

TO THE GREEN FIELDS
OF KASTINA



VX529 Sjt. OSWALD H. STAFFORD

6th Australian Division
Cavalry Regiment
Australian Imperial Forces

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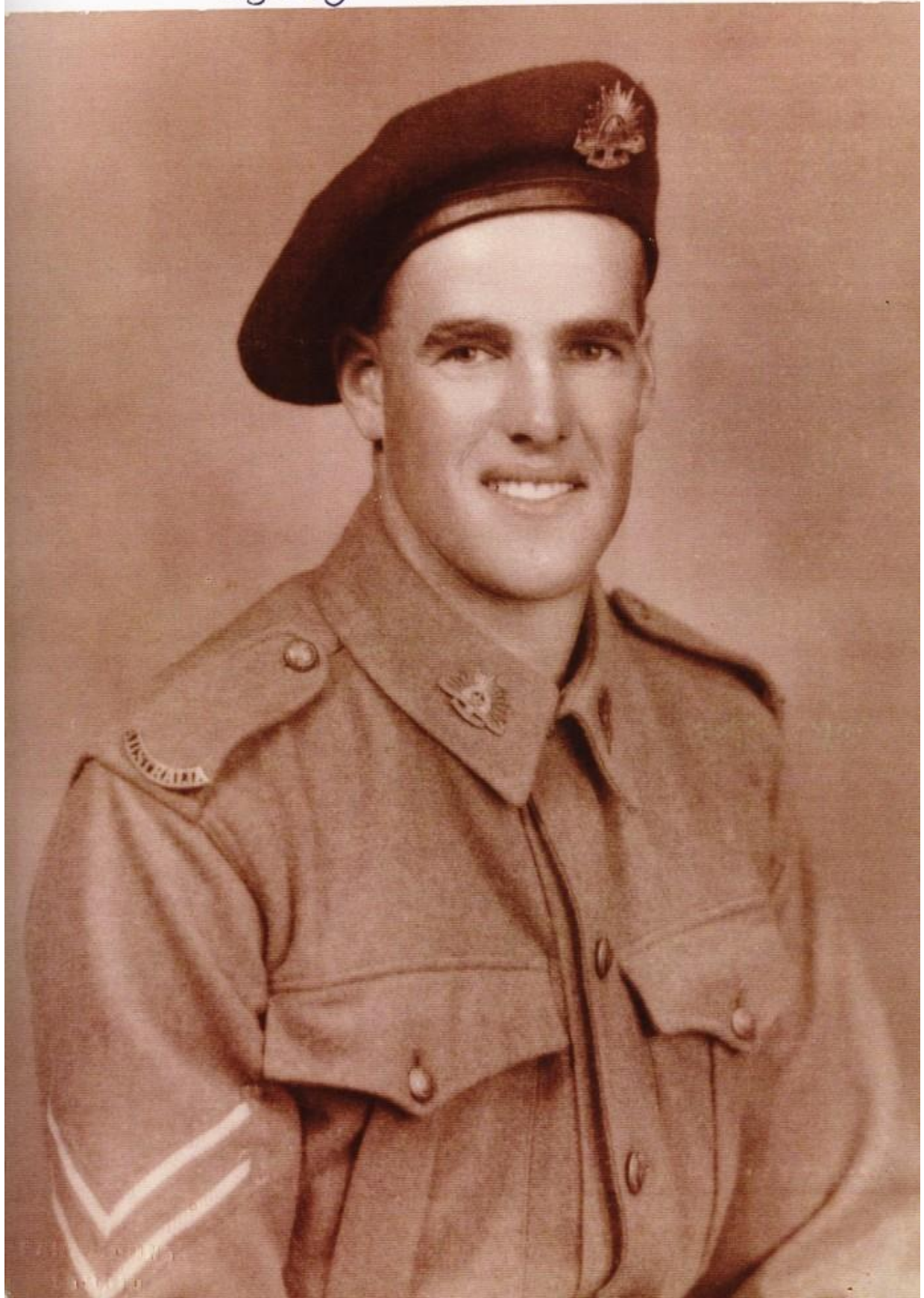


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	i
Foreword	ii
Introduction	iii
1914 – 1930	1
Pre-War Years 1931 – 1939	6
The War Years	
1939	22
1940	32
1941	53
1942	82
1943	113
1944	142
1945	161
The Post War Years	
1946 – 1950	177
Kastina 1951 – 1983	192
Epilogue – 1997	212
Afterword (Written in 1997), Family Tree and Family Photos	217

Dedication

I dedicate this book, first and foremost, to the loving memory of my beautiful wife, Win

To my four sons and daughter and their families

To my great mates of 6 Div. Cav. and 2/10 Cmd. Sqn., in particular No 3 Troop, No 5 Troop and Pioneer Section

Osie Stafford

Foreword

As far as I knew, my father never enjoyed writing very much. As a child and young adult, I always remember my mother taking care of all the family correspondence. So it was to my great surprise that, when I asked my father, at the age of 75, to jot down his memories and experiences of World War 2, he actually began to record and write in detail. And not only of his war years! But also of his childhood farm days during the early 1900's; of his life as a soldier settler and farmer and a dedicated, respected and loving family man.

Within these covers lies the end result of his many hours of hard work and memory searching - some painful and most inspirational. This is a true story written with love, compassion and honesty. It dates from an era of strong patriotism and belief in the duty to serve and protect one's country and loved ones; through war years filled with hardship and battles, with heartache and loss; to a period of pride, achievement, comradeship and everlasting friendships.

This story is written from life as a returned serviceman who toiled and dedicated himself to the task of settling, creating and managing his own masterpiece - a farm which would support his wife and family over many years.

The motto of my father's regiment reads - "Through the mud and blood to the green fields beyond", so it seems appropriate that in reading "To the Green Fields of Kastina", we not only gain an insight into one man's life, but we gain a richer and more personal understanding of what it was really like for Australian families during the first three quarters of this century. We can also see from where many of our great Australian values and qualities originate and we can be proud of our past heritage and culture.

For all of this, and for the standards and values you have passed on to our family, I thank you Dad, for a most truly precious gift which I shall always treasure.

Susan McLaughlin

Introduction

'To the Green Fields of Kastina' is the story of my life.

In 1989, six years after the death of my darling wife, Winifred, my daughter, Susan, suggested that I might fill the many empty moments and lonely hours writing an account of my life. She asked me to record those special highlights (those moments that your memory allows you to recall) and to bring to life a small diary I had kept during my service in the army during the war years (1939 - 1945). The war events and memories contained in this diary had been laid to rest on my return home from the war and were certainly never considered appropriate conversation to share with one's children. Is it any wonder they became more curious as they got older? Now seems an appropriate time to answer many of their unanswered questions and allow them to know a part of their father's life, previously unspoken.

The greater part of this book details the events and memories of the years I spent in the army with the 6th Division Cavalry and the 2/10 Commando Squadron from 3rd November 1939 to 23rd June 1945. But the story would be incomplete without briefly telling you about my boyhood years and those wonderful years after the war when Win and I set out, with such humble beginnings, to start a life together farming in the Western Districts of Victoria. Here we prospered both financially and personally as we built our first home together, developed a most productive farm and raised five healthy, strong children.

When I joined the 2nd Australian Imperial Forces, after eight years with the 20th Light Horse Regiment, I did so with the firm conviction it was my duty to do so. I was always patriotic to my King and my Country. A madman by the name of Hitler was trying to conquer the world. He had to be stopped. I am sure that most of the young men who joined with me had this same view. Undoubtedly, some were there for the adventure of a lifetime, not considering the possible outcomes - invincible in their own eyes.

They came from all walks of life, handsome young men with a common purpose. Nowhere would you have seen such a fine body of men. Most were from the country and the Light Horse Regiments, and so the Cavalry Regiment was formed as a Mechanised Reconnaissance Regiment for the 6th Division.

While we may not have had it quite as tough as some of the Infantry Battalions, our Regiment did its share and earned itself a reputation second to none. I was very proud to have served in this great Regiment. We had our tough times and easy ones and also some monotonous ones. We lost some good mates. However, through it all a great bond of mateship developed. This bond of mateship has been carried on down the years when we meet at Reunions and on Anzac Day. This is not a time to dwell on what was or what might have been. It is a time you pay homage to those who did not return with us, to support those men and families who are still suffering physically and mentally from the war, and to be touched just a little more by that bond of mateship that became such a precious commodity in a war that offered very few bonuses.

This book is not intended to be an historical account of the War Years. It is my own personal account of events and how they affected me. Much is forgotten, but one thing stands out loud and clear, the love and support of one's family. Mail day during the war was always a happy day that brought stories and messages from home and, though we could be many thousands of miles away, we knew we were never alone or far from the thoughts of those who loved us.

I was lucky to be born into a strong, loving family. My father and mother had a strong Christian out-look on life. They taught me at all times to be thoroughly honest in everything I did. Their love and support was always there for me, my brother and three sisters, throughout our lives. And I was lucky again to join another fine family, when I married Win, in the Stephens family. The love and support of a strong family is a wonderful thing to have and can never be underestimated especially at a time of war.

And now, in the eventide of my life, I have the love and support of my children and their fine families. I thank God for the good life I have lived and the wonderful family Win and I reared together.

I hope my children and their families will enjoy reading this book in the years ahead.

The most wonderful thing in the world
Is to have and to hold,
The love of a strong family
For all the days of one's life.

Osie Stafford

1914-1930

I was born in Clarence Street, Elsternwick, Melbourne on November 4th 1914. I was the fourth child of Hugh Erwin Stafford and Gracing Emily (nee Worcester). My great grandfather Worcester was born in England in 1810, his wife was also born in England. He and his wife and two small daughters immigrated to Australia on the ship "Westminster", arriving in Melbourne on December 13th, 1839.

He was a house decorator and set up a paint store on the site of the present Southern Cross Hotel in Bourke Street. Three sons and a daughter were born in Melbourne. One of these sons was George Worcester, my grandfather, born in 1845. He died in 1929. I remember him when I was a teenager.

My grandfather Stafford (Tom) was born in Northern Ireland and his wife in Scotland.

I was baptised in St. Catherine's Church of England, Caulfield on February 15th, 1915. My sister Elsie on June 2nd, 1907, my sister Marjorie on February 14th, 1909, and my brother Erwin on October 2nd 1910, and my sister Ruth was born on October 10th, 1918.

When I was about four, the family moved to Oakleigh. At the age of five I attended the Clayton State School. Oakleigh and Clayton in these years were on the outer fringe of Melbourne. It was nearly all farming land; orchards or market gardens.

My father was a carpenter by trade. He taught at the Deaf and Dumb Institute two days a week, teaching the boys carpentry. My father and mother were keen to get out into the country.

When I was six they bought a small ten acre farm between Dandenong and Hallam where they milked some cows. My father continued with his carpentry and I attended the Hallam State School.

The farming venture apparently wasn't a success. They sold out and we went to live in the next township about two miles away. It was a small town called Narre Warren, which was six miles east of Dandenong. This would be around 1921.

It was here my father teamed up with another carpenter by the name of Wally Duryea. Wally had a block at Blue Range Creek, Mansfield. He informed my parents that there was an adjoining block to his that could be selected from the Lands Department for one pound an acre. The block was six hundred and forty acres. He persuaded my parents to buy it. So, once again, the Stafford family was on the move.

Beside the house at Narre Warren was a big blacksmith's shop. My father and Wally pulled this down and had it railed up to Mansfield. It was to be part of our new home at Blue Range.

Early in January, 1924, Wally and my father and I (aged nine) set off for Mansfield. Wally had a gig and my father a spring cart. Both were well loaded up with building materials, and stores and possessions. Mother and the rest of the family were to follow by train later.

It took a week to get to Mansfield. We usually camped the night in school shelter sheds. It was a good place to graze the horses. The school holidays were on. It was a great adventure for me. We eventually arrived at the Duryea's bush home by the Blue Range Creek. The Blue Range was close by, in fact, it seemed to loom right over the top of us. The Duryea's house looked very rough and crude from the outside. Some of the walls and roof were covered with bark from the stringy bark trees that grew in great numbers in these parts, but inside, the house was fairly comfortable.

Mr and Mrs Duryea had two children; Allan about two to three years older than me, and Eileen about my age. Allan soon taught the laws of the bush and how to find my way and not get lost. Close to the house there were plenty of rabbits, kangaroos, wombats and foxes and further out, dingoes and wild goats. There was certainly plenty to see and plenty to do.

For the rest of the school holidays we did little else but chase after these animals. Allan had two good staghound dogs that were great hunting dogs. We caught lots of rabbits and even the odd kangaroo. It was great fun.

The rest of the family arrived about the end of January and it became very crowded in the Duryea home. During this time my father and Wally began building our own house. It was about one and a half miles away in the virgin bush. As I look back now I realise it must have been an awful shock for my mother who had been used to city ways all her life. Now she would have to rough it, as the first settlers did in the early days.

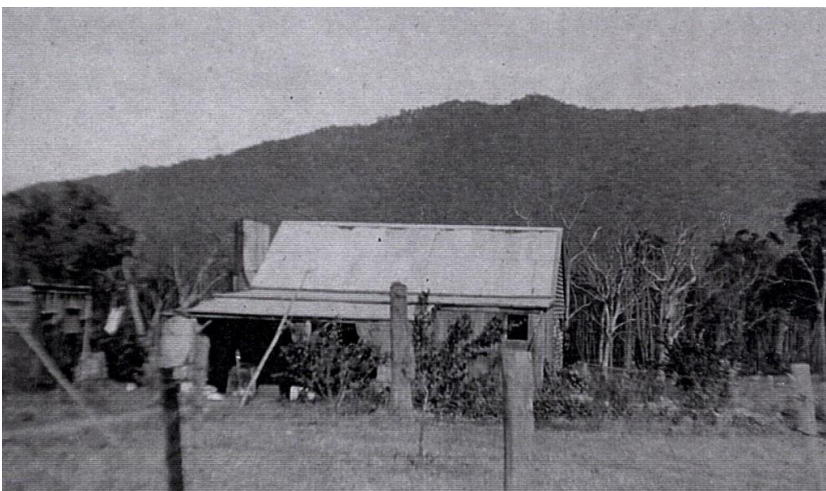
However, I never heard her complain once. She was certainly a wonderful lady.

With the start of February it was school time. The Bridge Creek School was about four miles away. The Duryea's had a jinker and pony that took the four of us (Ruth was just starting school) to school until Easter time, when Dad had our house near enough finished for us to move into. Dad bought us a pony and Ruth and I rode to school until the following year when I was given a bike, and Ruth still rode the pony. The Bridge Creek school was on the Tolmie Mansfield Road, within two hundred yards of the Broken River. The school teacher was Mr Ravenscroft. There were about twenty or more children attending at this time. I had started in grade 5, Ruth in grade 1. The names of children I can remember are Una Dale, Bob, Jack, Marg and Pat Rennie, the four Ackerly boys - Jack, Arthur, Les and Bob, some of the Gear family - Ralf, George, Crissie and Nellie, and Jim and Irene Comerford.



Osie at Bridge School, Mansfield in 1926

My brother Erwin, in this year, had left school. He was helping Dad build the house. My older sisters Elsie and Marj went to work at the Shepparton Cannery.



After the house was finished, Dad and Erwin went to work clearing the bush around the house. It was tough, back breaking work, with only axes and a crosscut saw to do it with. They eventually got a few acres cleared. With a single farrow plough and one horse it was ploughed and sown down to pasture. It was beautiful soil and the grass soon grew. They were able to milk a few cows. Of course, this was not nearly enough to keep the family. Money was fast running out.

The old bush home. Blue Range Creek, Mansfield, 1928

A new timber mill was being built at the northern end of Blue Range. Dad got a job building huts for the timber workers. Erwin was also employed there later. The mill was ten to twelve miles away, so they had to camp there during the week. It was my job to meet them both there every Saturday_ about one o'clock with two horses, then I would double dink with Erwin for the ride home.

On Sunday afternoon it would be back again to the mill. This time the horses would be loaded up with a weeks supply of provisions for the hard-working men. This six day supply of provisions would be put together by my mother. It would consist of cooked mutton and rabbit, to be used first, uncooked corn beef to be used later in the week, potatoes, pumpkin, bread, butter, jam, tea, sugar, salt, cake and scones. These provisions were packed into calico bags and biscuit tins, then into a bigger hessian bag (a chaff bag tied in the middle) for carrying. My father would have made a rough hessian safe to store them in at the camp site.

I accompanied my father and brother to a point about two miles from the mill. The last two miles was a very steep and rough track over the end of the Blue Range, so they would have to walk it. I would return home with the horses. It must have been very tough on Dad and Erwin, carrying their tucker bag as well. However they were earning good wages so money was the main consideration in those days. It would have been about two years they were on this job. They left it only when Dad found out he could get plenty of carpentry around the Bridge Creek and Mansfield areas. This enabled him to work on the home block some of the time as well.

Erwin got a job with a water boring contractor named Clydedale. Erwin was offside to a chap named Bill Smart who was in charge of one of the boring plants. In later years Bill Smart married my sister Elsie. Erwin spent most of his working life on boring plants, ending up with the Mines Department in later years as a supervisor.

I now had a hunting pack of dogs of my own. They were named Nigger, Sandy and Tiger and they were all my pride and joy. Nigger was a cross staghound/greyhound, very fast, could easily catch a rabbit and even a hare in the open country of Dueran Station where I often went rabbiting.

Tiger was a great little dog, a cross between an Irish Terrier and a Fox Terrier. He was marvellous at helping to dig out a burrow to catch the unsuspecting rabbit. Sandy was my favourite dog. His breed was unknown to me, he had too many crosses to be identified as any particular dog type!. He was the boss of the pack. It didn't matter which dog caught the rabbit, Sandy soon took charge of it and immediately carried it back to me. With his teeth bared in a big smile and his tail wagging, he would drop the rabbit at my feet. Of course, I would always pat and praise him for this and he would respond with an even bigger grin.

Rabbit skins were a good price in these years before the Depression. I remember sending about 8 lbs. of winter skins to Melbourne and they averaged 15/- a lb. I received back a cheque for 5 pound 10/-. It was a lot of money in those days for a boy of twelve.

I spent all my spare time on weekends and holidays, rabbiting. Most of this was done in the open country of Dueran Station. There were more rabbits there, than in the bush and, of course, the dogs had a better chance of catching them. Another reason for not hunting in the bush, at this , time when skins were a good price, was that my dogs were very keen on chasing kangaroos. If a mob was sighted they took off after them and took no notice of my yells to come back. They often caught a kangaroo and killed it. Nigger was always the one to bring the roo down. Sandy would only be a few yards behind and quickly onto the roo's throat. Tiger was the reason I was able to find them. He couldn't keep up, but could keep on the trail and all the time kept up a continuous bark, so I was always able to follow them. Of course, after such a chase they were knocked up and no good for rabbiting for the rest of the day.

When the Depression started, rabbit skins were worth nothing so I did some kangaroo hunting. Their skins were worth 1/- or 2/-. It was not much, but it was some pocket money for me.

It was on one of these hunts that poor old Sandy got into trouble. An old man roo must have grabbed him. Anyway, he came limping back to me with his skin ripped open from his brisket to the top of his shoulder. I headed back home with him. The other two dogs soon caught up to us. They were unharmed but looking sore and sorry for themselves. That was one hunt they didn't win and probably would never forget.

My sister Elsie sewed Sandy up with a needle and cotton. Surprisingly, he fully recovered, after many attempts to pull some of the stitches out.

On another occasion the dogs had a big roo bailed up in a waterhole in the creek. When I arrived on the scene, the three dogs were just barking on the bank with the big roo quite unconcerned in the water. Tiger must have wanted to show me what a brave dog he was, because he jumped in and started to attack the roo. He didn't get far before the roo grabbed him and pushed him under the water. Lucky for Tiger I had a long handled shovel and I was able to reach him from the bank with it. I belted the roo over the head with the shovel and he soon let Tiger go. Tiger swam out of that hole with all the fight knocked out of him. The roo took off into the bush and, for once, they weren't keen to chase him.

Another of my pastimes during these years was fishing. There were lots of black fish in the Blue Range Creek. Worms for bait, a piece of line tied to a stick for a rod, a small hook, and a cork for a float and I was set to catch a haul of small black fish. They were only about six to seven inches in length, but were very good to eat.

I was now in the seventh grade at school. Miss Elsie Cameron took over as teacher during 1927 and school work was no trouble for me. I always received top marks for history, geography and maths. English was my only weak subject. Miss Cameron was a sister of Mrs Dale who lived a few hundred yards up the road from the school. (Both these fine ladies wrote me many letters during the War years).

In 1928, I gained my Merit Certificate. Miss Cameron was very keen for me to continue on at school and gain a scholarship to enter Teachers' College. She told me there was no need for me to be a labourer to earn my living, I should become a teacher. She talked to my mother and father about this. Money, of course, was the trouble. I would need to board in Mansfield to attend the Higher Elementary School. She told them I could still attend Bridge Creek School and do the course for the scholarship. She would do everything she could to help me. They agreed to this, and so I attended Bridge Creek School in 1929. There were only sixty scholarships being awarded by the Education Department for all of Victoria that year, so I would need to get very high marks in all subjects to gain one. Miss Cameron said I would have to study very hard. Well, I did study hard. In November, I sat for the exam at Mansfield Higher Elementary School. A few weeks later I received the results. I received top marks in all subjects except English. This let me down. I did not win a scholarship. Miss Cameron was more disappointed than I was. Now I would have to go out and earn a living with my hands. This wouldn't be easy as the Depression had just started.

In the autumn of 1930, Jack Harris and I decided to go rabbit trapping together. Jack was about three years older than I. He had been working at Dales' since leaving school. Dales owned a farm of about four hundred acres on the Mansfield Tolmie Road. One of the boundaries was the Broken River, so they had some rich river flats. Their house was only a few hundred yards from the Bridge Creek School.

We got together about sixty rabbit traps between us, and some camping gear etc. We went trapping at a farm at Barwite, a few miles up the Broken River from Bridge Creek. The farm belonged to George Cameron,

a brother of Elsie Cameron, my teacher. George had built a new house on the farm before the Depression started. The old cottage was left standing so Jack and I moved into it for a few months.

There were thousands of rabbits about. The trouble was, they weren't worth much. There was a rabbit buyer operating in Mansfield. Jack and I only had push bikes to get about on. About twice a week we would load the bikes up with rabbits and take them into Mansfield. It was less than 1/- a pair that we got for them, so we didn't make much money.

The main bulk of rabbits we caught we had to skin and peg to dry. We got very little for these, however, we were keeping ourselves in food and there was a little over for pocket money.

After about three months of this, the Dales wanted Jack back to do some work. I managed to get a job with a farmer named Jack Hemsley. This farm was about two miles south of Dueran Station. It was two hundred and eighty eight acres and it was named "Bunya". He had another big farm further down the Broken River of one thousand, two hundred and fifty acres at Nillahcootie which his uncle, Alf Whitely, was working. The Hemsleys at this time had only one child, Marion, aged about five. A year or two later they had a son named John. It was Marion who wrote me many letters when she started at Teachers College during the War years.

Jack had to go away to hospital and have an operation. My job was to help his wife look after the small farm and also go down to Nillahcootie whenever Alf wanted a hand with sheep work. My pay was 15/- a week plus keep. I had this for a few months until Jack was fit to work again. He said I could stay on if I liked for 10/- a week. This was all he could afford to pay, but I was more than grateful and stayed on.

We were now well into the Depression. Wool was only making a few pence a lb. The economy had collapsed. Half the work force had lost their jobs. My Mum and Dad were struggling to make enough to live on.



1930. The Kill. Osie Stafford and Les Worcester, with Osie's Dad in the background.

Pre-War Years

1931

During the early part of 1931 I was working at home. The Depression had become worse. Jack Hemsley could not afford to keep me on. I did a lot of ring barking on our bush farm. There were now about twenty acres cleared around the house and another fifty had been ring barked. I spent a lot of time cutting these up



and stacking them into big heaps to be burnt later in the autumn when it was safe to do so. My father would gather up the charcoal from these burnt heaps and sell it to the blacksmith in Mansfield for a few shillings a bag.

I was now becoming quite efficient with the axe. I would spend some time on grinding and keeping it razor sharp.

Staffords and Worcesters. Back row: Osie's brother Erwin, Osie's Dad, Osie, cousin Les Worcester
Middle Row: Grandma Worcester, Osie's Mum, sister Marj Front Row: Madj Worcester, sister Ruth

When trees were ring barked that wasn't the finish of them. The tree itself would die within a few weeks, but lots of suckers would grow from the butt. These would have to be knocked off, at least twice. So clearing the bush in those days was slow, hard work.

I did get the odd job here and there for a week or a few days and still did some trapping. Rabbits were our main meat supply. My mother baked all our bread. It was beautiful bread. In the early years it was baked in the camp oven. My mother would knead the dough and set it in tins to rise over night before the open fire. She now had a good wood stove.

There was always plenty of milk, cream and butter from the few cows that we milked. We often had junkets and custards for desserts. A favourite of mine was the jam rolls Mum used to make. Also her pumpkin scones were beautiful.

Although we were in the middle of the Depression we never went hungry.

In the winter of this year Jack Hemsley wanted me back again to help with the lambing. I was back on the payroll at 15/- a week. It was a cold job going around the ewes and lambs when there were frosts. They were very heavy frosts. The paddocks would be snow white. We would sometimes get a run of frost for a week or more at a time. The frost would not melt on the south side of a building and it would gradually build up. Outside, pipes and taps would have to be heavily lagged to stop them from bursting. This meant cutting

up strips of jute bags or hessian and wrapping it around pipes and taps above ground level to stop the water in them from freezing.

In the spring of this year my mate Jack Harris suggested we join the Light Horse. I mentioned this to Jack Hemsley for his opinion. He said it was a good idea and he would lend me a horse.

The Mansfield Troop was part of the 20th Light Horse Regiment. The Head Quarters were at Seymour in central Victoria. There were twelve troops in the regiment going as far as the Murray River in the north and Broadford in the south.

The Mansfield Troop met on one Saturday each month to do some training. In the summer of each year the Regiment would go into camp for a fortnight at Seymour. On Saturday, 17th. November, Jack and I were sworn in as members of the Mansfield Troop of the 20th Light Horse Regiment. We were issued with what we thought was an enormous amount of equipment. The saddlery, bridle, rifle bucket, sword and scabbard, boots, leggings, belt and bandolier would need lots of tan nugget to keep them clean. The only thing we had to pay for was the emu feathers to wear on the hat. Harry Williams, a saddler in Mansfield, had them in stock. He also gave us the use of his back yard as a meeting place on the monthly parade day.

For each monthly parade we attended at Mansfield we would be paid a total of 9/-; 4/- for ourselves and 5/- for our horse.

On three or four weekends in the year we would have a two day bivouac. Lieutenant Ken Ross was our Troop Leader, Bert Earl our Troop Sergeant, Lou Murphy our Troop Corporal (Lou and I would join the Australian Imperial Forces eight years later).

Also at this time attached to the Mansfield Troop was Staff Sgt. George Mutton. He was the Quartermaster Sgt. in charge of stores and equipment. A Light Horse Troop at full strength had thirty members. I don't think Mansfield Troop at this time had that many. Some that I can remember were Jim Fry, Jack Drummond, Vic Broome, Jack Klingsporn. Later in the 30's, many more young chaps joined up. Norm and Noel Harris, Mabin Crockett, Jack Adams, Gilbert Anderson, Doug Laken, Jack McCormack, Jack Stephens and there would be more whose names I have forgotten.

I was just seventeen when I joined but I signed up giving my age as 18 - the compulsory joining age!

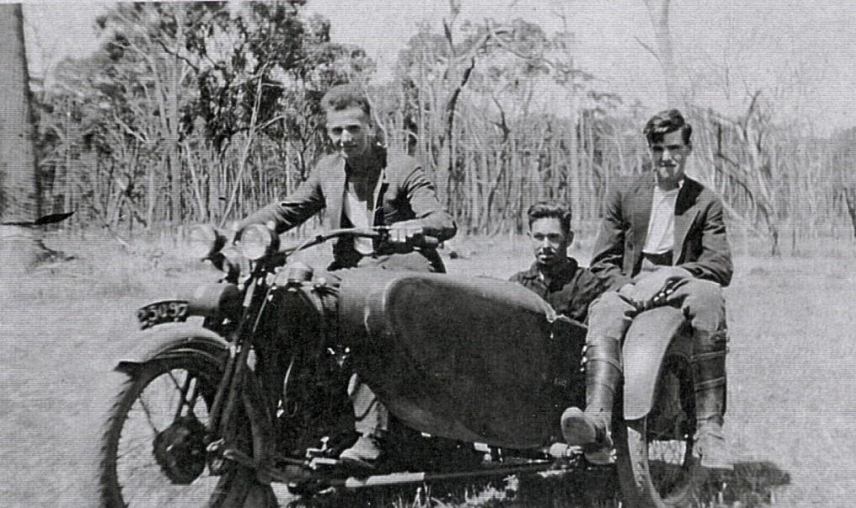
1932

In January of 1932 Alf Whiteley left the farm at Nillahcootie. Jack Hemsley said I could do the job. Although inexperienced, I would have Jack directing me a lot of the time. And so, I moved down to Glen Farm at the end of January.

I lived by myself in a small cottage with only four rooms. The cottage was only about fifty yards from the Broken River. There was a two stand wool shed and many other old sheds in fair condition, such as stables, shearers huts and store sheds. I had a telephone so Jack could ring me with instructions. The phone was only a party line. There were three others on this line. My call sign was four short rings.

I didn't know much about cooking. My mother gave me some tips and instructions, as did Mrs Hemsley. Not that I had much to cook anyway. Jack would bring me some meat twice a week, a loin of chops and a four quarter of mutton mostly. All other things, I would order by phone from Mansfield and the mailman would leave in the mailbox. Bread, jam, butter, potatoes and sauce and that was about it. It was a very simple fare, but I never went hungry and I was always well satisfied.

My job was mainly looking after the sheep. There would have been about one thousand, eight hundred of them on the farm. There was no super in those days so the pastures were only light compared with today.



Osie's brother Erwin on his Harley Davidson motorbike with Les Worchester in the side car and Osie on the mudguard.

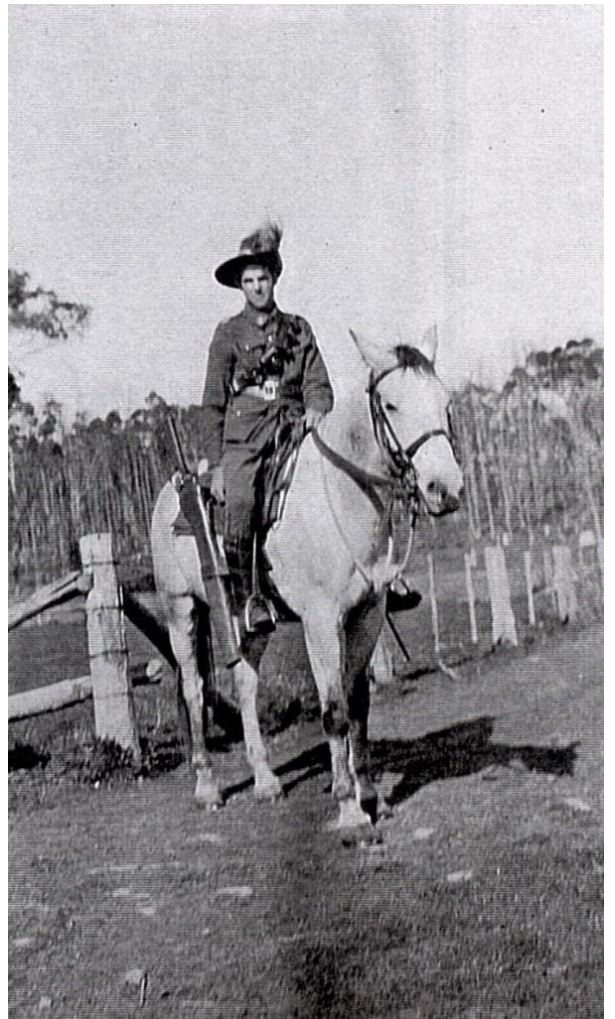
In March I went into camp at Seymour for two weeks with the Light Horse. The agreement with Jack was that this would be my annual leave. It was a great adventure and experience for me. On the morning of departure, I had to be at the Mansfield Railway station at 6 am. It was a very early rise for me that morning. With all my equipment I had to ride into town, some six miles from Glen farm.

We loaded our horses into the cattle trucks and away we went. We picked up the Alexandra Troop at Molesworth and the Yea Troop at Yea. At Trawool we detrained and rode the remaining five or six miles to the old Seymour Military Camp. This was a well established camp from the First World War. We slept in big huts; on a straw mattress on the floor.

Our horses were tied up on horse lines and fed top quality chaff and oats in nose bags. A guard had to be on the horse lines all night to see they didn't get into any trouble.

Next morning we started simple troop drill for the horses to get used to each other.

Over the next two weeks we went on many exercises out into the hills around Seymour. We went to the rifle range and fired hundreds of rounds of live ammunition. We learnt all about the Hotchkiss Machine Gun and also fired it at the rifle range. We attended several lectures on army tactics and procedures.



Trooper O H Stafford, 20th Light Horse Regiment, Mansfield Troop with rogue horse Bluey

On the last day we had a sports day. There were jumping events, best turned out Trooper, the rescue race and tent pegging in sections of four. (In a later camp in the middle thirties Jack Harris, Lou Murphy, Vic Broome and myself won this event).

In all, it was a great first camp. There would be many more over the years.

When I started work at Glen Farm, my pay went up to one pound a week. I was in the money! I felt it was time I bought a horse of my own. I bought a horse from Charlie Greenway, a brother of Mrs Hemsley. The horse was a big grey, I called him Bluey. He turned out to be a bit of a rogue. He didn't like things hanging from the back of the saddle around his flanks. This would only make him start to buck.

I was out in the paddocks rabbiting one day and tied some rabbits on the back of the saddle. I didn't quite get into the saddle when he starting bucking. Of course, I didn't have a chance, I went for a six. Bluey set off for home at full gallop, jumped one gate, bashed through another, crossed the partly flooded Broken River and pulled up at the stable door. I had to follow and wade through the river up to my middle. I was really mad when I reached that horse. He had got rid of the rabbits but the saddle was okay I sprang into the saddle, set him off at full gallop across the river and up a steep hill and kept him at it until he was a lather of sweat. He was a tired horse by the time I brought him back to the stable. I told Jack about this episode. He said the horse was too dangerous for me to have, I could have been killed if I had got hung up in the stirrup.

Later he made some enquiries about this horse and found out he had been in a buck jump show at one time. He was really mad at Charlie Greenway for selling him to me. Jack made Charlie take the horse back and return my money.

For a while after this I was riding one of Jack's ponies for my work around the farm. Eventually Jack found a really good hack, a light bay, well broken in and beautiful to ride. Jack wouldn't let me pay for him though. He was mine as long as I worked at Glen Farm. I named him Tim.

My job required me to be in the saddle every day. Every second Sunday I would ride home to see my Mum and Dad. Around the road, it was about twelve miles. But I did a short cut through the back paddocks of Glen Farm into the bush at the end of the Blue Range. This would only be about seven miles.

At first it was a very lonely job I had. When there was not much sheep work I would not see much of Jack. Wireless was now on the go, but very few people had them at this time. There was a garage chap in Mansfield named Doug Burns, who couldn't sell any cars because of the Depression. He turned his hand to making cheap wireless sets. They were three valve sets powered by a six volt wet battery. He used old packing cases as a cabinet to fit them into. Jack bought one of these for me. It was great. It had a set of ear phones. Later on, I had a loud speaker fitted. The battery would last about six to eight weeks, then I would have to send it into Mansfield with the mailman to be recharged. He would bring it back in three days time. There were only Melbourne stations (about four operating at this time). At night I could nearly always pick up Sydney and Adelaide with good reception. Mine was the only set in the Nillahcootie area for quite a while.

1933

By 1933 I was gradually getting to know some of the young people in the area. The four Hall brothers only lived a half mile up the river from me. Joe and Arthur were working the farm, the two younger ones were still going to school. Down the river, about a mile, was the Peel's farm. Reg and Olga were about my age. Others further out were the Cleland and the Aldous families.

John Hall lived closest to me, he was only about five hundred yards away. He was an uncle of Joe and Arthur. John was a bachelor and in his sixties. He had a small farm joining Glen Farm. He was on the same telephone party line as me. He would give me a ring some evenings for a yarn. He rang me one day in the winter to tell me he had won 200 pounds. He was very excited about it. He had backed Moss Trooper to win the Grand National Hurdle and Steeple double. In those days, 200 pounds was a lot of money. A loaf of bread cost five pence, a lb of butter nine pence, one dozen beer 5/-, a pair of dungaree working pants 4/-11 pence; 6/- if they had double knees! (Today, they call them jeans and they cost \$40 or more, a rise of eight hundred percent.)

In October shearing time came around and I was very busy then. Mrs Hemsley came down to cook for the



shearers. One of the shearers was Peter Cummins. His daughter Ann married my friend Norm Harris.

My job of course was bringing in the woollies (sheep in full wool) and taking the shorn ones away. What time I had between this I would do shed work, mainly pressing wool. Dave McGill, an old chap up in the hills was the shed hand. Jack did his own classing.

Osie with Marion and John Hemsley, Glen Farm, Nillahcootie

In the spring of this year I had a few games of cricket with the Barjarg Cricket Club. Barjarg was a small area, a few miles down the Benalla Road from here. I didn't get to training very often and also one Saturday in the month I had to go on parade with the Light Horse. Occasionally, on other Saturdays, we would be doing firing practice on the rifle range in Mansfield. The Light Horse was my first love so I didn't get far with cricket, even though I liked the game very much.

In the summer of this year some of the young people around the district would organise a day trip to places of interest. One particular favourite was to hire the cream truck, along with its driver, from the Butter Factory on a Sunday. One trip we did was to Mt Bulla. The truck took us as far as the Chalet, then we walked the rest of the way to the very top. We had our lunch up there. The views were magnificent. On these trips there was always lots of singing as we travelled along. Grog was not allowed.

1934

I had now been two years at Glen Farm and had learnt a lot about handling sheep, repairing fences and general farm work. Jack raised my pay to twenty five shillings a week.

We did not go into camp in the autumn of this year. We were going into camp in November at Broadmeadows with the 2nd Cavalry Division, of which we were a part. This was to help Melbourne celebrate its centenary.

In the winter of this year the Australian Cricket team toured England in an attempt to win back the Ashes they lost to the Poms in the 1932-33 Body-line series.

Don Bradman, that wonderful batsman, was captain. At this time I now had a loud speaker for my wireless. I invited several young chaps from around the area, when the Tests were on, to come and listen to them. This was a first from England. However, it wasn't a direct broadcast - after each over a cable would be sent describing each ball of the over. In the 3AR Studio they would pretend they were describing each ball direct.

The names of those I can remember coming, were Joe Hall, Reg Peel, Bob Aldous, Jack Reidon and I think Fred Cleland. They would all bring some supper with them. I would supply the tea and sometimes bread and butter to make toast on the open fire that was always burning. They were great nights! There was never any beer. We couldn't afford it in those days. If the cricket wasn't very interesting we would play cards. Most times they would go home at 1 am. If it was exciting they would see it out. Of course, the Aussies won the series easily. Don Bradman made many big scores. It was great entertainment when he was batting. He had good batsmen to back him up, in Woodfull, Ponsford, McCabe and Kippax.

Shearing time came around in October and was finished before the end of the month. It was in this month I received a very important letter from 20th Light Horse Headquarters. The 20th Light Horse had been selected from the 2nd Cavalry Division to supply a Royal Mounted escort for the Duke of Gloucester to the 1934 Centenary Melbourne Cup.

The escort was to consist of a Lieutenant and twenty six other ranks. Each troop in the 20th would supply two members. Lou Murphy and myself were selected from the Mansfield troop. I was dumbfounded for a start at this information. It was a very great honour. My good friend Joe Hall said he would help Jack Hemsley with any jobs in my place while I was away.

The whole of the 2nd Cavalry Division was going into camp in the first week in November (about 15,000 men). The escort would be going a few days earlier to practice the escort drill. We would be supplied with army remount horses. Our own horses would be brought down by the Mansfield troop. Jack Harris said he would collect my horse and look after it for me. Lou and I, along with all our saddlery, arms and equipment went by train to Broadmeadows about five days before the Cup Day. The next day we commenced training, first of all getting used to our new horses.

They were wonderful horses. They were well trained in Light Horse drill. For the escort we would be using lancers, so we had to learn how to handle these. They were about 6 feet in length. On the right stirrup was fitted a small leather socket to carry the weight of the lance. All our spare time was spent in polishing all the equipment. Brasso on all the brass buttons and buckles on the uniform and saddlery. Heaps of tan nugget on boots, leggings, bridle and saddlery. The white cotton head rope for the horse had to be whitened.

For this special escort we would not be wearing the leather bandolier. A bandolier was a leather belt worn around the body across the left shoulder to the right waist. Attached to this belt were nine leather pouches, five on front of the body and four in the rear. Each pouch would hold ten rounds of .303 rifle ammunition. In peace time these pouches were stuffed with paper to keep their shape, except of course on the rifle range. Instead, across the breast and on each shoulder we would be wearing white plaited cord epaulets, these also had to be whitened.

On the Monday before the Cup, the 2nd Cavalry Division marched into camp. We, the escort, were in a different section of the camp. We were having a final run through of the drill, everything went well. In the evening, we put on a final polish to our equipment.

At nine o'clock on Cup Day, we set off for Flemington, a ride of about 12 miles. It was raining steadily. We had on our great coats and also capes. We walked our horses most of the way as there was plenty of time.

We arrived at the back entrance of the Racecourse, just off Epsom Road at 11.30 am. We were to pick the Duke up here at 1.00 pm. It was still raining. There were nosebags full of chaff for our horses and some tea for us. It was very welcome.

A little after twelve noon the closed Royal Coach arrived pulled by four horses. There were two riders and two footman. The Duke was to arrive by car, he would only have a few yards to walk to step into the Coach. It was still raining steadily. At 12.30 we were ordered to remove our great coats and capes, we had to be in proper uniform for the escort. Our coats would be taken up to the stables on the grounds proper where we would be stabling our horses after the Escort.

In the meantime, we were getting very wet. One thirty came, and still no Duke. A little after this an official arrived to inform us that it was too wet for the Duke. He would go into the grounds by car. Of course, we were very disgusted at this. We were also informed if it fined up we would escort the Duke off the course after the Cup was run. Well, off we went up the straight, we were not in proper escort formation, we were in sections of four and the Coach trailed along behind. However, when we arrived near the judges box, the crowd came charging to the rails thinking the Duke was arriving. They soon saw the Coach was empty and started to laugh. Well, we couldn't see the funny side of it at all. We were getting very wet. It was still raining. We stabled our horses and were given meal tickets to get a hot dinner. It was a great meal and we sure did justice to it. We were starving, it was after two o'clock and we had eaten nothing since early breakfast.

When we came out of that dining hall, we were much happier. The rain had stopped and the sun was shining. We had a little time for a walk around before the Cup was to be run. The lawns and grounds were very wet. In fact, some of the lawns were turned to mud. I saw one poor old lady slip over in the mud, she was in an awful mess.

We saw Peter Pan win his second Melbourne Cup (1932 was his first) on a very heavy track. I don't know if any of our escort mates won any money on it. I know Lou and I didn't.

About four o'clock we formed up on the straight near the judges box with the Royal Coach to escort the Duke off the course. After waiting some time, a red faced official came and told our officer that a mistake had been made; the Duke had already left by car.

Of course, our officer was really furious and so were we. We were lined up abreast facing the grand stand. He gave us an order which is rarely used except in battle. It was "Sections right, gallop march". From line abreast we were immediately in sections of four and going at full gallop. We left the coach behind. We churned up that straight and the mud flew from our horses' hoofs, we did not slacken until we reached the end of the straight and went out on to Epsom Road. We did not spare our horses on our way back to camp, mostly at a fast trot. So ended a very disappointing day.

Well, we did see the Cup, so that was something. We did not blame the Duke, it was the dumb head officials who were running things we were crooked on.

We were to have yet another disappointment! On the Friday after the Cup, there was to be a march of the 2nd Cavalry Division through the streets of Melbourne, made up of about 15,000 men with all the attached troops. On the Friday morning, the whole Division formed up in a big paddock on the outskirts of the camp. The Light Horse Regiments, the Artillery, Engineers, Signallers, Ambulance Units and many other smaller units that go to make a Division. It was really an impressive sight. The day was cold and windy. There had been the odd shower or two. Again we waited and waited. Eventually the order came that the march was cancelled.

The forecast was for heavy showers throughout the day. As it turned out, we could have marched. There was hardly any rain.

It was a great disappointment to us all, as well as to the people of Melbourne, who were going to line the streets to cheer us on.

Well, it was back to training for us. The next week we did manoeuvres and exercises around the country side. The weather was fine and sunny for a change, so that helped.

We had two weeks in camp and then it was back to work on the farm.

Jack Harris was now working on Dueran Station renewing fences. He informed me there were several miles of fencing to do and they would need thousands of posts and droppers. He thought I might be interested in supplying them off my father's farm. I thought this a good idea. I would make a lot more money than working for farm wages. I went along and saw Mr Lester, the owner of Dueran. We came to an agreement that I would supply stringy bark posts and droppers at 3 pound, ten shillings a hundred for the posts and seven shillings a hundred for the droppers. This would be at the stump and they would do all the carting. The exact number would be worked out at a later date. I gave Jack Hemsley a month's notice.

1935

And so I left Glen Farm after being there three years. I had learnt a lot about farming in that time, but I had no regrets about leaving. It was a lonely life living on my own. I was glad to be home again and to my mother's good cooking.



I bought some splitting gear in the way of wedges and a good cross cut saw. My father helped me fell the trees and then I did the rest. Of course I had done a lot of it in my earlier days so I wasn't a "new chum" on the job. I did pay my father something for his time and the trees, also my Mother for my board. I still made more than double what I made on wages. I worked on splitting those posts and droppers through the summer, autumn and winter of this year. I cannot remember how many thousands I split, but it was a great number. In the winter I did some rabbit trapping as well.

It was also in the winter of this year we had a visit from my Auntie Sylvia and my cousin Joyce for a couple of weeks. Joyce was a lovely girl. She came around the traps with me. She was a city girl, so it was all new and strange to her. I taught her a lot about the bush as well as a few other things!

*Osie's mother Gracina Emily Stafford
(nee Worcester) Born 1880, died 1967*

In the spring of this year Mr Lester informed me they now had plenty of posts and droppers. He also told me he was going to have a new cattle yard built. I could supply the posts for that and also assist in the building of it. This would be in the new year.

It was in this year of 1935 that I got to really know the Stephens family. They had come from Gisborne in 1933 to share farm the dairy that Mr Lester owned on Dueran.

The dairy was close by Bridge Creek School and the Broken River. The three eldest boys, Rich, Jack and Frank had left school and were helping run the dairy. Jack, at this time, was also working part-time on the Dueran homestead garden. Winnie had just left school and was helping her mother. The rest of the family were still going to school, except Don, who would have been about two or three years old. Mr Stephens asked if I could help with the grass hay. I was glad of this and really got to know them all. They were a fine family.

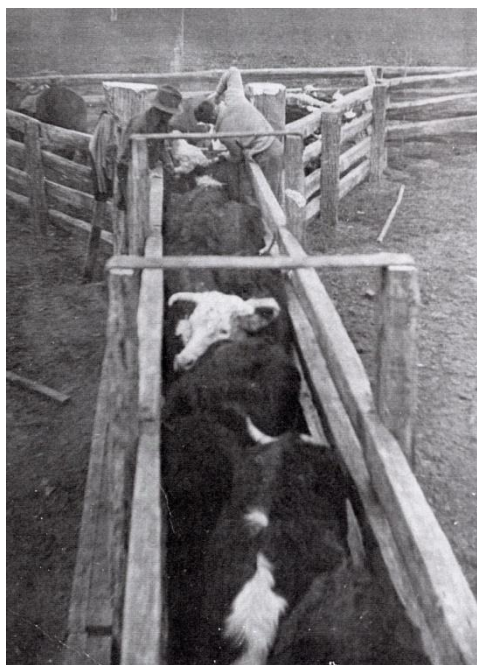
In November, we filled two big silage pits with grass hay. It was carted in straight off the mower. We used two horses and a wagon. Another horse was used at the pit to pull the load off, and then to tramp around on the hay to consolidate it while the wagon was away being loaded. This went on for about a month. The silage would be fed out to the cows in the autumn and winter. It was great feed.

It was in this year that we built a tennis court next to the school with many working bees on weekends. The Stephens family all became fairly good tennis players. The court was only a few hundred yards from their home, so they spent most of their spare time there. I started to play a bit the next year in 1936.

It was in the spring of 1935 (September I think) that I attended an Officer and N.C.O's school for a fortnight at Broadmeadows. I had been promoted to Lance Corporal. Lou Murphy and Ken Ross, our troop leader, also attended. I learnt quite a lot at this school. A lot of the work was black board and lectures. We had Remount horses when required for exercises out in the field. It was a great two weeks.

1936

Mr Lester informed me in January that he wanted one hundred and fifty posts for the stock yard. They were to be yellow box, eight feet long and bigger than the ordinary fence posts. They took some splitting. It was hard hot work in January. It took me over two weeks to do the job. I was paid 10 pounds for the one hundred and fifty posts. Another chap had the job of supplying the rails from up Tolmie way. They were split from messmate trees, nine feet in length.



Mr Peter Cummins (Ann Harris' father) had the job of building the yards. I was his off-sider. It was a big job. All the rails and posts had to be dressed with an adze to remove the splinters. The outside fence was a complete circle. There were three big yards built within this. One small one led to a crush for branding and treating cattle. We had no mechanical tools in those days, only hand tools. It took us over two months. Mr Lester was very pleased with the job we made of it.

Mr Lester asked me if I wanted a permanent job on Dueran as a stockman. I was sure pleased to accept it. Harry Norris was leaving, so I was taking his job as stockman assisting Bill Stewart who was the overseer. Bill, with his wife Queenie, lived in the cottage. Queenie cooked for the men who worked on the station. I think there were three of us at this time; Jack Harris fencing, Norm Harris on the house cows and gardener of the homestead, and myself.

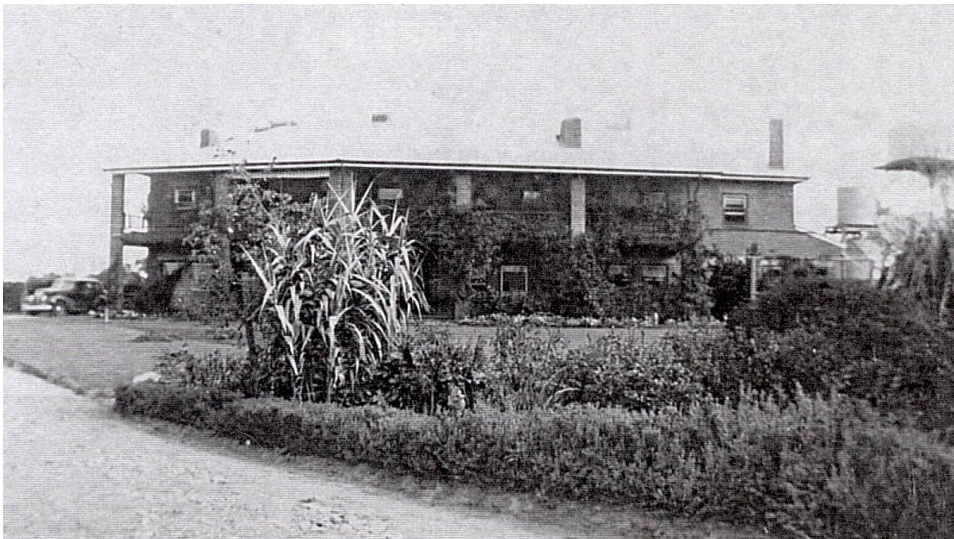
Bill Stewart (wearing hat) and Osie branding steers in the new stockyards he helped Peter Cummins to build



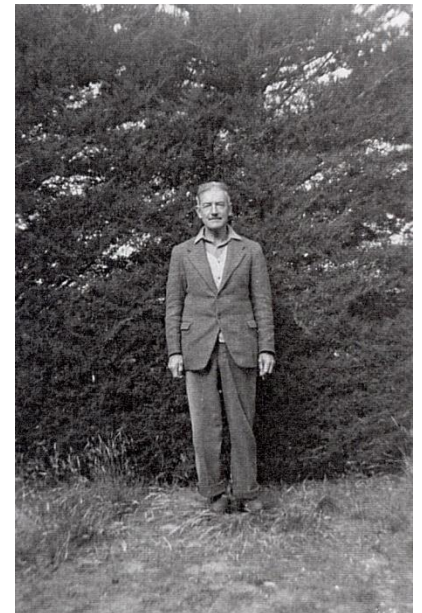
In the latter end of March we went into camp at Seymour for our annual two weeks training. It was another great two weeks.

Photo depicts 20th Light Horse Days. This was taken at the Broadmeadows Camp in 1936.

(L to R): Jack Drummonds, Reg Phillips, Osie, Jack Harris and Jim Fry.



Dueran Homestead on the Broken River, Mansfield



Mr Hugh Lester, owner of Dueran Station

April was crutching time and Bill and I were flat out keeping the sheep up to the crutching team and taking them back to their paddocks. During this year on Dueran, I was settling in well to my new job and was enjoying the work and the company of my fellow workers.

It was in the spring of this year I bought a second hand Harley Davidson motor bike and side car. I paid 40 pound for it. It was in very good order. It had a twin cylinder 8 horse power motor. It certainly had plenty of power.

I now had means of getting about of a weekend. The pictures on a Saturday night in Mansfield were a favourite spot. At times there would be two of us on the bike and two in the side car. My sister Ruth was

now working as a house maid in the homestead. Ann Cummins was the cook. I often gave a ride to these two, in the side car. Norman Harris would be on the pillion seat. It was alright in the warmer months but freezing in the winter, especially when a frost was on.

My pay now was 2 pound, ten shillings a week with keep. I could even save a bit now.

I was now a member of the Bridge Creek Tennis Club and spent a bit of time there on weekends during the spring and summer months.



The Stephens family in the orchard of the dairy on Dueran Station. Back Row: Joan, Frank Jnr, Winnie, Alf, Jack and Rich. Front Row: Harry, Mother Stephens with Don, Frank Stephens (Pop) and George.

1937



In the autumn of this year we again went on our usual two week camp at Seymour. We were taking training more seriously now. A madman by the name of Hitler was starting to build up the German Army.

On sports day, Jack Harris, Lou Murphy, Vic Broome and myself, won the tent pegging event. It meant going at full gallop and pulling a wooden peg out of the ground with the sword. We were going abreast so we had to watch we kept in line with each other and did the correct drill with the sword and, of course, got that peg on the end of the sword. We did all that perfectly, and won the event from about thirteen other



Winners of the Tent Pegging: Vic Broome, Lou Murphy, Osie Stafford, Jack Harris

In the spring, shearing was coming up. Before the main shearing started, the rams were shorn. A blade shearer by the name of Joe Byrnes was engaged. It was my job to look after him, sweep the board, pick up the fleece and skirt it and put it in the press. I also had to be on hand to help Joe hold a ram when it started to struggle. The Corriedales weren't too bad, but there were also sixty or seventy Border Leisters. They gave Joe a bad time. I would sometimes be in the press tramping the wool when I would get a yell from Joe, "Come on Osie, help me hold the bastard!"



Ruth Safford (Osie's sister) and Norm Harris at Dueran Station

Bill and I were always busy bringing in sheep and taking them away, drafting etc. Bill also carted the wool away to the Mansfield Railway Station on the Ford truck. I always helped him load it. It was at the end of shearing (the last load I think) when, helping him finish off the load and struggling to push a bale into position, I slipped and fell to the ground. The bale fell beside me, luckily, and not on me. However, I did break the fibula bone in my left leg down near the ankle. I was out of action for six weeks with the leg in

teams who were competing.

In the winter of this year, Jack Stephens started at Dueran as a permanent gardener and lived with us in the mess quarters. We became great friends. On weekends we would go out shooting, fishing and playing tennis. I couldn't talk him into joining the Light Horse though.

There were now four of us living in the men's huts. Jack and Norman Harris, Jack Stephens and myself. We decided to make a table tennis table and bought the necessary bats and balls. We set it up in the big shearers dining room. We would have a big log fire going, so we spent many happy hours during the long winter evenings. We also learnt to play very well.

Another job I had to help him with, first thing of a morning, was to turn the grind stone to sharpen his shears. They had to be perfect. During the day between sheep, he would touch them up with an oil stone. He sure made a beautiful job of shearing those rams.

The main shearing was done by contract. Dick Wells was the contractor, he was also the classer. There were four shearers, six shed hands and a cook.

plaster. I soon learned to get about well on crutches, but I was glad when the plaster came off and I was able to get back to work.

It was in this year that a young Englishman came to live on Dueran as a jack a-roo, Robin was his name. He was the son of a friend of Mr Lester's in England and came out for a year to learn something about farming. He was about twenty one or twenty two and was a very pleasant young chap and very keen to do his bit and learn something about farming. However, he never seemed to catch on. Whatever we gave him to do, he always made mistakes. That didn't worry Robin, he kept trying.

One afternoon he went off on a walk on his own. Night time came and he had not returned. The boss organised a search party. We all went out in different directions calling for him. He turned up at the Comerfords home about three miles up the Broken River from Dueran at about 10 o'clock that night. How he managed to do that was a mystery because he had to cross the Tolmie Mansfield road which is the boundary of Dueran. He certainly gave us plenty to talk and laugh about.

Robin could drive the truck, so Bill gave him the job to take hay out to some bullocks in a paddock about half a mile away. There was a fair size hole in this paddock where a big tree stump had been burnt out. It was the only hole in the paddock. Robin managed to find that hole with the truck's rear wheel. Robin had to walk home. Jack Harris went out with three draft horses and pulled the truck out. Poor old Robin, he just couldn't do anything right.

1938

War clouds were gathering. Hitler was beginning to show his muscle. England and France were trying to appease him to keep the peace.

We again went into camp at Seymour in March. There had been some changes in the Mansfield Troop. Ken Ross our Troop Leader had been promoted to captain and became Officer Commanding of A Squadron which was comprised of Mansfield, Alexandra, Yea and Broadford Troops. Our new Troop Leader was John Drake who owned a big property (Tonga), south of Mansfield. Bert Earl was promoted to Squadron Serjeant Major of A Squadron, Lou Murphy became Troop Serjeant and myself Troop Corporal. Quite a few new recruits joined the Troop, Jack Adams, Doug Lakin, Gilbert Anderson, Jack Lovick, Mabin Crockett, Jack McCormack, Norm and Noel Harris and Colin Bullock. Our troop was now up to full strength. This was a great camp.

At Dueran life went on smoothly. More super phosphate was now being spread on the paddocks. Bill Stewart would spread most of this with the Ford truck. The rough and hilly paddocks I would do with a horse drawn spreader. Bill would bring me up a load with the truck and stack it on the ground in the paddock I had to do. It was hard work lifting those bags of super up into the spreader.

The result from this super was soon evident. The stock rate was greatly increased. Dueran now would be carrying twice as many sheep and a 50% increase in the number of cattle. The price of wool had increased and the country as a whole had now come out of the Depression.

It was in the winter of this year that I attended another Officers and N.C.O. school at Broadmeadows for two weeks. It was a very interesting school. Ken Ross and John Drake also attended from Mansfield.

There were about one hundred and twenty five who attended the school. At the conclusion of the school we had our photo taken. After the War, on examining this photograph I recognised several 6th Division Cavalry chaps who were in the 2nd Cavalry Division at the time. They were Mick Hurrey, Bob Piper, Les Stewart, Maj Morrison and our first Adjutant of 6th Division Cavalry, Captain Basil Finlay, who at that time was Adjutant of

20th Light Horse Regiment. Also in the photo is Captain Cheaval who was our Adjutant when I first joined the Light Horse. -Captain Cheaval was a son of General Sir Harry Cheaval of World War One Light Horse fame.

On the Sunday, when we had a days leave, I attended a special Church Service with my mother and Grandmother Worcester at St. James Cathedral in King Street, Melbourne to celebrate its centenary.

I think it was in the early part of this year that Elizabeth Thompson came to Dueran as a companion and help for Mrs Lester. Mrs Lester had contracted a rare disease and her hands and limbs were giving trouble. Elizabeth came out from England and we soon nick-named her "Tommy". Mrs Lester gave her some time off on most days. She would spend this time riding around the paddocks. She was a very good horsewoman. If we were mustering sheep or cattle she would help us with that.

It was in this year we had a Regimental Shoot at Seymour Rifle Range. It was held on a Saturday. Each Troop in the Regiment had to supply a team of four to compete. Our Mansfield team consisted of Jim Fry and myself, either Norm or Jack Harris or Jack Drummond. Ken Ross drove us down to Seymour in his car on Saturday morning. We had a great afternoon shooting. Our team won the overall aggregate for the day. We won two team events and one individual event. I was lucky enough to win that one. It was for the ten rounds rapid firing competition at two hundred yards. We had to fire ten rounds in one minute. We were allowed to have five rounds in the magazine of the 303 rifle before the minute started. When we had fired the five rounds we had to remove another five round clip from our bandolier, do up the pouch flap, then load the clip into the rifle and fire the five rounds. We had done lots of practice at the Mansfield Rifle Range on weekends leading up to this shoot. My score for this event was forty five, dropping only five points from the possible fifty.

In the evening we had a dinner in the Drill Hall in Seymour. It was a merry event. After dinner our Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Barry presented the trophies to the winners. It was in the small hours of the morning when we arrived back at Mansfield, a tired but happy lot of boys. Ken Ross's brother was the chemist in Mansfield at that time. He collected the trophies and displayed them in his shop window for a couple of weeks. The local paper gave us a good write up also.

It was during this year that Mrs Dale and Mrs Perrin formed the Bridge Creek Dramatic Society. Young people they persuaded to join were - (ones that I can remember) my sister Ruth, Ann Cummins, Win Stephens, Frank Stephens, Una Dale, the school teacher Peggy Handcock and yours truly. We decided to do a small play and some concert items for our first effort.

We met and practised in Mr Perrin's woolshed about two nights a week over the winter months. In the spring we put our show on, in the woolshed. I wouldn't call it a raging success but we still had lots of fun doing it. At a later date in the year, we did the same concert in the Tolmie Hall. We met with more success there.

Every year I was in the Light Horse, usually in the winter months, we would have our Military Ball which was always a great event. Also, at a later date, our annual dinner. This, of course, was men only. Many visitors would be invited including Light Horsemen from Yea and Alexandra Troops. In this year we had a guest speaker from Melbourne, Sir Frank Beaurepaire it was. He was one of Australia's first gold medal winners for swimming in the Olympic Games. He gave a great speech.

The spring of this year was a very dry one. In most parts of Victoria there was a drought on. In the Mansfield district it could not be called a drought, only a dry spring.

1939

The summer of this year was a very hot one. Friday the 13th of January was a heat wave, with the temperatures well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and a howling north wind. Many fires started up over the State. The forest areas were the worst ones. Over seventy lives were lost on this terrible day. Most of these were in the saw mill areas. They didn't have a chance to escape. The fire travelled so fast. The township of Woods Point was completely burnt out. The townspeople were lucky there was a creek running through the town. They all went into the creek when the fire approached. Two lives were lost however. Mansfield was lucky, no fires started up.

The start of February was still hot and dry. The build up of the German army was causing great concern. The Australian Government decided more training was necessary for the militia. All army units in Victoria were to go into camp in the middle of February for two weeks training. Broadmeadows and Seymour were the camps. Our Regiment, along with the rest of the 2nd Division Cavalry, was going to Broadmeadows.

We arrived at Broadmeadows camp about midday on a Thursday. We set up our horse lines and our tents, not far from the horse lines. In the afternoon it was very hot and dusty. During the night a steady rain set in. We were happy about that, it would lay the dust and, perhaps, be enough to end the drought.

It sure did that. The rain continued for four days non stop. By the Sunday the horse lines were a quagmire. The poor horses were up to their knees in mud. Black sticky mud. Our tent lines were a mess too. Everything was wet and muddy. We took the horses out for exercise as often as possible. They were having an awful time of it when tied up in the mud. We were all getting very concerned about the horses. So was our Squadron Commanding Officer, Captain Ken Ross. He gained permission to use a paddock, over the road from our camp, then he gained the approval from the Commanding Officer, Colonel Mitchell, to let the horses go there.

We did this on Sunday afternoon and it was a disaster! As soon as we let them go they stampeded, about one hundred and twenty horses of A Squadron. Some of them tore through fences. Three broke legs and had to be destroyed. Most of them just kept galloping around the paddocks until they were exhausted, then they quietened down. Quite a few were injured with cuts and scratches. Two horses were never found, they must have just kept going. My horse escaped injury. Eventually we rounded them all up and it was back to the horse lines with them. We were given a new area to tie them up in, it wasn't so muddy, so that helped.

On the Monday, Ken Ross went into Melbourne and bought us all rubber boots. We had to pay for them but they were sure worth it. We now had dry feet. On Monday evening the rain stopped. There had been over 10 inches. Within a few days the mud dried up and things were back to normal.

It was out into the countryside doing exercises and manoeuvres for the remainder of the camp. Then back to Dueran and work. Dueran had had over 12 inches of rain, it was like spring again. We had further good falls in March. In early April we were cutting Lucerne and grass hay an unheard of thing before this.

Life went on happily in Dueran. In Europe, Hitler had marched into Czechoslovakia. Neville Chamberlin, the English Prime Minister, had signed an agreement with Hitler that this will be the last. "Peace in our Time". Not many really believed it.

Mrs Dale and Mrs Perrin had got the Dramatic Society moving again. We did a one act comedy, "My Turn Next". I was the leading man, a chemist who suspects his wife (Ann Harris) of trying to poison him. Great stuff!! We took it to Mansfield along with some concert items. It met with fair success. We had a lot of fun doing it.

In the winter there was a fancy dress roller skate ball in Mansfield. Ruth talked me into going as Hitler. I used part of my Light Horse uniform and Ruth did the make up on me. I certainly looked the part. The skating was the hard part, but I managed to get around. I won second prize in the men's section.

Mrs Dale became very ambitious with our acting skills, she started us on a big three act play, "Lord Richard in the Pantry". Once again I was given the leading role as Lord Richard. Una Dale was the leading lady. I had hundreds of lines to learn. Ruth also played a big part as a maid.

Of course it never got off the ground. Hitler put a stop to that. Pity, as I may have ended up a film star!

September 1, the German army has invaded Poland. England and France have declared War on Germany.

The War Years

1939

September

- 1 Just how is this war, which broke out today, going to affect me? Time alone will tell. This much I do know. If an army is formed to go overseas, I am going to be right in it. There was a meeting of the Light Horse tonight. There was much excitement and much talk as to what will become of us and when we will be called up to go into camp. Everyone realises how serious the situation is. For several years now, we have been kept well informed of the situation in Europe by the press, wireless and newsreels at the picture theatre. We have seen all the small countries around Germany taken over by Hitler's armies. Now he has marched into Poland. Hitler has made it very clear that Germany is the "superior race" and that the Germans will capture the world. The majority of Australians that I come in contact with believe he must be stopped at any cost. Yet there are others who do not want to be involved in a war fought in Europe. Nobody could blame them for that, but I can't help thinking that sitting on the fence will do the greatest harm.
- 2 Work as usual today though it is somewhat hard to concentrate. It is hard to realise there is a war on and that very soon we will all be involved in it. Just thinking about it is enough to make your stomach turn and you can see the concern in the faces of friends and family.
- 3 **AUSTRALIA DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY.**
- 4 Jack Harris and I have the day off to tour around looking for horses to buy. We feel sure that we will be called up soon and we have decided that we may as well have some decent horses to take to camp with us.
- 9 We didn't get any horses and now we have decided to let the Government get them for us. It's their job anyway. The war excitement has eased off a bit and we have settled down to work again. One cannot help wondering though just where it will all end, and how long it will last, and where I will be this time next year.
- 16 Another week has passed and still no word of going into camp. I reckon it's about time they started to get an army together. They will never win this war by mucking about. Mrs Lester's companion, Tommy, left during the week. She is returning to England to do her bit for the war effort over there. Good old Tommy. I certainly will miss her. Who knows I might get over to England myself one day soon and Tommy said to be sure and look her up. (I did look Tommy (Elizabeth Thompson) up 48 years later during a trip to England in 1987, what a thrill it was to see her and talk about old times)
- 23 The Government has at last decided to form a division for overseas service. I am going down to Seymour today on the old "Grid" (my trusty motorbike) to see about joining up. I cannot get Jack Harris to come with me though.

24 I reported to our Light Horse Headquarters at Seymour yesterday but the W.O. in charge couldn't tell me much about joining up. However he took my name and particulars and said he would forward them on to Melbourne. Now its just a waiting game and learning to be patient.

30 Today I have received notice from the Light Horse to say we are to move into camp on the 16th of October for four weeks training and that we require our own horses. So, I will have to buy one from somewhere.

It was in the papers that 20,000 men are wanted for the 2nd Australian Imperial Forces and that the Government wants at least half of them to be from the Militia. But the Militia chaps won't be enlisted till we go into camp. That will suit me nicely.

October

7 I bought a horse from Hermerstons who had a farm on the Mount Buller Rd, east of Mansfield. He is nothing flash and I only paid 10 pounds for him. However, he will do me just fine as I will only want him for a week or two in camp. If I get in the Australian Imperial Forces I can sell him as the Government will supply our horses.

15 This is most likely my last day in civilian life for the duration of this war. Busy all day preparing to go into camp tomorrow.

16 Up bright and early and into Mansfield. Loaded our horses on the train and eventually got away at 9 o'clock bound for Seymour.

All the boys were happy and we had a good old sing-song on the way down. Detrained at Mangalore at 1600 hours (Army time is referred to in hours and here I am on Day one already into the jargon). It is cold and drizzling with rain. We rode out to our camp which is on the Shepparton Road about five miles out of Seymour. It is a very uncomfortable camp but we will just have to make the best of it.

17 Well, we have settled ourselves into camp. I have Mabin Crockett, Jack Adams, Gilbert Anderson, Doug Lakin and Roy Bostock in my tent. We make a good team and are all jolly good pals. Roy Bostock is a bit of a lad as he often comes home late at night drunk and causes disturbances in the tent. We have threatened him with the horse trough if he doesn't behave!

18 Started training today but it was only troop drill and signal drill - getting the horses used to one another. My old hack behaves himself very well.

22 Nothing much has happened over the last few days. We have been doing the usual troop training and scout patrols.

23 Applications are called for enlistment in the 2nd Australian Imperial Forces. Lou Murphy and I put our names in and we are the only two from the Mansfield Troop. I am disgusted with them.

24 I have since learnt that there are forty four vacancies from this regiment for enlistment in the Australian Imperial Forces and only seven men have put their names in. Only seven men out of five hundred to volunteer to go overseas and fight is damn disgraceful to say the least. The sooner I am called up the better I will like it.

- 27** Today we seven volunteers have been medically examined and filled in all our necessary papers for enlistment in the Australian Imperial Forces. On Monday, we are going home on a few days leave and then we are going to Melbourne to be sworn in. There is no turning back now - there's a war to be fought and won and I intend to be a part of it.
- 29** My last day with the 20th Light Horse. Last night the Mansfield Troop gave Lou and I a send off. It was a jolly nice affair. They gave Lou a beaut set of blade razors and me a Rolls Safety Razor. Today we handed back all our Light Horse equipment, with the exception of our uniforms and kit bags that we were allowed to keep.
- 30** Home to Mansfield. Lou had his car in camp so we didn't have to use the damn old train.
- 31** Shifted all my belongings from Dueran up home. I felt a little sad to be saying goodbye to Dueran. It held many good memories for me and had given me a great start in life. I had a talk with Mr Lester. He was sorry to see me go, but glad I was one of the first to join up. He very generously gave me a months overpayment of wages.

November

- 1** Down to Dueran again. Jack Stephens is going to buy my horse for what I paid for him. I had to leave him in camp but Jack is going to get him when the Light Horse boys come back.
- 2** Lou and I went by train to Melbourne today, dressed in our Light Horse uniforms. It was the normal passenger motor train as far as Tallarook, where we joined the Melbourne - Sydney line and there changed trains. Then it was express all the way to Melbourne.

On the motor train we picked up passengers at Bonnie Doon, Yark, Molesworth and Yea. These passengers were mainly civilians. There were a few Militia Servicemen, like ourselves in uniform. The trip took about five hours.

- 3** We reported out to the Recruiting Hall in Kooyong Road and were eventually sworn into the Australian Imperial Forces to serve at home or abroad for the duration of the war and 12 months thereafter. A Lieutenant Hall swore us in and he was a very sarcastic devil. When he saw us Light Horse chaps arrive with our emu feathers, spurs and leggings he wanted to know if we were from the back blocks of Queensland. Well, we may have looked like bushwhackers to him, but we had no doubts about what we were made of and what our contribution to this army would be. He must have had a set on the Light Horse, because as soon as we were sworn in and he knew we were no longer free men, he started to roar and bellow at us because we couldn't do his BLOODY infantry drill.

We got away from him at last and were taken out to the Melbourne Showgrounds by truck and dumped there. Nobody seemed to want us or know anything about us. The Melbourne Showgrounds were taken over by the Army as an Assembly Depot for men who had just joined up in the 6th Division Australian Imperial Forces.

Like ourselves, they had been recruited and sworn in at various Drill Halls around the city and also in the bigger country towns. The halls and pavilions within the Showgrounds were used as sleeping quarters and some for office work.

From here, the recruits were sent out to the various units that were being formed to make up the 6th Division. These units were being assembled at training camps such as Broadmeadows, Seymour and a new one being built at Puckapunyal.

We were told out at the Recruiting Hall that we were to go into the Reconnaissance Regiment for the 6th Division. After a lot of mucking about we were issued with some blankets and were told to report back in the morning. I have teamed up with a chap from Dimboola named Bill Baker.

- 4 Nobody still seems to know a damn thing in this place. However, I suppose they will straighten things out one of these days. At present it seems like one big muck up.

Thousands of men here and no organisation. Still, I suppose that it is to be expected when forming a new division.

Lou and I eventually tracked an Officer down who gave us leave till Sunday night. He also told us that we would probably be leaving for Seymour on Monday morning.

Bill Baker and I went and saw the film "We of the Australian Imperial Forces." It was the life story of the Australian Imperial Forces during the last war. It was very good, but it made us wonder if we would have to go through similar conditions such as trench warfare and the terrible mud of Flanders. We stopped the night out at Burwood, with my sister Elsie.

- 5 A very quiet day. Returned to the Showgrounds at 2000 hours. Found out that all men for the Reconnaissance Regiment are moving out first thing in the morning for Seymour.

- 6 Packed up at the Showgrounds and moved out at 0830 hours and arrived at Seymour at 1030 hours. Marched out to the old Seymour camp and found that our tents were all pitched by an advance party. No parades today, we are just getting settled in.

I am in a tent with Lou Murphy, Max Ramsay from Swan Hill, Jack MacBeam from the Wimmera and Bob Reid from Gippsland. They are all good chaps and I expect we will get on famously.

- 7 A parade this morning - the first one in the Australian Imperial Forces. Our Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Fergusson gave us a talk and told us he expected lots from us in the future. He also told us that we are B Squadron and that the rest of the regiment was recruited from the remainder of Australia and that we would join them at Ingleburn NSW at a later date.

This Commanding Officer of ours seems a very stern old devil but I think he will be all right. We have been divided into troops but this is only temporary as nobody is certain just what our organisation is yet. Lou and I are together in the same troop and Lieutenant Knox is our troop leader. I don't know any of the other chaps in the troop but it won't be long before I do.

We started off by doing some old Light Horse dismounted drill. This is nothing new to most of us as practically all these chaps are out of the Light Horse units.

There are a few who have joined from Artillery and Signals. We sure look a motley crew in our various uniforms. The civvies are in "giggle suits" (khaki drill work clothes) and the remainder in various assortments of bright coloured Militia uniforms. However, we will all be issued with new uniforms before long.

- 8 More drill. Lieutenant Knox told Lou and I that we would get our Militia ranks back almost right away. He also told me I should be a Lance Sergeant before the New Year. I was very pleased about this. Because of my experiences in the Light Horse I did expect to receive my two stripes back right away. The third stripe to Lance Sergeant would be great.
- 9 The troop went for a route march today down to the Goulburn River and back. It is very hard to get us to march properly as many of the chaps have a different length stride. However with a bit of practice, we should come good (I certainly wouldn't like Hitler to see us just yet!) We were told a little of what our organisation is to be. We are the Reconnaissance Regiment for the Infantry. We are to be equipped with light tanks and Ben Gun carriers. There are to be three armoured vehicles to each troop which will comprise of a troop leader, troop serjeant and troop corporal and nine other ranks.
- 10 More marching and more drill. Major Morrison is our Officer Commanding (an Officer Commanding commands a squadron and a Commanding Officer commands a regiment or a battalion) and is a very fine officer.
- 11 Very little change. Went for a route march and just managed to make it back to camp as I am feeling very sick on it. Must be flu or something. I lay in the tent all afternoon feeling very crook. Murphy and a few others started acting the goat pulling down each others tents and of course they had to pull down mine much to my annoyance.
- 12 Reported to the M.O. this morning and he is sending me off to the camp hospital. He never said what I had, but it must be a bad attack of flu.
- 13 There is no doubt as to what I have got now. Damn measles! This morning, when I woke up I was all out in spots. I am to be sent to Fairfield Hospital Melbourne. Woe is me - off to hospital after only a week in the Australian Imperial Forces. I arrived at Fairfield sometime in the afternoon. They brought me down by ambulance but I wasn't very interested in what they did with me.
- 14 Feeling very sick with the sorest throat and cannot eat a thing. Jimmy Comerford is in the same ward and he looks a very sick lad too. I don't think he has recognised me.
- 20 Starting to spark up a bit now. The spots have just about disappeared and the sore throat is better, so I can eat a bit now. Received a letter from Mum and Dad and also one from my sister Ruth. She informs me that I won the sweep on the Melbourne Cup at Dueran. I didn't even know I was in it. The boss must have put me in. Good old Mr Lester.
- 21 Allowed up today. This is certainly better than lying in bed all day. The sooner I get out of this place and back to the unit the better I'll like it.
- 24 Discharged today and damn pleased to get away. I was put in charge of a dozen other chaps and told to report to 6 Division Head Quarters, St Kilda Road. I reported in with my motley crew. The only clothes I have are my Militia jacket and slacks and a pair of tennis shoes and no hat. When I was sent to hospital my kit was supposed to be sent along too, but I never saw it so I don't know what happened to it. At least I have got my shaving gear and toilet gear. Some of these chaps with me haven't even got that and they are dressed in all sorts of clothes so we sure look a queer lot.

The Officer In Charge at St Kilda Road wanted to know what the devil we reported there for. He said we should have gone straight out to the Showgrounds. I told him I had orders to report there. Such is our

wonderful organisation! However, this chap was very good. He got us an army bus to go out to the Showgrounds. I reported in there and handed over all the discharge papers and after a lot of mucking about we were shown a hut to sleep in and issued with blankets and supplies.

25 We all have to go on sick parade this morning having just come out of hospital. The MO gave us all 5 days sick leave. I am going out to Burwood to stop with Elsie as it wouldn't be worth while going up home for such a short leave.

27 Had a quiet day yesterday. Went into the city today and bought myself a pair of shoes so I look a little more respectable than when wearing tennis shoes. However without my hat I don't feel fully dressed. I hope when I go back to the Showgrounds they will send me straight back to the unit. My patience is running a little thin.

28 Reported back to the Showgrounds. I still had a day left and need not have reported in till tomorrow, but just got sick of doing nothing. I wanted to get back to Seymour as soon as possible, as I think the Squadron will be going up to NSW and I don't want to miss out..

Met Eddie Clugston, he is in the Reconnaissance Regiment and got the measles as soon as we got up to Seymour. He has been here a week and hasn't been able to get away, so things don't look too bright for my chances of an early departure, but I'll make a hell of a nuisance of myself and get back somehow.

I was interviewed by an Officer who caused my morale to go right down. He said my unit has already gone up to NSW as their numbers are already above the allotted numbers on the roll. He didn't think I would be sent all that way to join them and that I might have to join something else. Of course I had quite a lot to say about that, but it didn't get me anywhere. I'll keep trying though!

29 Nobody seems to want me here, so I managed to get leave for the day and got out of the damn place, and was I glad I did! No sooner did I arrive in the city than who should I meet but Bob Reid our Squadron Serjeant Major. I wanted to know why he wasn't up in NSW and he said all the Squadron were on four days leave and that they would be going to NSW when they came back from leave. He thought it would be next Monday. Well that rocked me to the knees to think that they have been here all the time and that damn Officer out at the Showgrounds told me they had gone. It just goes to show what a terrible muddle they are in and how much they know. Well, the old morale has gone up again and I'll be able to put it to these blighters at the Showgrounds now.

30 Managed to get on to an Officer in Charge of drafts going to Seymour. I explained the position to him and he gave me a good hearing and said there was a draft going up to Seymour tomorrow and that he would do his best to put Clugston and I on it. Well I seem to be getting somewhere now anyway. I was told last thing before turning in that Eddie and I are to be ready to move in the morning.

December

1 Finally, back to the old Seymour Camp once again and the Squadron is still here so I am quite happy. There have been quite a few changes since I went and it looks as if I have missed out on promotion through being away. I had a talk with Mr Knox and he told me that there were to be more promotions and that I was sure to get one.

Wrote to Ruth and asked her if she could come down on Sunday with Frank as we will be going to NSW next week. Got issued with my new Australian Imperial Forces uniform and kit of clothes and

equipment. Talk about clothes! I have more than I know what to do with. My Light Horse Kit, which was uniform only, I am sending home.

2 Started training again today, mostly practice for rifle and pistol shooting. I am in a tent now with Eddie Clugston, Fred Westhrope, Ron James and Stan Robinson. They are all decent chaps and Stan Robinson happens to be out of the old 20th, so we have many things in common.

3 Orderly Corporal today, even though I am still only a trooper they got me doing a Corporal's job. When appointed Orderly Corporal it was for only one day. It would only come around once a fortnight or less, depending on the number of corporals in the Squadron.

My job was to be in attendance at Squadron Head Quarters all day under the orders of the Squadron Officer Commanding and the Squadron Serjeant Major, to deliver messages to the Troop Leaders or to the Regimental Head Quarters, or to help with the mail sorting.

Mum, Ruth and Frank arrived down today and we had a picnic lunch on the road outside the camp. They also brought lots of cakes and the boys in the tent were pretty tickled about this. We had ourselves quite a feast. Mum had made my favourite fruit cake which I made sure I had plenty of before the others devoured it.

4 It doesn't seem likely that we will go to NSW this week after all. More rifle and pistol practice.

5 On the range today and had a rifle shoot.

6 On the range again - finished our rifle shooting, some of the chaps are terrible shots and want lots and lots of practice.

7 Did our pistol shoot today. Joy of joys! We have just been told that we have all been granted four days leave and that as soon as we come back we will be definitely going up to Ingleburn Camp just out of Sydney. We were also told that this is only preconcentration leave and that before we sailed (if we did) we would get pre-embarkation leave back to Victoria.

8 This morning the whole Squadron arrived at Seymour Station at 0700 hours and the chap at the ticket window had to write out rail warrants for over a hundred of us. It took him nearly two hours and kept the train waiting over an hour. Why the dickens he couldn't have given us tickets and be done with it I'm dashed if I know. I just got to Tallarook in time to catch the Mansfield train for home. Lou went on to Melbourne and is coming up in the Service Car tomorrow.

Went out home and jolly glad to be there too.

It was always a great pleasure to come home. A very warm welcome from my parents would always be there. This was where I spent my boy-hood. This was where I developed a great love of the bush. (This love of the bush I still have to this day; when ever I travel I make it my business to get out into the bush and walk for miles. To walk along a bush track has always been a pleasure and gives me the greatest feeling of peace and solitude).

9 Went to Dueran and saw Ruth. Winnie and Ann and the lads. Went to the pictures with them tonight.

10 A quiet day at home with the family and plenty of Mum's home cooking!.

- 11** Rode the old motor bike up to Mt Buller Sawmills to see George Cameron. I hoped he might be interested in buying the bike. Sold it to him for 24 pounds and will leave it in Mansfield for him to collect.
- 12** Said all my goodbyes but told everyone I will be seeing them again if we go overseas. Rode the old bike into the town for the last time. Went on the train and eventually arrived back at Seymour Camp at 2200 hours to find out that we are definitely off for NSW tomorrow.
- 13** Busy packing up all morning, then into Seymour to catch the Sydney train. It didn't leave till 1700 hours but with usual army style we were there two hours before hand. Everybody is very happy because we are on the move at last and will be seeing new places.
- 14** Travelled all night and arrived at Ingleburn Camp at 1000 hours. We did manage to get a bit of sleep by some of us camping on the floor and Robbie sleeping up in the luggage rack. In another carriage somebody else tried it but the rack collapsed!

Well this camp seems very comfortable but it is much hotter than Seymour. It's not so much the heat that knocks you but the dry humidity. There are twenty men attached to each hut. The showers are excellent with both hot and cold running water. We have been allocated leave about every night to go into Sydney. Most of the lads buzzed off tonight to have a look around Sydney but I felt a bit too tired.

When we marched into camp this morning, the other three Squadrons of the Regiment met us with the usual cry for all new-comers, "You'll be sorry". Well we are not yet, even though we might be one of these days.

- 15** Getting settled in - general mucking about - issued with a few more clothes. Went into Sydney with Robbie and Jim Cousil and had a good look around. Finished up by going to Luna Park. The temperature was hotter than Melbourne and you needed to have an eye on the lookout all the time for trams, a bit of a novelty for the boys from the bush. These trams would never stop where you wanted them to and we quickly nicknamed anyone who went A.W.L. as someone who "shot through like a Bondi tram".
- 16** A parade today of the whole Regiment for the first time. Colonel Fergusson gave us a talk. He said, "If any man fails to obey an order or play up in any way that will bring disgrace on this Regiment, I will deal with him ruthlessly". The boys have already christened him "Ruthless Rufus".

Went into Sydney this afternoon with Robbie and Jim. They are two jolly good pals and both in my troop. We had a look over the Harbour Bridge and then did a trip around the Bay. Had a very enjoyable afternoon. Went to the pictures at night.

- 17** While under the shower this morning I got into a conversation with a chap named Stan Poppins. He mentioned he came from Hampton. I said I had a cousin living there by the name of Joyce Petherbridge. He said, "that's my girl friend". We talked some more and we found out he was a second cousin of my mother. (On returning from the Middle East, Joyce and Stan were married. In later years after the War, Stan has become a staunch committeeman of our Unit Association. He became secretary years ago and still is. I originally got to know Joyce in 1935 when she paid a visit with her mother at Blue Range Creek. I took her around rabbit traps, among other things. We have been great friends ever since).

Went out to Artarmon to visit Auntie Aleathea and Uncle Bert and young Ray and Albert. This was the first time I had met them. They were delighted to see me and treated me very well and made me promise to spend Christmas with them and to bring a mate.

18 Started a week's N.C.O. school under Serjeant Major Gaul, a permanent army chap. There are twelve of us altogether - three from each Squadron. There is Leo T Killeen, Cedric Rolfe and myself from B Squadron. We did nothing else but drill all day and by Jove did he drive us - I'll say. He bellowed and roared at us all day - the real typical "Tommy Serjeant Major" that one has heard all about. However, we can take it, no matter how hard he tries us. One thing I'll say for him, he does know his job.

19 More drill and yet more drill. Rifle drill, squad drill and every blessed sort of drill and a lot of it at the double. If one of us does the slightest thing wrong, he makes us double up to a tree and back, which is over two hundred yards away - as he says "just to make you remember next time". We reckon his idea is just to make us do our blocks and crack up, but we know if we do, it will be goodbye to the stripes which we have been promised. We have decided between us, to take all he can give us no matter how hard.

20 The "Old Blighter" eased up on the drill today and gave us a few lectures on the rifle, rifle shooting and judging distance. One chap from C Squadron yawned during a lecture and he made him double around the tree to wake him up.

21 More drill, more lectures and plenty of study at night. Tomorrow we are being examined but it is only in the form of drilling the squad ourselves and giving a lecture.

22 Passed all the tests okay. None of us are sorry it is over and we all agree it was the toughest five days we have ever put in. After we finished in the afternoon, we had to go along with the rest of the Squadron to be x-rayed and a blood test taken to find out our blood groups. Already, rumours are going about that we will soon be going abroad, but I think this most unlikely as we haven't really started to do any training yet.

23 Received my promotion to Corporal today and it dates back to December 10th so I'll draw 9 shillings a day as from then.

We are to get four days leave for Xmas. The remainder of the Regiment get eight days but B Squadron had four days before we came up here, which the others didn't get. I am taking mine from Xmas Day, so I will have to remain in camp over the next week and do guard duties. There are only a few left in camp. Jim Cousil and Robbie and quite a lot of the Victorians were going to try and get down on the train to Melbourne. Don't know how they will get on, as none of B Squadron were given rail warrants not being home leave. They'll either have to pay their fare or else "jump the rattler".

24 Very quiet day in camp - rang up Auntie and told her I would be out for Xmas dinner and would be stopping with them for four days.

25 - Christmas Day -

Met Harry Hunting on Central Station. He was heading back to camp as he didn't have anywhere to go, so I made him come out with me to Artarmon. We had an excellent Christmas dinner - the old Uncle did things in style with wine, beer and the best of cigars. Being an old digger he told us lots of tales of the last war and just couldn't do enough for us "young diggers", as he called us.

Harry and I and the two lads went down to the beach in the afternoon and had a swim. After tea Harry had to go back to camp.

- 26** Most of the troops had been given leave over Christmas. A certain number had to remain on duty to guard the camp. I was given four days leave commencing on December 26. I mentioned to the officer in charge of the camp that I had been invited by my uncle to have Christmas dinner with them. The officer was kind enough to let me have that extra day's leave.

On the second day of my leave, Auntie, the boys and I went down to Manly beach by the ferry and had a marvellous day.

- 27** Went and had a look over Taronga Park Zoo, it certainly puts Melbourne Zoo in the shade.

- 28** Auntie, Roy, Albert and I went up to the Hawkesbury River. We took our lunch and had a picnic, then hired a boat and went out fishing but the only fish we caught were a couple of small cat-fish. However, we had quite an enjoyable day.

- 29** Left Auntie's after lunch and went into Sydney and had my photo taken at Paramount Studios. I ordered three to be sent home. Returned to camp in the evening - hardly anyone back from leave.

- 30** Nothing much doing today, quite a lot of chaps slowly arriving back with lots of different stories about how they spent their Christmas.

- 31** A quiet day in camp - most of the lads are back now.

1940

January

- 1 No holiday for us today. We are having a big march through the city on Thursday. Everything points to us leaving soon for overseas.
- 2 Lots of marching practice so we look our best for the city march.
- 3 The 16th Brigade is to march and our Regiment is to lead it.
- 4 We went by train to Sydney and then marched through the city. It was sweltering hot in our thick uniforms and black berets, however the march was quite a success. The streets were just packed with people and at one place the police had to clear a path for us. It was a very silent crowd for most parts and there were a few who were even hostile towards us - and called us "Five bob-a-day murderers".

We arrived back in camp very tired and saturated with sweat. However, after a good shower we soon freshened up - in fact some of the lads went off back to the city, but I was far too tired to go dashing back there again.
- 5 We all received our vaccination today and also the T.A.B. inoculation. The vaccination was for chicken pox. The T.A.B. inoculation was for typhoid and cholera. It seems practically certain now that we will be sailing within the next week or so.
- 6 Robbie and Lou had to go along for another x-ray. Their first x-ray must have been done on faulty film. Robbie is scared stiff that there is something wrong with him and that he will be left behind.
- 7 There was no need for the panic yesterday as the second lot of x-rays put Robbie and Lou in the clear. Taking it easy today - everyone is a bit sick and has very sore arms after the vaccination yesterday.
- 8 Went into Sydney with Max Ramsay and did another trip around the Harbour.
- 9 We have been told we are embarking within the next few days. Everybody is excited at going overseas. There are a lot of chaps like myself though, who are disappointed at not getting home to say good-bye.

Wrote several letters to home and friends. Received a letter and wallet with cheque for 5 pounds from the Bridge Creek people. What a fine gesture from the people of Bridge Creek to send me such a great gift. It makes a man humble but proud to know and have so many wonderful friends.

Busy packing as we are leaving in the morning.
- 10 This morning we moved out from Ingleburn camp to embark. This is supposed to be a most secret move but as our troop train moves through the suburbs of Sydney there are crowds everywhere to wave us good-bye. They seem to know that we are going overseas. We arrived at the wharf where several big liners were tied up. After very little delay we went aboard the "Strathnaver" a 22,000 tonne passenger liner. Everything was well organised which is a change. We were soon shown our cabins which are very comfortable. There are four of us in a tourist class cabin, No. 64. Jim Cousill, Jack Fisher, Stan Robinson and myself. As soon as the four of us got our gear settled in, we raced up on deck and had a look around the ship.

At 1300 hours our ship moved away from the wharf and steamed slowly up the Harbour. Well at last we are off heading for goodness knows where. Of course there are plenty of rumours as to where we are going but it seems it will be either the Middle East or England. I hope it is England! As we travelled up the Harbour there were hundreds of small craft packed with people cheering and waving us goodbye. Although every one of us are happy and excited, one can't help but wonder just when we will be returning home again or who will be the unlucky ones who will never return. I had a long and lingering look at the shores of Australia and implanted this vision clearly in my mind.

Eventually we got through the Heads and the coast line of Australia faded away. And, as it did we picked up another convoy. Five big ships loaded with a brigade of New Zealanders.

We now take up our place in the convoy and what a marvellous sight it is. Ten big transport ships in three lines protected by two cruisers on the flanks and the British battleship Ramilles way out in front.

The sea is lovely and calm, so as yet nobody is sea sick. At sunset we have to shut up the port hole of our cabin as the ship must be completely blacked out during darkness.

11 Land is out of sight and we are really on our way, bound for the unknown. We are no longer allowed to wander at will all over the ship. There are guards and sentries everywhere. Our unit has the promenade deck for exercise, so we are fairly well off. There is nothing doing today, but I believe we are going to start some training soon. It will consist only of activities and deck games.

12 Land in sight this morning. Wilsons Promontory looms up on the right or I should say the "port side".

The canteen opened this morning and things are very cheap as there is no duty on anything. The meals are quite good and we are waited on by stewards, so we are doing things in style. Everyone is happy and for a change there are no growls and moans which are typical of the army. However, they will soon come, as I can see this "good life" on board ship getting very monotonous.

13 The Empress of Japan - the largest ship of the convoy joined us this morning. She loaded at Melbourne with 6 Division Head Quarter troops, so we must be just passing Port Phillip Bay, but well to the south as there is no sign of land.

The only thing we did this morning was some marching around the deck and some games with the medicine ball.

14 The sea is much rougher today. I hope it doesn't get any worse or I'll be getting sea sick. It probably will though as we are now starting to cross the Bight. Apparently we are going to call in at Fremantle as we have been told to write letters home if we wish. I wrote to Mum and Dad. Robbie is already speculating as to how much leave we will get and just how he can acquire some money as he is broke as usual.

15 It is very rough today and quite a number are sea sick. I am a bit squeamish myself, but managing to stick it out. We started some training today on the old Lewis gun. It's good to be doing something to get your mind off how you feel.

16 We were payed today, but the men could only draw 10 shillings each, much to Robby's disgust. He never quite had enough and the game of Two Up came around just a little too often. NCOs could draw 30 shillings, so it looks as if I'll have to finance this cabin as I had a few quid when I came on board.

- 17** Land in sight! Fremantle gradually draws closer to us but much to our disgust we drop anchor a few miles out. Apparently all the ships of this convoy can't get in the harbour so we will just have to wait our turn. In the afternoon, a tug pulled up beside us and shortly manoeuvred us towards the dock.

After tying the ship up we were all issued with leave until midnight, so away we went.

We have just been told to hand in all diaries or to post them home.

Diaries obviously are a security risk

(It was after the war ended in 1945 when I saw it again.)

FAST FORWARD TO 1989

4 May

Nearly fifty years have passed by since the preceding lines were written.

My daughter, Susan, has asked me to write down dates and main events that happened to me during the war. This is a tough assignment.

Memories fade with the passing of the years. However, soon after arriving in Palestine in February 1940, I did keep a small diary in a note book, mainly to keep track of the letters I received from home. In this note book I also jotted down dates of events and movements up until we arrived back in Australia.

Several years ago Shaun O'Leary (a member of our Regiment) wrote a book on the history of our Regiment "To the Green Fields Beyond". This book has been a great help for me to put many of my memories to the exact date and location.

Our Colour Patch, which of course could not be mentioned in a diary, was brown, red and green on a grey background of the 6th Division. Our motto was "Through Mud and Blood to the Green Fields Beyond"; hence the name of his book.

Now to continue on from 17th January, 1940, at Fremantle – as I remember ...

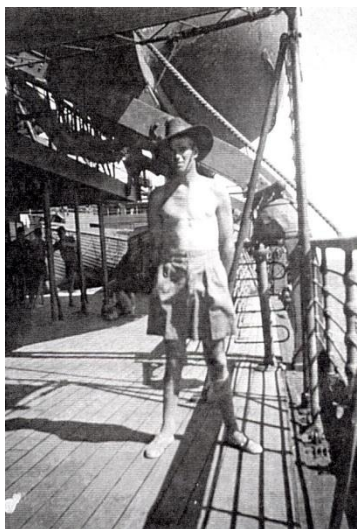
- 17** On leave this evening with my mates Robbie (Stan Robinson), Jim Cousil and Jack Fisher. We caught a train at Fremantle and went up to Perth. We had a good look around the place, had a few beers, but not too many and arrived back at the ship at midnight.

We heard the next day on a news report that the 2nd Australian Imperial Forces had nearly wrecked Perth. This was lies as far as I was concerned; to the best of my knowledge, the troops were all well behaved.

- 18** We set sail again across the Indian Ocean. While it was very rough coming across the Australian Bight, the Indian Ocean was as calm as a mill pond.

Our escort had increased considerably. The British aircraft carrier Eagle, had joined us along with a French cruiser, two more Australian cruisers and several destroyers. Quite an impressive sight. Our time was taken up with PT (physical training) and plenty of running around the Promenade Deck.

We had with us two machine guns of War I, the Lewis and the Hotchkiss. The Hotchkiss I knew well from Light Horse days, so I did quite a bit of instructing on that. We also had a lot of instructing on the Vickers, a water cooled heavy machine gun, a beautiful gun.



Osie on the Liner Strathnevier Jim Cousil & Osie with cruiser in background

For entertainment, we played "Housie Housie" (a similar game to Bingo) and performed the odd concert at night, mainly put on by the crew of the Strathnaver. They were very good. The boys would play Two Up when ever they got a chance. It was Robby's favourite pastime, though he was seldom lucky at it. I played occasionally but I couldn't see what all the excitement was about. It seemed more like a good way to lose all your money and Robbie sure made a habit of that.

For the next two years when he was in my troop he would borrow a "quid" from me sometime between paydays, depending on his luck at Two Up. But always on pay day he would pay that quid back to me. Even after leaving my troop, on occasions he would borrow some money from me, but he always paid it back.

Life went on smoothly across the Indian Ocean. Another thing that occupied our time was learning map reading and Morse Code. Each troop was to be equipped with a wireless transmitter. We had in our troop a specialist operator, Corporal Morgan, he could do twenty five words a minute on the Morse key. He came from the Signals Section of the 2nd Division Light Horse. He had learnt his job well. However, we all had to learn the Morse Code and be efficient up to five words a minute.

We crossed the Equator on the 28 January 1940 and arrived at Colombo on 30 January 1940. Again the troops could only draw 10 shillings, NCOs 30 shillings. So again I had to lend my cabin mates some money as we heard we were getting a few hours leave in Colombo. Our ship anchored out in the bay. We went ashore in a lighter (a type of barge that carried goods and people from a larger ship that could not dock at a wharf because of shallow water) at 1300 hours and had to be back at 1700 hours. It was a dirty smelly place and the beer was terrible but that didn't stop Robbie from getting partly drunk. Jack, Jim and I were of more sober habits.

However, we had lots of fun. Sailor Livingstone joined us (later to become a member of my troop) and we hired a Gharry (a four wheel, one horse drawn buggy), drove around for some of the time, bought a few souvenirs, then headed back to our ship.



A few hours leave in Colomba on 30th January. Front: Stan Robinson. Standing: Osie, Jack Fisher and Sailor Livingstone. Seated rear: Jim Cousil

On arriving back, we found that mail from Australia had arrived. There were five letters waiting for me and what a great feeling to see the familiar handwriting of my family and friends. There was a lengthy letter from Mum and Dad with all the home news, one from my sister Ruth, another from Win Stephens, one from her sister Joan and Mrs Dale from Bridge Creek filled me in with all the local news.

Photo on right shows a mobile advertising sign in Colombo. Robbie had to do some smart talking to make the Indian get out of the shafts, he didn't like the idea at all



- 31 Off we go again, this time heading West across the Indian Ocean heading for Aden. We have just been told we are going to Palestine and will receive our equipment and commence our main training there - so that puts an end to all those rumours that we are heading for England!

The days go on, more training with the machine guns, Morse Code and wireless procedures.

February

- 8 We arrive at Aden the entrance to the Red Sea. We anchored out in the bay. Some troops got leave, we didn't.

The Arabs (referred to as "wogs") came out in small boats of all kinds and sizes offering duty free cigarettes. They have the most exciting name of Gold Flakes. A packet of ten costs only 1 penny. It seemed too good to be true and it was! Some of the boys lit them up and discovered they were very poor quality, so not many were sold.

- 12 We headed up the Red Sea and entered the Suez Canal today. All our extra equipment had come up from the hold ready for disembarkation. Very slowly we headed up the Canal to Kantara where we said goodbye to that majestic ship, the "Strathnaver".

The "Tommies" (British Army) were there to meet us and had everything organised in their usual efficient manner with a hot meal (sausages and mash) and a blanket to keep us warm on the train. It was very cold. We pulled out of El. Kantara Station in the early hours of the morning.

After our soft life of the last five weeks on board ship this was doing it the hard way. The carriages were dog boxes, dirty and smelly. When daylight came we were travelling through the Sinai Desert, it looked dry, arid and primitive. I turned away and tried to go back to sleep on the rock hard seats.

- 14 We arrived at Gaza in Southern Palestine, to the cry of Arab boys calling out "eggs are cooked, eggs are cooked!". They were selling cold hard boiled eggs. We told them what they could do with those eggs. We looked out across the "City of Gaza" and were not very impressed. It looked like just a heap of mud huts.

Later in the morning, we arrived at the very small station of Al Majdal, right on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Majdal was a small "wog" village of mud huts.

We were detained here, then got on buses to take us to our camp at Qastina.

(Eight and a half years later I was to name my new farm at Hexham in the Western District of Victoria after our camp).

Qastina was a pretty place among the orange and grapefruit groves. There is also open. country which the locals farm with their primitive implements, growing wheat and oats. They all live together in a village made of mud bricks as they have done for the last couple of thousand years or so.

On arriving at our new camp, we were pleasantly surprised to find all the tents erected and only some work left to be done on the showers and cook-houses. This was thanks to the "Tommie" Cavalry Regiment of the famous "Greys" who had been out there for sometime to keep order between the Jews and the "Wogs". They still had their horses. We thanked them very much and as ex-Light Horsemen ourselves we had a lot in common to talk about.

It is winter time here. In fact the climate is very much like home in Victoria. We were issued with four blankets, bed boards and a pallet (a mattress cover) we filled with straw. We were quite warm against the cold nights. The straw beds were even quite comfortable to sleep on.

We moved into big tents about 18' x 18'. They certainly were spacious and very well finished, far better than the Australian tents.

We had one tent for each troop. The Troop Leader and Troop Serjeant slept in separate tents for Officers and Sergeants. Our Troop at this stage was No. 3.

Troop Leader	Lieutenant David Knox	Troop Sergeant	Lou Murphy
Troop Corporal	Osie Stafford	Driver Corporal	Wally Athorn
W/OP Corporal	Morgan Morgan	Driver Trooper	Stan Robinson
Driver Trooper	Jim Cousil	Gunner Trooper	Buster Tope
Gunner Trooper	Jim Monk	Gunner Trooper	Bill McGrath
Gunner Trooper	Tommy Arthur	Gunner Trooper	Terry Fergusen (Colonel's son)

- 15** Today we had a big parade. Strangely we were only in working dress but we did wear our Black Berets. The occasion was a visit by the British Minister of Foreign Affairs. Anthony Eden to welcome us to the Middle East. He was escorted by our 16th Commander Brigadier Tubby Allen.
- 16** We have been issued with more equipment. As Crew Commander I was issued with a .38 Webley Pistol. There doesn't seem too much chance of getting our Light Tanks and Bren Gun carriers for quite a while yet. It seems we will be getting utilities to train with instead.

Received some mail from Mum and Dad, Ruth, Win Stephens and Mrs Dale of Bridge Creek, Mansfield.

For training at present there are plenty of route marches around the country side. At last we have our first Bren Gun (Light Machine Gun) and are learning all about it. Much lighter and more efficient than the old Kotchess we had in the Light Horse.

The Arabs are allowed into the camp area for short periods during the day to sell their wares. They bring in donkeys laden with oranges. For 10 mills (about 2c) we can buy enough oranges for the whole tent. They are jaffa oranges, the best we have ever tasted. Because they are so cheap and so delicious the chaps are really hopping into them. The trouble is, with all this extra fibre, the "noise and smells" they cause are quite something! (Oh well, I guess that is one way we could win the war, should the ammunition not arrive!!) All we can do is to lift the sides of the tents and roll them back to let some

fresh air in. I am sure some of the boys have a competition going to see who can let the loudest one go.

- 28 The days have rolled by. A four day leave has been granted for a limited number of personnel to go to Jerusalem. I was lucky enough to win the draw for our Troop. We went by bus to Jerusalem and stayed in a good hotel.

We had guides to take us on conducted tours each day. We visited the Calvary in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and on to Bethlehem to the Church of Nativity where Christ was born.

Down the steps to the Grotto of Nativity were crosses carved in the stone by the Crusaders of the 12th Century. We visited the Wailing Wall where the Jews assemble to say their prayers as they have done for thousands of years.

Then it was off to the Great Mosque of Omar - the Arabs sacred Mosque. We roamed the streets of New and Old Jerusalem and bought some souvenirs with what limited money we had. My watch had packed up so I bought a new one from a Jew who assured me it was a very good watch in spite of the fact it was only in an old blue metal case. When he left Germany before the War started they weren't allowed to take out money or expensive jewellery. This was one way they beat the Germans, by getting good watches out of the country. I paid him about 3 pounds for it. It proved to be a wonderful watch and I had it for many years after the war.

We had a day down to the Dead Sea. It was too cold to go for a swim. From there we went on to the Old City of Jericho on the River Jordan.

We went to the pictures at night. We didn't think much of the local beer, in fact it was terrible. However the food was good at the hotel. The menu consisted of a spicy meat dish, possibly goat and fat tail sheep (to them a delicacy but certainly not to us!). In all we had a great four days. I had plenty to write about to the folks at home.

It was back to the parades, the drill and the route marches at Qastina.

March

- 3 Spring had started and the days were getting warmer. An Air Mail Service had started up and we were now getting mail in ten days or two weeks from home instead of several weeks. This was great and we didn't feel quite so isolated.

- 4 Today I caught up on some letter writing home. I wrote to Mum and Dad, Ruth and Win Stephens.

- 9 Visited the old battlefields around Beersheba. At this time we had received our first utility, a Ford V8. Now we could get some driving practice and move around a bit.

- 14 Received a letter from Mum dated 21/1/40. It must have been held up somewhere.

- 20 Went on night manoeuvre. Heavy rain set in and we got wet as shags so we returned to camp at 0400 hours.

Preparing for a night manoeuvre. Osie Lou and Sailor



21 More rain. Lay in camp all day.

22 – Good Friday –

Went on another trip to Beersheeba. Inspected Turkish defences of last war. Looked through Beersheeba War Cemetery. On the way home we stopped at the Gaza Cemetery. On arriving back at camp I found I was Corporal of the Guard. Because of those thieving "wogs" we had to have a strong guard around the camp every night. They would steal the eye out of a needle given the opportunity!



*Relaxing time for No. 3 Troop at Qastina Camp. Rear: Bill McGrath, Jim Monk, Terry Fergusson (with hat), Osie, Jim Cousil, Wally Athorn
Front: Morgan Morgan and Stan Robinson (writing)*

23 Mail day again. Received letters from Mum and Dad, my sisters, Ruth and Marj and cousin Joyce Petherbridge.

28 Went on a manoeuvre to Hebron which proved to be a very interesting trip across the Palestinian country side.

30 The weather is warming up. Went for our first swim in the Mediterranean Sea close by the old city of El Majah.

31 Went for another swim.

April

1 More swimming. At this time a picture theatre had been built, so we went there fairly often of an evening. It sure broke the monotony of drill, route marches and camp life.

We have been issued with two more vehicles, a Chev utility and a Morris 15 hundredweight utility. The Morris is a very strong and sturdy vehicle and used by the British Army. David Knox is in charge of the Ford, Lou is in charge of the Chev and I have the Morris. We have mounted machine guns on them. Out on the good roads David and Lou would leave me behind. I would say to my driver Jim Cousil, "Have you got the brakes on Jim?" We had lower gears on the Morris and would be flat out at 50 mph.



Going swimming. Lou, Robbie and Osie. The vehicles were 15 cwt Morris

Across country it was a different story though, the Morris was by far the best vehicle. This was especially true in sandy country as we were equipped with sand tyres and carried sand trays.

We often had to pull David and Lou out of sand bogs in some parts of the country.

Terry Fergusson and Bill McGrath are the other two members of my crew. There are many laughs had all round as we bounce over this hilly terrain.

- 2 Went out on a night manoeuvre tonight. Now that we have our vehicles we can move about the country more, learning all the time. The wireless set has been installed in Lieutenant Knox's vehicles so Morgan is in his element. Our troop could keep in contact with other troops and Squadron Head Quarters. At the start of a manoeuvre David would put us in the picture, then say to us, "Now you have to put on a good show boys!" Of course in those early days things often went wrong, especially at night. We would get lost or lose contact with the troop to the right or left of us. However, we are all learning fast the skills of driving, keeping the correct distance apart in convoy and weapon handling.



When we arrived back at camp, if we had done a good job on the manoeuvre, David would hand me 10 shillings or a quid and tell me to shout for the boys!

Terry Fergusson and Osie on top of a stone hut used as a wireless Outpost, Al Majdal on the coast of Palestine

- 3 Went for a swim. More weapon training, route marches and still trying to work out this Morse Code.

A Jewish village about fifteen miles from Qastina put on sports meeting for our Regiment today. The events were all athletics of course. The prizes were oranges! We already had more oranges than we could poke a stick at back at camp. However, these oranges were of a much poorer quality. Oranges were the main source of living for the Jews. They couldn't export them because of the War, so oranges lay everywhere on the ground under the trees rotting. A Jam Factory had been built to deal with all the surplus oranges. But, it didn't take long to get sick of the very sweet marmalade jam they served up to us for breakfast. We travelled to the meet in our troop vehicles to get practice in convoy driving. On the way home we would sneak up on the vehicle in front and pelt it with oranges. By the time we reached camp we had gotten rid of most of the oranges.



Good show Lou! A weapon pit in a good defensive position with a Bren gun mounted. Training days at Qastina, Palestine

- 7 The mail was coming in regularly now. I even received a packet of smokes from Ruth.
- 9 Went on a night manoeuvre. Arrived home in the early hours of the morning. Reveille was still at 0600 hours though! No sleep in.

- 10 Received two more packets of smokes from Ruth. Good old Ruth! I must write and tell her I can now get plenty of cigarettes from our canteen.
- 13 I have been appointed Corporal of the Guard. As Corporal of the Guard, I don't get much sleep as it is my job to change the Guard every 2 hours. The Guard do two hours on and four hours off, so they do get a fair sleep.
- 14 Caught up on some letter writing today. Wrote to Mum and Dad. It must be hard on them wondering where I am and if I'm safe. I hope these letters give them some peace of mind.
- 19 Received a letter by air mail from my brother Erwin dated 3 April.
- 21 Went to Deir Suneid Camp to take over Guard duties. Deir Suneid was a new camp just built for the 17th Brigade who were soon to arrive from Australia as part of the 6th Division.
Received letters from Mum and Marj and another packet of smokes from Ruth.
- 25 Wrote to Erwin.
- 28 Wrote to Marj. Returned to camp at Qastina.

May

- 2 Set off on three days manoeuvre - just our troop. Mr. Knox found out there was a horse race meeting at Beersheba, so that is where we were heading!
- 3 Just into the second day of our manoeuvre when a message came over our wireless, "return to camp immediately". Mr Knox was very annoyed. We imagined that Regimental Head Quarters had heard a whisper of our intentions. It probably saved us all a few shillings and a heavy head for some of the boys!
- 5 On my return there were papers from Mum and Marj, a parcel from Mrs Dale, and her sister, Miss Elsie Cameron (my last teacher at Bridge Creek School, ten years ago). Boy, how time flies.
- 6 Started a two week Bren Gun Carrier School at Julis. Julis was the next camp up the road from ours. A carrier was a tracked vehicle, open at the top with armour plate around the sides, front and rear. It was a tough course. The first few days was learning all about the mechanics and maintenance of the vehicle. Then began the driving and learning how to handle it under all conditions. The hardest part was changing down in the gears. It had a crash gear box which meant double de-clutching and having the correct number of rev's to engage a lower gear. After a few days we became experts at it. The Carrier was underpowered for cross country work especially in sand, even though it had a Ford V8 Mercury Motor. Most of our driving was cross country, so it meant a lot of gear changing.

We finished up the last couple of days driving in steep and rugged conditions, going into wadies (gullies) where at times the Carrier was almost standing on its nose! On the last day we received our results for the two week course. I was happy with a 78% pass as it was a little above average.
- 19 Back to camp at Qastina where I received more mail from the folks at home.
- 26 Although I had just completed a Carrier Course, by the looks of things in Europe it may be a long time before our troop is issued with any. The German Army is on the march and is pushing the British and French Armies back into France.

- 27 It now looks for certain that Italy will come into the War. Today we started digging Weapon Pits around the camp. In the near future we will be fighting from here for sure.
- 28 Wrote some letters.
- 29 The British Army is fighting for its life around Dunkirk. The main part of the French Army is retreating South and West. Grim news indeed. However life goes on just the same at Qastina. The morale of everyone is high. We carry on with our digging.



Osie at Qastina camp

The evacuation of the British Army and a small part of the French Army has commenced from Dunkirk. (The evacuation went on until the 4th June and a total of 338,000 troops were taken off the beaches and the harbour and returned to England. Crafts of all shapes and sizes were used mostly at night, organised by the great British Navy. All their equipment is lost. However, with the might of the Navy to stop the Germans from crossing the Channel, in time they will build up the equipment again).

June

- 6 Shifted camp to L.4. section within the camp - this was just across the road a couple of hundred yards. We also dug the floor of our tents down about 18 inches to protect us if there was any air raids. We also plastered our white tents with black mud to camouflage them from the air.
- 10 Italy declares war on Britain.
- 14 Training goes on - Corporal of the Guard tonight. The Picture Theatre is well patronised with some good shows on at times.
- 23 More mail from Elsie. Ruth & Winnie.
- 24 Orderly Corporal - this is an easy job. Being in attendance at Squadron Head Quarter all day to do any messages or small jobs the Squadron Officer Commanding or Squadron Sergeant Major may want done.

July

- 4 More mail from Dad and Ruth by air mail. I hope they realise back home just how much I appreciate all this mail that keeps arriving.
- Training goes on - weapon usage, driving skills, wireless operation and maintenance. Not much change in the war news. We have been issued with a Boves Anti Tank Rifle. It is .50 calibre with an armour piercing bullet. Won't be any good against big tanks, however it will be of some use. We have been to the Rifle Range and tried it out.
- 21 Corporal of the Guard again today. Not much happening.
 - 27 Orderly Corporal today. Wrote some letters to Elsie, Mum and Dad and Win.

August

- 2 Wrote letters to Marj and Mrs Dale

- 5** Started a four day wireless course today - learning all about procedure and practicing Morse Code. I can manage about six words a minute. I am not breaking any records but keeping up with most of the other chaps.
- 9** Received letters from Marj and Ruth airmail, also The Weekly Times from Ruth. Finished wireless course.
- 10** Received two more Weekly Times from Ruth and the Australian Journal from Marj, these of course came by boat and have taken over two months to get here. Australia seems so far away and its hard to digest the local news. It seems far removed from what's happening here, but I am certainly grateful to my wonderful family for keeping me in touch with all their letters and the papers.
- 18** Received a nice long letter from Winnie by air mail.
- 19** Wrote letters to Ruth and Win. Doing maintenance on vehicles and there is talk of yet another manoeuvre.
- 21** The complete Regiment has started a weeks manoeuvre.
- 24** Manoeuvre cut short, returned to camp. Rumour has it, that there is a big move on somewhere. Time will tell. More mail when we got back to camp.
- 25** Wrote to Winnie. Latest rumour has it that we are going to Egypt next week.
- 28** Red Letter Day for me! Received seven letters all dated May - three months to get here. At present the "Ities" (as we call them) have got the Red Sea bottled up so ships are coming the long way around.
- 29** Moving to Egypt on 1st September.

September

- 1** Left Qastina by road for Egypt at 1300 hours and arrived at Asley 1500 hours, a distance of sixty five miles. It was a little sad to be leaving our very comfortable camp at Qastina. Tough times are ahead I am sure. Asley is a Police Post on the edge of the Sinai Desert. Camped in the sand beside our vehicles. The cook house was set up and we got a hot meal of bully beef stew!
- 2** Left Asley at 0630 hours. Arrived at the Frontier, El-Arya at 0830 hours. Arrived Ishamalia on the Suez Canal at 1700 hours. A beautiful tree lined town with the desert all around it.
- 3** Left Ishmalia early and travelled along the sweet water Canal to Cairo. A very interesting trip. Some irrigation from the Canal which comes from the Nile. Travelled around the outskirts of Cairo to Helwan, a big Military Camp about twenty miles from Cairo. No tents for us, so we camp out under the stars. We will be doing plenty of this in the future I guess.
- 4** Nothing much doing today, waiting for our tents to arrive. In the distance we can see the River Nile and beyond that the Pyramids.
- 5** Putting up our tents and getting settled in. It is much hotter here and when the wind blows, its very dusty.
- 7** Went on leave for the day to Cairo with Robbie and Jim Cousil. We went out to the Pyramids. Very interesting. Didn't think much of the City of Cairo. Too crowded, and too many of those dirty "Wogs"

around begging for money - or "you want play with my sister!" Robbie was a bit interested in that, but not Jim or I so we soon talked him out of it.

Parts of Cairo were very interesting. On the Street of Gold and the Street of Silver, you can watch the tradesman at work making all sorts of ornaments and jewellery. Then there is the Street of Carpets where the carpets are all hand woven. I have never seen such beautiful work. I can't help thinking how the girls back home would love it. Then of course the Street of Ill Repute, better known as The Wazi, a street where every man's needs could be satisfied and where many a good brawl occurred. We looked but we did not buy! Very dirty and very smelly. Back to camp in the evening on the fast electric train service that runs between Helwan and Cairo.

- 10** Received a letter from Mum and Dad dated 29 Aug.
- 12** Wrote more letters.
- 14** Went on leave with Robbie to Cairo, had a good day. Jim sends most of his pay home to his wife, so hasn't much to spare for outings.
- 15** Wrote to Ruth. Received two more Weekly Times.
- 18** Received a parcel from Miss Cameron that had been sent in April. Must have been on a slow boat to China! It was mostly tinned stuff so was all right and very much appreciated
- 29** Over the last eleven days we have been doing lots of training out in the desert. Some of it at night on compass bearings and by the stars.

We have lost four members of this troop. Terry Fergusson, the Colonel's son went off to O.C.T.U. (Officers Cadet Training Unit) - a six month course. I will miss Terry, he was a fine member of my crew. Tommy Arthur went off to Regimental Head Quarters Squadron as a boot repairer. That was his trade before joining up. David Knox's driver, Corporal Wally Athorn and also Trooper Bill McGrath have also left the troop.

Replacements for these chaps were Corporal Bill Holmes from A Squadron as driver for Mr Knox. Two reinforcements in Max Hubbard and Joe Law. Max became my gunner taking Terry's place. Joe went into Lou Murphy's crew.

October

- 2** Received quite a few letters over the last few days from Winnie, Ruth, Elsie and Joyce.
- 5** Received a parcel from Mrs Hemsley. I managed to get a note off to thank her.
- 6** Went out on Divisional Exercise today which was a very big affair. In fact it's the first time we have all been together. "We" being (B & C Squadrons). We still only have our utilities and Morris pick ups. A Squadron, the lucky ones, have been issued with Bren Gun Carriers. Goodness knows how long we will have to wait for ours.

The Division Exercise lasted three days. It was an imposing sight spread out over miles of desert. Lucky the wind wasn't blowing so the dust was not too bad.

- 9 Back to camp at Helwan. More letters from Jack Stephens and Jack Adams. They, along with several other Mansfield boys have joined the 9th Division Cavalry Regiment. May catch up with them over here one of these days.
- 10 Caught up with some letter writing to Mum and Dad, Ruth, Winnie, Jack Stephens, Jack Adams and Miss Cameron.
- 14 Sent a parcel of dress material to Elsie and Ruth.
- 20 Rumours have been going around for the last week that we will be moving closer to the front. However I think it will be a while yet, probably not until we get our full equipment.
- 25 I was wrong, we are off to Alexandria tomorrow. Received a letter from Ruth.
- 26 Left Helwan at 0215 hours and arrived at our new camp at 1530 hours. Armiriya is the name, a very dusty camp with limited water. It is, situated twenty five miles west of Alexandria, the start of the Western Desert.
- 27 Digging slit trenches all day. The "Ities" come over most nights to bomb Alexandria. Their target is the Harbour which is the main base for the British Fleet and several Australian Navy ships. They fly at maximum height. They are not noted for their accuracy. So far they have managed to hit the Harbour on just a couple of occasions. They have also managed to hit the desert or the Mediterranean which is twenty to thirty miles away from the main target! Hence our precaution to dig slit trenches in which we take shelter when the Air Raid Siren sounds. We are then treated to fireworks and search light display from the Ach-Ach on ships and ground positions in and around Alexandria. This display is really magnificent. The search lights sometimes catch a plane in its light and we can see it like a tiny moth in the sky.



*Our Regimental Medical Officer, Captain James (with towel)
and Brian Mole (sitting on petrol tin), Western Desert, Libya, 1941*

November

- 3 It is one year today since I joined up. How time flies. A lot has happened but I haven't been in any of it yet. Not that I am desperate to get in a fight but I did join up to do my share and I'm not good at this sitting and waiting.
- 4 My birthday. I certainly won't have happy memories remembering today. We spent most of the day out in the desert on Regiment manoeuvre. On the way back to camp, the carrier, of which Sergeant Jack McBean was in charge, overturned. No one is quite sure just how it happened but Jack was pinned underneath and killed. This was a sad day for us all. Jack was a very popular Serjeant in our Squadron. He was buried in Alexandria next day.

- 5** Received a letter from Mum and Dad, and a birthday parcel from Marj. What would I do without them!
- 11** A little rain - a rare event in this part of the world. Nothing much doing the last few days except an air raid every night. We have come to expect them now, so running for the trenches is no big deal. More mail including another letter from Jack Stephens.
- 13** Orderly Corporal duty today.
- 14** Another air raid, that makes it one every night for a week.
- 16** Went on day leave to Alexandria. There is no night leave, on account of the air raids. Did some shopping for the troop tucker boxes. We could be going up to the frontline any time now. As we have a vehicle to three men, we find room to put a few extras in the way of tinned food. Alexandria is such a smelly dirty place. The air raids of course are not helping it. Managed to buy some tinned goods at the Army and Navy canteen, - tinned sausages, fruit and cheese.
- 17** Received a letter from Dad and one from Alison Powell. I did not know Alison existed until I received this letter. It appears she is a second cousin of mine, she got my army address from my sister Elsie as she lives in Burwood not far from Elsie.
- 19** Wrote to Alison and Ruth.
- 21** Went on Division exercise, very dusty - out for two days.
- 23** Arrived back in Camp.
- 25** Received a Canteen order for five shillings from Mansfield. That will help to put a few more goodies in the old "Tucker Box".
- 27** Went on a long route march - camped out. It rained on the way back to camp and we got very wet.
- 29** Orderly Corporal duty today - caught up on some letter writing to Mum and Dad, Elsie, Ruth and Win.
- 30** Wrote to Alison. Packing up to go to Siwa.

December

- 2** We left yesterday and our journey so far has taken us three hundred and sixty miles across the desert. It has been a slow trip, very rough in places.
- 3** Reached Siwa in the afternoon. A really marvellous place. Siwa is one hundred and seventy miles inland and on the edge of the Great Sand Sea. It is in a depression, some seventy five feet below sea level. It is called the "Qattara Depression". It is a beautiful oasis in the middle of the desert.



Quatermaster's Store at Siwa, Egypt

It has a green area of six miles by four miles where warm spring water bubbles up from under ground. This water irrigates date palms, olives and various other crops. The last recorded rain was in 1929. It was in one of these springs that Cleopatra was supposed to have bathed a few thousand years ago. It was in these same springs that we of B Squadron of the 6 Division Cavalry Regiment most certainly did

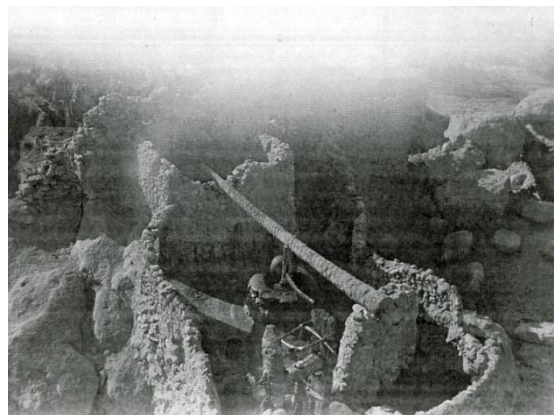
bathe on the 3rd December 1940 after a dusty crossing of the Western Desert. It was a day we would always remember; our taste of paradise in the Garden of Eden

4-5 Settling into this lovely place. We had better make the most of it because I am sure we won't be here for long.

We had a look around the Arab villages which are mostly made of mud and straw. The last heavy rain was last century when some of the huts just about washed away. We were shown some with scars from that last big rain.

We rigged up shelters for ourselves using the large palm leaves, then we went out on short patrols.

5-9 Received an early Christmas parcel from Mum, Dad and Marj. What a pleasant surprise to find a tinned pudding, tinned ham, Mum's fruit cake, some sweets and cigarettes.



Ruins of mud huts at Siwa

Doing more short patrols and fixing defence positions in case they should be necessary. We are going out regularly on patrol to feel out the enemy's strength in the various out posts they hold just over the border in Libya.

Eighty miles to the north west and across the border of Egypt and Libya is a fort held by the "Dagoes" called "Giarbub" (spelt on some maps as Jaghbub). It also was in a depression 30 ft below sea level. It had springs but not sufficient for irrigation. There was also a very beautiful Mosque which was very sacred to the Senussi Arabs. The fort was well defended by "Ities" with close to two thousand troops. They were well dug in with plenty of gun emplacements. They had sufficient water but everything else had to come overland from their main forward base at Bardia on the Coast. They had a few defendable outposts on their supply route between Bardia and Giarabub. One of these outposts was Garn about forty miles north west of Giarabub.

11 Great excitement in the camp. We are to make a raid on the outpost of Garn. This will be our first bit of "real action". The plan is to go out on patrol, expose ourselves to the enemy, draw their fire, and immediately retire to a safe position. In this way we would be able to roughly estimate the enemies strength by the amount of small arms fire and artillery used against us. This information would then be communicated to Regimental Headquarters where plans were prepared for further action.

We left Siwa at 2230 hours in bright moonlight. (One of the jobs we did after arriving at Siwa was to remove all the windscreens from our vehicles. This was to stop any reflections from the sun giving away our position in the daytime). Now we were following a rough and dusty track without lights or windscreens. The dust poured in along with the freezing cold wind. The desert sure is a very cold place at night in the middle of winter.

The moon set in the small hours of the morning. We had no option but to stop and wait until dawn. We moved on and crossed the barbed wire which marked the border. Soon after, we sighted Garn in the distance.

It appeared to be a very big building protected by a barbed wire entanglement. We took some cover in a wadi (small dry creek) about a mile from the fort to observe and see what was going on. At about 1000 hours, our troop was ordered forward to open fire on the fort. This we did and were supported by the Vickers guns of Mick Hurrev's troop. Before we had advanced very far we came under very heavy fire from machine guns and shells. We had no option but to retire back to the protection of the wadi. Soon after this, an "Itie" fighter plane attacked us. Of course we fired everything we had at it. Our only casualty was my very good friend Buster Tope who was in Lou Murphy's vehicle. Buster was hit in the buttocks and groin by bullets and shell fragments. He was the first Australian Imperial Forces soldier wounded in the Middle East.

Buster was evacuated to hospital, it must have been an agonising trip for him over the rough tracks, before reaching Mersa Mertruh. Thankfully he recovered from his wounds and returned to the Regiment. He went to Head Quarters Squadron and was promoted to Serjeant and became armourer for the Regiment. His knowledge of guns and rifles was impressive and he would be well utilised in this area.

The Squadron did some more reconnaissance around the post, then headed back to Siwa.

13 Recovering from the excitement of our first bit of action. It wasn't much and we realise there will be plenty more up ahead. It is just a year today since I said goodbye to the folks at home. It might be a few years yet before I see them again. There is nothing certain in War time!

14-15 Doing maintenance on our vehicles. The desert is very hard on them.

16 Our Intelligence Section were intercepting messages sent by the "Ities" to their out lying forts. The clever fellows had actually broken their code. They learnt that a convoy was leaving Garn to go to Fort Maddalena in the afternoon of the 16th. Our Squadron left Siwa at 1130 hours and drove 120 miles to the border, arriving at 1730 hours. First we cut the wire that marked the boundary between Libya and Egypt and then positioned our vehicles so as to set up the best possible ambush before dark set in. At 1930 hours we heard the convoy coming. They stopped at the cut wire and we opened up on them with everything we had. They replied with machine gun fire but of course they didn't know our range. We knew theirs to the very yard so we played havoc and panic with that convoy.

We set fire to two trucks, two more were abandoned.

The remainder of the convoy took off. A very light flare went up which we knew was the signal for us to re-group, then we took off back to Siwa. The two abandoned vehicles were later recovered by some of our chaps; a small reminder and bonus of our ambush.

Eddie Clugston knew quite a bit about diesel engines. He got them started alright and they were driven back to Siwa. They were good trucks and were used by our Regiment for the remainder of the time we were in the Middle East. There were quite a few bullet holes in them, but none that did any harm.

The trip back to Siwa was rough and freezing cold. We arrived in the early hours of the morning and managed to get some sleep before getting up to service our vehicles and weapons.

17 We had no sooner finished our servicing when the order came we had to go out again. Word had come that the "Dagoes" intended to evacuate Maddalena to Giarabub. We set off at 1330 hours and again set up an ambush and this time laid mines along the track.

We put in a freezing night waiting but no convoy came along. We stopped there for two more days and nights until we learnt that the "Dagoes" had indeed evacuated Maddalena but had moved out far west of the wire and track before heading for Giarabub.

We were ordered to return to Siwa.

20 Arrived back at camp at 0100 hours this morning, very cold and tired, in fact the coldest I have ever experienced. Going out on these night raids we put on all the clothes we can. We have just been issued with sleeveless leather jerkins. These fit over our great coats and are a big help. I never thought I'd see the day when I would wear long underpants, - "Jim Jifferies" as we call them. They sure keep the legs warm though.

21 Mail day. Five wonderful newsy letters. One each from Ruth, Mum, Marj, Win and Alison.

22 Caught up on maintenance and some well overdue sleep.

23 Have to go out in the desert for an indefinite period. We have with us, a troop of "Tommies" from the 3rd Royal Horse Artillery with four Bofors Guns. They will be a big help. We are making a reconnaissance around Giarabub. It looks like we will be out there for several days.

24 Doing lots of patrolling around the desert. The "Dagoes" have dug in lots of defences for their artillery and machine guns well out from the Fort itself. We have been seeking out these positions and in the process, copping plenty of fire. However, we are a moving target and thankfully the "Dagoes" are lousy shots!

My crew are doing all right. Jim Cousin, my driver, is doing a good job. He gets a bit toey when the shells or bullets are flying around, but then he hasn't got that on his own. Anyone who say's he is not afraid when the bullets are flying around is a liar. Support for one another is what it is all about and I always try to support my crew. In doing so, I think it helps me to forget the bullet that might be coming my way.

All this patrolling has to be done during daylight. Before dark we would retire back a bit and join the rest of the Squadron, take up defensive positions and post guards. By doing this we could get a reasonable amount of sleep and keep warm with the blanket we were able to carry.

25 Christmas Day - My thoughts go back to twelve months ago and the great Christmas day I had with my Uncle and Auntie at Artarmon, Sydney. Well I am sure it won't be much of a day today. It's out on patrol again. We did have a little from our hampers left, so it wasn't all bully beef and biscuits for Christmas dinner. I wonder what the family are having for Christmas lunch back home and who might be gathered around the kitchen table.

We were shelled quite a lot in the afternoon. Some "Itie" bombers came over. They were too high to think about firing at them. It simply would have been a waste of ammo. They dropped their bombs, but they landed much closer to their own troops than to us. We sure get a few laughs out of them!

On the evening of Christmas Day as we were withdrawing, one of our troops made an attack on an enemy gun position. The Troop Serjeant Ken Walsh, was wounded and taken prisoner. (We learnt some time later he was flown out and taken to Rome)

26 More patrolling. The going is tough, with water in short supply, as it all has to come from Siwa. We are all growing beards as washing is out of the question. Its quite strange to look around you and see all

these scruffy faces and watch as some men grow beards overnight and others just produce a little fluff on their faces! I suppose its just another form of camouflage.

Our main rations are bully beef and biscuits. We do have a few extras in the tucker box, but it is fast running out.

We have a primus stove and tea and sugar so we can make our "cuppa" when time permits.. On occasions we get caught just before the Billy boils. We light the primus and then get the order to move on, or worse, we get the tea made and have to move on. Then I have to do a balancing act with a Billy of hot tea while Jim tries to miss the stones and holes and keep up with our Troop Leader David Knox. If the going gets too rough I have to dice it over the side, but this is always a last resort. I can't hand it over the back to our gunner Max Hubbard as he has hardly any room to move with a machine gun to look after. However I should say that most times we get our cuppa. David Knox and Lou Murphy our Serjeant are great chaps. They like their cuppa just as much as me.

28 We keep patrolling around the Fort. We are sure the enemy thinks we are a much bigger force than we actually are. They are not game to come out from their defensive positions. We now have C Squadron with us so we are a force of about two hundred in number. The "Dagoes" would out number us by at least eight to one.

31 Over the last few days nothing much has happened except patrol and more patrol. However, things really happened today. Our Intelligence Section from Head Quarters wanted to move in as close as possible to the Fort to take photographs. B Squadron had to protect them. Of course the enemy artillery opened up as soon as they saw us and for once they were on target. Corporal Con Reidel and Trooper Fuller of the Intelligence Section had just moved forward with their cameras. Trooper Fuller was killed and Con Reidel was wounded with shrapnel splinters. Trooper Marchant from one of the other Troops went in under fire and carried Fuller out.

(At a later date he received the Military Medal for this brave action).



We really stirred up a hornet's nest just over a few photos. Later in the afternoon we were engaged in more hot action and again the artillery had our range. They certainly have had plenty of practice over the last week. A vehicle belonging to a Troop Leader in C Squadron was hit and the wireless operator Corporal Rex Walton was wounded and badly burned. (He eventually recovered from his wounds but was evacuated back to Australia). Two other trucks of B Squadron were hit and Corporal Trounce of Squadron Head Quarters was killed. It was a tough and sad day for us all.

An Arab ploughing with a crude plough and team as they have done for past centuries.



Arab women bringing in the sheaves



Bedouin Arabs on the fringe of the desert

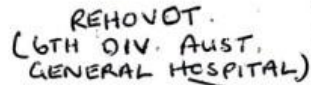


An Arab shepherd boy minding the sheep



A crude method of thrashing corn

LIBYA : EGYPT



1941

January

- 1** B Squadron has returned to Siwa for a spell. We certainly need it after nine days of continuous patrolling out there. It was great to have a warm bath in the crystal clear springs and a general clean up. Our meal tonight never tasted so good, probably because it wasn't covered in desert dust. C Squadron is still out there keeping a watch on the Fort.

Received a letter from Dad and Winnie. Wrote several letters. Have done lots of maintenance on our vehicles. The desert is very hard on them, especially the springs. The Light Aid Detachment has been flat out replacing springs for us.

Five days have sped away and tomorrow we must go out again to Giarabub to relieve C Squadron.

- 6** We set off about 0900 hours. We had with us a troop from the 8 Field Regiment Royal Artillery with four 25 pounders (an artillery weapon with a barrel of three and a half inches in diameter, it could project a 25 pound shell a distance of ten to twelve miles). They will be a great help out there over the next two weeks when patrolling and harassing the enemy. A lot of the time, we were attached to the Artillery as protection for them. Their leader was Captain O'Grady and we were very honoured to be their escort. He soon earned for himself the nick name of "One shot O'Grady".

At this stage we had cut off all supplies from coming into the Fort over land. There was an aerodrome at the Fort, so planes could still come in to supply them. From the top of the escapement we could look down on the Fort and the aerodrome. This spot was the Captain's observation post. One day when we were with him a plane came into land. As soon as it stopped he signalled his guns (which were in safe positions well back), to fire one ranging shot so as to work out the exact range. That one shot hit the plane and damaged it. Hence O'Grady's nick name! Three days later they had the plane repaired and ready to take off. This time he sent over a salvo (all guns firing until ordered to cease fire) from the four guns and hit the plane again, this time, setting it on fire! They never landed any plane there again. They flew over and dropped the supplies by parachute.

- 18** Haven't received any mail for two weeks. Still patrolling and protecting the troop of Artillery. While we have been here the last few weeks, the "big push" on the coast has been taking place.

The 6th Division along with British Troops and New Zealanders and our A Squadron attached to 6 Division have made a name for themselves in taking Bardia and capturing thousands of prisoners and equipment. Now they are well on their way to Tobruk. We are stuck down here in the desert and missing out on all the glory. However, with Bardia fallen and Tobruk about to, the Fort here may surrender, then we can catch up with the Divy

- 25** Another week has gone by. Tobruk has fallen. No sign of surrender from the Fort. We have learnt that the Officer in Command at the Fort, Colonel Costiana is determined not to surrender.

He has built up the morale of his troops. It looks like we will be here for sometime yet. We are still patrolling around and protecting Captain O'Grady and his guns. He is always charging around firing a shot here and there. This is to deceive-the enemy that we have a large force of artillery. (We learnt later on that they believed that to be so.) If only we had a whole army of O'Grady's the war would be over in no time and we could all get home and get on with our lives!!

Things have improved as far as our tucker goes. The cook house has been set up at Melfa about twenty five miles from here. They bring us out a hot meal every evening. It is well appreciated. Cooking on a primus for three is a bit difficult. Lighting kerosene is hard to come by, so we run our primus on petrol. It is a bit tricky at times. Running on petrol the primus built up incredibly more pressure than it would on kerosene. Unless this pressure was released from time to time the primus would explode.

Another small comfort we are getting is a ration of rum every night. This is to help combat the very cold nights. The rum issue has always been a tradition of the Navy when at sea on active service. This was a first for the Army. When the weather warmed up it was discontinued. We never saw any more rum for the rest of the war.

- 28** Still harassing the enemy. It seems we won't get any peace until we take the place. No hope of that for sometime yet, at least until the push up the coast is completed and we can get an Infantry Battalion to help us.

Received ten letters from home over the past two weeks. The Postman is doing a great job in getting the mail out to us here. I had letters from Mum and Dad, Ruth, Elsie, Marj, brother Erwin and wife Stella, Winnie and Joan Stephens, Alison and Hughie Craig. Also two parcels from Ruth and from the Bridge Creek people. To them all, I say a very big thank-you. It is great support I am getting from my family and friends. They are wonderful.

- 31** Back to Siwa - our troop is going on five days leave to Alexandria - the powers that be, have decided that there is no danger of the enemy breaking out of Giarabub, so a troop at a time will have some leave. We are the lucky ones to be first.

February

- 1** Having a good wash-up, getting our clothes clean. We have been issued with some new ones from the Q Store. Can't have the troop going on leave looking scruffy!
- 2** Set off for Mersa Matruh in a three tonner. Stayed there the night.
- 3** Caught the train and arrived in Alexandria in the afternoon.
- 8** Having a terrific time in Alexandria. David Knox was in the Officers Club. We didn't see much of him. The rest of us were in a Hotel set up especially for troops on leave. There was Serjeant Lou Murphy, Corporal Bill Holmes, Corporal Morgan Morgan, Troopers Stan Robinson, Joe Law, Max Hubbard, Jim Cousill, and myself (Corporal).

Alexandria wasn't as good of course as Cairo for leave, but we sure didn't complain. I did manage to catch up on some letter writing. Alexandria did not seem to be badly damaged from the bombing. There were no raids when we were there.

The "Ities" have been pushed way back along the coast. Of course we did quite a bit of drinking on our leave, at least most of the troop did, in fact some of them never stopped. By the time our leave was up they were broke. Who could blame them, it's pretty rough up there and we will soon be back there again.

- 9** Back to Mersa Matruh.
- 10** The long dusty track back to Siwa.

- 12** Back to Giarabub - no change in the situation except two hundred "Wogs" Arab soldiers) have deserted. This looks promising.
- 14** More "Wogs" deserting. We believe now they have been kicked out by the "Dagoes" to make the rations go further.
- 17** All the "Wogs" have now left the Fort, about six hundred in all. We are going to have a shoot up at the Fort this afternoon.
- Captain O'Grady's guns fired two hundred shells into the Fort in the hope they would surrender. No go, their artillery retaliated strongly.
- 18** Nothing doing today. Mail came in this evening. Letters from Mum and Dad, Elsie, Alison and a Postal Note from Mansfield Comforts Fund. This mail has taken over six weeks to arrive where as the last mail only two weeks.
- 19** Wrote to Mum and Dad and Marj.
- 20** Went out for another attack on the Fort. We are going to keep up close for a few days.
- 21** Still in position with our artillery blazing away. The "Dagoes" send over a few shells in reply every now and then.
- 22** Still the same. My pal Jim is starting to feel the strain.
- 23** Still in the same position. These damn "Dagoes" don't seem as if they are going to surrender.
- 24** The same.
- 25** We are moving back a few miles. It seems we will have to hang around and starve them out.
- 26** Having a good spell - no shells to worry about. Received a letter from Ruth. She sure keeps the letters coming, good old Ruth.
- 27** Wrote to Alison, Ruth and Win.
- 28** We were to have gone out today for another four day shoot at the Fort, but a dust storm prevented it.

March

- 1** Still blowing, very dusty, but we are going out on a patrol around the Fort.
- 2** Hurling over the shells and getting a few back!
- 3** Still the same - those Gunners of Captain O'Grady's are sure getting plenty to do.
- 4** Returned back to our camp spot with the Fort still holding out.
- 5** Nothing doing.
- 6** Going out for another reconnaissance of the Fort. Got very close in. We now know every gun emplacement and weapon pit around the Fort.
- 7** On out-post duty to the south of the Fort for four days. Very rough going down in this area.

- 11** Back in Camp. While we were away, they had moved the camp area up closer to the Fort. The cook house has been moved here too, which is a good thing. One piece of bad news was our Commanding Officer Colonel Ferguson was badly wounded on March 9. He was eventually evacuated back to Australia where he fully recovered. However he never returned to the Regiment. He was promoted to Brigadier and Commander of the 8th Infantry Brigade in New Guinea. Major Morrison was our new Commanding Officer.
- 14** Our job today was to go to the Air Strip and escort a Brigadier Wootten of the 18th Infantry Brigade on an observation tour of Giarabub. The purpose of his visit was to work out a way to attack the Fort with his Infantry, who were already on the way. His force would consist of the 2/9 Battalion, one Company, a Mortar Platoon of the 2/10 Battalion and a Battery of 12 (25 pounder) guns from the 4th Royal Horse Artillery. A Machine Gun Platoon from 2/12 and the 13th Light Field Ambulance were also among the force.
- My first impression of the Brigadier was of a big man with an imposing presence, but as I write up my diary, and recall today in my mind, my greatest recollection of Brigadier Wootten will always remain, his big white "bum" shining in the desert sunlight! The poor man must have had a touch of the diarrhoea, because we spent the entire tour stopping for him to disappear into the sandhills. Should the enemy be watching they would be intrigued, and no doubt a little mystified, to understand our tactics!
- 16** Out we go on another reconnaissance to see if we can find a track across the salt marsh to the east and south of the Fort that would carry the heavy trucks and guns of the Artillery. A sand storm was blowing which made things very difficult. However we did find a track of sorts and it was decided the main attack to the Fort would be made from the south. The "Dagoes" had most of their defence in the north.
- 17** The Squadron moved out in the early hours of the morning with just enough moonlight to illuminate the way. We moved along the track we had found the day before. It was our intention to test their defences to the south a little after daylight. We saw two trucks with troops on board approaching. We opened fire on them and they soon surrendered. We took fifteen prisoners including two officers. There were two killed and three wounded. Later we attacked an out-post but had to retire when we came under heavy shell fire. Later in the afternoon we were ordered back to base.
- 18** A day of rest today before the battle.
- 19** At about midday we set off with the Artillery and the Infantry in trucks along the track we had found across the salt marsh to the south of the Fort. Some trucks bogged in the sand. Manpower was used to push them out. Also, some of the 25 pounder guns became bogged. Eventually though they all got through and took up their respective positions. B Squadron's job at this stage was to protect the Artillery. C Squadron was on the North escarpment. At 1530 hours the Artillery started ranging on the various defensive positions around the Fort. As I write this the wind is blowing and it is very dusty.
- 20** Today the Artillery have really opened up, assisted by the Mortars. This is to soften them up for the Infantry who will attack tomorrow. There is a strong wind coming from the south east and it is still dusty. We have taken up defensive positions and camped for the night.
- 21** At 0515 hours the Artillery opened up with a heavy barrage. The wind is still very strong but coming from the opposite direction to yesterday. The Artillery did not allow enough range for this wind and some of the early shells fell amongst our waiting Infantry. Twelve men were killed and twenty wounded. This was a sad blow to the Battalion. When the barrage lifted, the Infantry advanced. By this time a

dust storm had developed making things very unpleasant for everyone. However it did provide some cover for the Infantry as they kept advancing. They used grenades in the weapon pits and lots of "Dagoes" were surrendering.

Later in the morning B Squadron were moved forward and given the job of taking the aerodrome which we accomplished by midday. We captured several guns and thirty six prisoners. The "Itie" flag was hauled down at 1300 hours. The battle was over. There were two hundred and fifty enemy dead, a lot wounded and over five hundred taken prisoner. Seventeen Australians were killed and seventy seven wounded. Included in this number were the casualties from the British guns as well.

In the afternoon we moved into the Fort area. The dust storm was still blowing. We found water and washed grime and dirt from places that had not seen water for a good few days. We also found a large empty tent still standing and agreed that this would do us for the night. The cook house brought us a hot meal in spite of the sand storm and for this we were most grateful. After three months our job here is finally finished.

- 22** The wind has stopped. The day is fine and clear. We salvaged the enemy's equipment all day. We heard that the Rome News Broadcast reported that Giarabub held out until the last round of ammunition. We found thousands of shells for their artillery and hundreds of thousands of rounds for their small arms. They could have held out for months!
- 23** Still salvaging, sorting it all out and stacking it up. The Infantry and Artillery have all gone back to the Coast.
- 24** Same routine today as yesterday.
- 25** Just hanging around getting impatient to get away from this place. The work is all completed.
- 26** Returned to Siwa. Great to get back to some real comforts and wash away the dust of the desert.
- 27** Maintenance.
- 28** Having a well earned rest. We are setting off tomorrow for the long journey back to Amiriya. I am sure we won't see this place again.
- 29** Arrived Mersa Matruh and camped the night.
- 30** Arrived Amiriya after a good trip. Received three letters the first for over two weeks. As usual they are from my loyal family Mum and Dad, Ruth and Alison.
- 31** We are going to Helwan tomorrow.

April

- 1** Arrived Helwan and set up tents. Good to get back to the comforts of camp life for a while, especially the hot showers. I don't think it will last long though. The 6th Division has gone to Greece. We would have been with them had we finished a little earlier at Giarabub. The 9th Division have taken over in the desert. The Germans have already landed in North Africa and are advancing on Benghazi.
- 4** Most of the Squadron have gone on leave. Our troop had five days back in February. February seems like a lifetime ago.

- 5** Wrote some letters. Had a few hours leave in the evening in Cairo with Stan and Jim.
- 6** Received letters from Ruth, Winnie and Elsie.
- 7** Wrote more letters, nothing else doing.
- 8** Anybody who could drive a truck was rounded up this morning. Twenty of us have to go to Tel-a-Habia on the south east end of the Canal to pick up twenty new three tonne trucks (Chew and Fords) and take them to Amiriya. From there they will be picked up and loaded at Alexandria for the 6 Division in Greece.
- 9** Arrived at Tel-a-Habia about mid morning after a very pleasant drive along the fresh water canal from Cairo. The rest of the day we spent servicing the trucks and familiarising ourselves with them.
- 10** We set off with the trucks at 0700 hours. The leader of the Convoy, driving a Ford utility was Lieutenant "Barley" Wray (a new Officer). There were no instructions as to what the speed of the Convoy should be. We soon found out! We were doing 50 miles per hour trying to keep up to the vehicle in front. This was a ridiculous speed for a convoy and these were new trucks and not to be driven over 35 mph for the first 1000 miles.

We had to go through Cairo to get to Alexandria. There the fun began! We certainly had to slow down, but not much. We were trying to dodge "Wogs", donkeys, camels, trams and people. It was quite a hair raising experience. I had many near misses. I don't know how, but we eventually got through Cairo without mishap. Then it was back to flat out speed again. A staff car passed me and eventually made it to the front. The convoy came to an immediate halt!

We heard later from Lieutenant Wray's driver, that it was a Colonel in the staff car and he gave "Barley" Wray quite a blast! For the rest of the trip we did a very sedate 30 mph.

Arrived at Amiriya near Alexandria in the mid afternoon and handed over the trucks. They were later shipped across to Greece. (These trucks were to be captured by the Germans a few weeks later so any harm we did them didn't really matter).

In the evening we travelled back to Helwan by train.

- 11** Nothing doing today except getting settled into our new organisation. When we receive our new equipment of tanks and carriers there will be six troops instead of the present five. There will be two troops of light tanks and four of carriers. My troop is No. 5 Troop. Mr "Hec" Brain is our new troop leader. Lou and I are still Troop Serjeant and Troop Corporal. David Knox, along with Stan Robinson as his driver, have gone to No. 2 Tank Troop.
- 12** We have just been told to pack up, we are going up to the front again. The "Hun" is pushing fast along the coast of North Africa. The 9th Division is well dug in at Tobruk and holding the enemy back there, but it looks as if they will by-pass Tobruk and come on towards Mersa Matruh. The 7th Division Cavalry Regiment are camped beside us at Helwan and are fully equipped with tanks and carriers. A lot of their troops are on leave.
- Much to their disgust we are ordered to take their equipment and en-train for Mersa Matruh. We are to be attached to the British 7th Armoured Brigade.
- 13** Left Helwan by train bound for Mersa Matruh.
- 14** Arrived Mersa after a very tiresome journey.

- 15** Have dug into our positions of defence not far out of Mersa Matruh. It is very cool here, a breeze is blowing off the sea all the time.
- 16** Our Squadron hasn't got all its equipment yet. Our new Troop Leader Mr Brain seems to be quite a decent chap. The dust is blowing very thick today.
- 17** Nothing doing today. Received some mail.
- 18** Off for a two day patrol of the desert. This is mainly to get used to our new equipment and iron out any problems.
- 20** Back to our base camp. Blowing hard, very dusty. There seems to be very few days that are free from dust. Received a letter from Dad. It rained this evening! The first rain I have seen for over six months. It was not much but it did lay the dust which was great.
- 21** I am teaching my crew all about the Bren gun. They seem to have forgotten everything they learnt about it when back in Palestine. At Giarabub we had the old Lewis gun. The Bren gun is a long way ahead of the Lewis. It is a very efficient, light, air cooled machine gun.
- 22** Found time to write some letters to Mum and Dad, Elsie and Win. Censoring of letters is very strict. We cannot inform our families where we are positioned or what we are doing, except when we are on leave. They know we are in the Middle East. We could tell them about the climate and that was about all.
- 23** Still in our defensive position. Still finding time to instruct on the Bren and Carrier. The school I did in Palestine on Carriers and Bren Guns is standing me in good stead.
- 24** Some of the Squadron went out on patrol work today. Our troop remained in camp. Wrote letters to Ruth and Mrs Perrin. Received letters from Alison and Mrs Stephens.
- 25** Nothing doing today. Air raid this evening.
- 26** Built a shelter with our tarp to keep the hot sun off when having our meals. The days now are getting much hotter.
- 27** Received the last of our equipment today. We are now on a moments notice to move out. The Hun is on the move again.
- 28** Moving to a new camp site further west.
- 29** Out for early morning patrol, then spent the rest of the day working on our carriers.
- 30** Going out for a four day patrol. Towards evening, Lou's carrier broke down. I stayed with him and Mr Brian went back to Base Camp. Quite an exciting night. Not from the enemy though. Jim thought he was going to die because he was bitten by a scorpion. I checked him over with my torch and assured him he would be all right. No way was he going to sleep on the ground though, he climbed in the carrier and spent the rest of the night in there.

May

- 1** Mr Brian returned this morning with the Squadron mechanic to fix Lou's carrier. He soon had it going again. It seems the problem was an electrical fault. Returned to Base camp in the afternoon.

- 2** A day in camp doing maintenance.
- 3** Another day in camp.
- 4** Out on patrol again, hot and dusty.
- 5** Received some mail. A letter from Alison Power and Mrs Dale of Bridge Creek with a five shillings canteen order. It's great the way the family and friends back home keep writing and sending hampers and canteen orders.
- Out on patrol again. We had an exciting chase after a mob of gazelles. We managed to shoot one and also a wild turkey. The cook did a smashing job of them and it sure made a nice change from Bully Beef. It's amazing how they can exist out in this desert. There is a little thorn bush and tussock for them to live on. Further inland there is nothing.
- 6** A day in camp, a dust storm all day.
- 7** Out on patrol again.
- 8** Patrolling - found time on returning to the camp, to write and thank Mrs Dale.
- 9** More patrolling. Wrote to Joan Stephens.
- 10** We are moving west today, just how far we don't know. It is terribly hot, temperature 130°F in the shade we were told, but of course there is no shade out here on the move. We have a ration of three two gallon cans of water per carrier (three men) per day. The engine swallows it's share of this. The water in our water bottles is almost too hot to drink. It doesn't take long to boil the billy with the primus and when we do, that cuppa never tasted so good.
- Having a good wash is out of the question. A wipe over with a damp cloth is all we can manage.
- Petrol is more plentiful than water. A few days ago when we were resting up I washed some underwear and socks in petrol. They had a hard harsh feel when the petrol evaporated, at least they smelt a bit better.. or so it seemed!
- 11** Still moving west. The heat, dust and wind is terrible.
- 12** Still on the move - the wind and dust have stopped thank goodness. It is a great sight seeing the whole regiment spread out on a wide front travelling across the desert. We are acting as a screen for the 7th Armoured Brigade with their heavy tanks coming up the rear.
- 13** We never moved today. Did maintenance on our carriers and weapons, getting rid of sand and dust.
- 14** Moved forward today and most of the night.
- 15** Contacted the enemy. Came under some shell fire but drove the enemy back into Libya again.
- 16** Retired today back into Egypt.
- 17** Did a patrol forward again and contacted the enemy on the Egypt side of the border. The German advance patrols were equipped with armoured cars, they were doing the same job as we were, scouting for the enemy. Their cars were much faster than our carriers and also out gunned us. As soon as we sighted them we were ordered to retire and allow the crusader tanks of the 7th Brigade to engage them. It would be the Germans turn then to retire. This type of skirmishing had been going on for days. The

German lines of communications were stretched to the utmost as the 9th Division were holding firm at Tobruk so denying them the port. All their supplies had to come from Benghazi, so there was no way they could launch a full scale attack.

On the evening of this day we took up our usual defensive position and dug our slit trenches. A few hundred yards to our right was a "Tommy" tank bivouacked for the night. A few of us strolled over to have a yarn to them. They belong to the famous British Regiment, the 7th Hussars. It was of course the same tanks that came to our rescue earlier in the day. We asked them how they chased the Hun and what happened. A big Tommy Corporal in his own words told us exactly what happened, "Oh, those f...kers! We chased those f...kers to f...k we did, but the f...kers were too fast for us". There were gales of laughter from all around.

(From this point of time until our departure from the Middle East we affectionately called all the British Army the "F....KERS")

18 Ordered to retire again. Travelled all night. I had to take my turn at driving to let Jim get some sleep. When Jim was driving I wasn't game to sleep in case we were needed or Jim should go to sleep at the wheel. Our petrol supply was running low. Very relieved to find a petrol dump just on day break and filled up with petrol.

We are moving back to Mersa Matruh. Our Regiment is being withdrawn from the field. We haven't been told why and no one has a clue.

20 Still moving back.

21 Arrived at Matruh. We are going to have a couple of days spell by the beach.

22 Swimming and lazing about in the beautiful Mediterranean. This is a little bit of heaven after six weeks in that cursed desert. Fresh water is still scarce so we washed all our clothes in the sea. They sure needed it, so did our bodies, the first wash for weeks.

23 Out on patrol but nothing doing.

24 In our camp by the sea all day, wrote some letters.

25 We have been informed today that we are returning to Palestine. Wonders will never cease. Loaded our tanks, carriers and equipment on the train at Mersa Matruh. Left at 1400 hours.

26 After a very slow journey, arrived at Kantara on the Suez Canal at 1500 hours. Camped _ there for the night.

27 Waiting all day to cross the Canal, don't know what the hold up is. Eventually crossed the Canal at 2000 hours and we're on our way again. The rest of the 6th Division has taken a battering in Greece. The Navy had come to their rescue and evacuated most of them back to Alexandria. Some had been sent to Crete earlier. Now the Germans were invading the Island with thousands of paratroopers. The Allied units there held out for a few days but the odds were too great.

Again the Navy came in at night and evacuated most of them.

The Greek campaign was a disaster that should never have happened. Many lives were lost and many taken prisoner.

Now we are heading for Syria to occupy that country which is held by the Vichy French. It is feared that the Germans will come down through Syria to reach the Canal. It is hoped that the French forces will not offer any resistances to our forces.

We travelled all night by train across the Sinai Desert.

28 After travelling most of the day through Palestine we arrived at a little place in North Palestine called Adera at 1600 hours. We detrained and then set up camp amongst a plantation of gum trees. This was marvellous. We soon had the billys boiling with a fire of gum sticks. The Jews, to their credit had planted lots of eucalyptus tree plantations throughout Palestine. It was a great reminder of the bush at home.

29 Moved up closer to the border of Syria and again camped amongst the gum trees. This is wonderful contrast to the heat, dust and sand of the desert. We camped close to a Jewish kibbutz in Gunnigar. About six miles away is the village of Nazareth, where Jesus lived as a young man and worked at his trade as a carpenter.

The Jewish people were wonderful. They supplied us with milk, fresh fruit and vegetables, and also hot showers. It was sure a little bit of heaven.

30 Doing lots of maintenance on our carriers and guns, the dust and sand of the desert is unbelievably hard on them. We will want lots of spare parts before we can move from here.

31 Just the same. Waiting for parts. Wrote some letters.

June

1 Doing work on our carriers this morning. In the afternoon we attended a Jewish festival which was very enjoyable. Received six letters today, two from Mum and Dad, one from Ruth, Win, John Lester and Frank Stephens.

2 Wrote some letters. Working on our carriers. Some spare parts have arrived.

3 Still in this lovely spot amongst the gum trees. Went to the village in the afternoon and had a hot shower. Boy was it beaut!

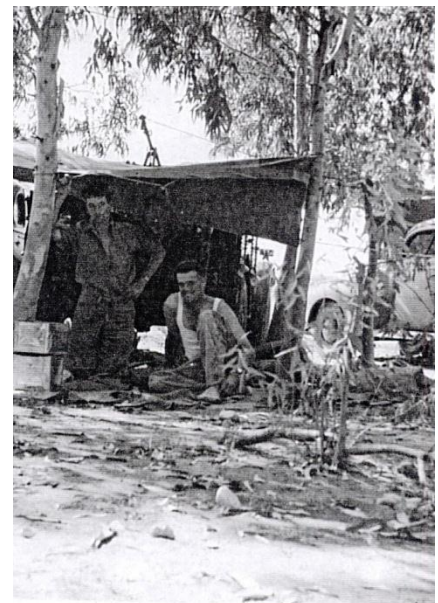
4 Nothing doing.

5 Went on a route march in the morning. Some more parts have arrived, so further work on the Carriers, we now have them ready to move.

6 Another route march this morning. There sure is plenty of exercise around this place.

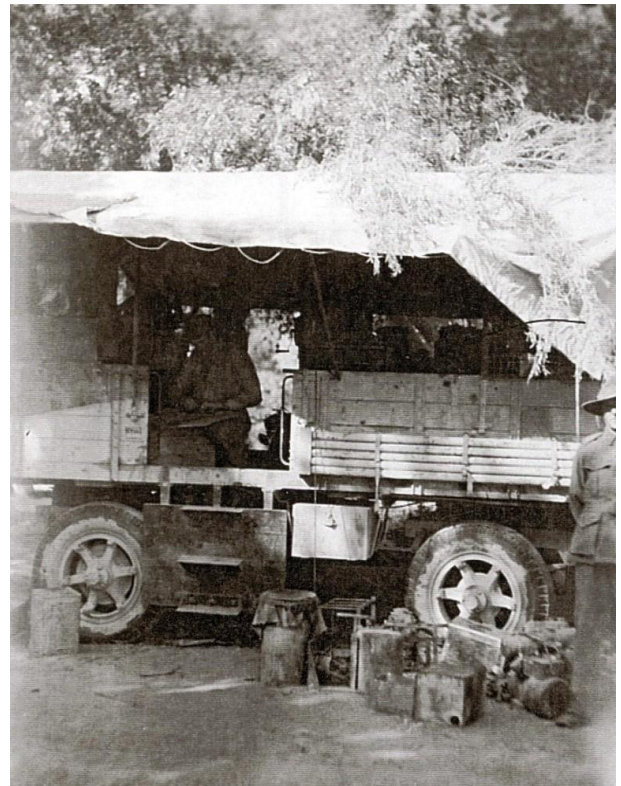
7 We are moving north today. Moved up near the Syrian border and camped amongst some olive trees.

8 The push into Syria has commenced but we are in reserve, so will remain here for the time.



Camped among the gum trees prior to invading Syria.

- 9 No movement for us today.
- 10 Met three mates of mine from Mansfield. They are in the 9th Division Cavalry. They were Jack Stephens (Win's brother), Gilbert Anderson and Jack Adams. I had them in my section in the last year of the Light Horse in 1939. It was great to see them, but it was only for a few minutes as they had to move on. They are heading for the front line. I wished them well and told them to keep their heads down.
- 11 Tom Greenburgh has now taken over from Jim Cousil as my new driver and Joe Law my gunner. I'll miss Jim as he was a good friend of mine and did an excellent job as my driver. Kevin Jonson is Lou Murphy's driver.
- 12 Early in the morning we moved into action against the Vichy French. We were told earlier that the French would soon surrender, but we soon found out to the contrary, that they had no intention of doing that. They were well equipped with artillery and tanks and knew how to use them. The country of Syria was a direct contrast to the desert. It was very mountainous so we were restricted to the roads.
- The defenders had all the advantages against the attackers. We were split into two columns. Our column consisted of most of B Squadron a section of 25 pounder guns, an engineer section and a company of Infantry. Major Macarthur Onslow was in command of our column.
- (Very soon after this he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and the Commanding Officer of our regiment. Later in the War he rose to the rank of Major General, awarded D.S.O. and knighted C.B.E. He owned the famous farm "Camden Park" which his great grandfather took up and started the first merino sheep stud in Australia).
- We moved up the road towards Merdjayoun which our Infantry had taken two days earlier, so to this point we did not contact the enemy. We were fired on several times from the air during the morning. The first attack took us by surprise as we thought they were our own planes. The French had similar markings on their planes to our own.
- A few miles north of Merdjayoun we came under shell fire and as we moved towards a road block we came under machine gunfire, so we had no option but to retire back down the road to the shelter of the hill. We took up a defensive position here and camped for the night.
- 13 A quieter day today. A few shells came over from the French 75's. They don't worry us, because of the steepness of the hill, they go way over the top of us. We have a lookout at the top of the hill to make sure there is no forward movement from the "Frogs".



Light Aid Detachment(LAD) Palestine-Syria border

- 14 We are still in the same position, keeping a good lookout from the hill top. While we have been here, the Infantry have pushed the enemy back as far as Jezzine, but in our sector the enemy are still in the same position. They are still using their artillery frequently.

15 A nice quite Sunday morning, no shelling. It's hard to imagine a war is on! In the distance we can hear church bells ringing in Merdjayour. We are just laying about taking it easy. We had begun to think the "Frogs" had withdrawn from the scene!

But not so ...at 1500 hours in the afternoon it was a different story. The enemy commenced a very heavy artillery barrage. This was followed with an attack by their tanks and Infantry. We returned plenty of fire but the situation was getting very hairy. We had no option but to withdraw down the road a few miles, where we took up a new defensive position. As soon as we took up our new position, our Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel McArthur-Onslow arrived. He was after information on the enemies location strength. He asked for an escort to go with him to the top of the hill for a look see. Lou Murphy's and my crew went with him. We armed ourselves with two Bren guns and rifles and away we went. It took every bit of our strength to climb this steep hill carrying our equipment. We carefully looked over the top and saw nothing in the valley below us, but from another hill top about half a mile away there was some movement.

Just as we had seen them they had seen us and bullets started whizzing around over the top of our heads. That was all we needed to know. We returned to our carriers and the Colonel went on his way. In a very short time our Artillery opened up on the hill where we had seen the enemy. The Colonel certainly hadn't wasted anytime in getting the information through! The counter attack by the Frogs petered out, mainly thanks to our artillery.

16 Out guarding the Artillery. Much quieter today. We even found time to do maintenance on our guns and carriers.

17 Went out on an early morning patrol. Mr Brain's carrier became bogged crossing a creek. This was a new experience, to be bogged after the desert. We soon pulled the carrier out and were on our way again. We have left the Artillery and are now guarding a bridge. It is a lovely spot, beautiful cold running water and lovely shady trees. A real treat.

18 Just the same, caught up on some washing.

19 Still enjoying this wonderful rest, camped by the fast running stream.

20 Our orders today are to move up and attach ourselves to the 33rd Battalion. It makes me think there must be another "push" starting.

21 We are temporarily attached to the 33rd Battalion as a reserve, to act as extra fire power if needed. The shells from our Artillery are going over very fast. The Vichy French 75's are replying but they are not coming anywhere near us. We are not far from Fort Khiam. Lieutenant Ryries' troop are also with us.

22 Still in reserve for the 33rd Battalion. But the firing seems to be hotting up at the front.

23 Went out on a patrol and were lucky enough to capture five prisoners who we cut off from their main force as they were retiring.

24 We are back in position as reserve, resting in a pleasant spot by a creek. We heard that our forward troops have advanced a little.

25 There were some German planes over today. They bombed our forward position, but none fell near us.

26 We are having a very easy time of it these last few days, just idling away the hours, listening to the guns blasting away up at the front. However this could change at any tick of the clock and we need to be ready to move at a moments notice.

Lou blew up some fish in the creek with a hand grenade. We had a jolly good feed, a long way ahead of the old bully beef.

27 Nothing doing. It seems that the War in this area is at a stalemate.

28 Just the same. Received some mail, from Mum and Dad and Alison Powell.

29 Did some letter writing, as well as some maintenance on the carriers.

30 Still in the same position. It looks as if we might be moving to another battle front as we are not much use here now.

July

1 Wrote to Alison, Win, Mum and Dad. Another day by the lovely stream. It looks as if we will move tonight or tomorrow morning to a position nearer the coast. We are bound to see some more action there.

2 Did not move today. Wrote more letters.

3 Moved today to a position near the coast but well behind the front line.

4 Went down to Aire in Palestine via a truck, along with a few others to collect some new carriers. We sure need them, our old ones have about had it. The desert sand sure plays havoc with the motors. Made it back to our camp site in the evening. A canteen order arrived from the Mansfield Comfort Fund.

5 I am instructing on maintenance on the carriers. In the evening we moved a few miles up the coast.

6 Instructing again.

7 Nothing doing today, just lying about in camp.

8 Moved up nearer the front, within a few miles of Damour. The news from Europe is that the Germans invaded Russia on the 22nd June. They have penetrated a fair way into Russia but the good news is, that the Russians are now holding them. It will take a lot of pressure off England and also us here in the Middle East. I am sure now that we will win this War.

Our little War here against the Vichy French may be soon drawing to a close. Damascus has fallen, and now we are not far from Beirut, the capital. It may be on in earnest though, tomorrow.

During the afternoon we were sent forward to the front to join Mr Ryrie's troop. We passed through Damour which had just been taken and there was evidence of some tough fighting having taken place. The forward troops of the Infantry were now pinned down with very heavy artillery fire from the outskirts of Beirut. A few shells were falling in our area. Our Artillery were hammering away from the rear of us. We remained in a defensive position until late in the evening, then retired up the road about a mile and bivouacked for the night in a banana plantation.

9 At 0400 hours in the morning we were up and away, with day light just breaking. Our job was to move down the road until we made contact with the enemy. As we drove down the road we sighted a road

block some two hundred yards in front of us. At this point we were fired on by machine guns. We beat a smart retreat to a stone wall about hundred yards back which gave us good protection from the small arms fire. We dispersed the carriers a little further back from the stone wall. The two drivers of Lou's and my carriers remained with them. Mr Brain's carrier was another hundred yards back up the road. They took cover in an old stone house.

Serjeant Lou Murphy, Trooper Law, Trooper Fisher and I along with Troopers Beckett and Shegog took up positions at the stone wall with rifles and a couple of machine guns. Trooper Kevin Jonson was in Lou's carrier as driver and Tom Greenburgh in mine.

With Mr Brain were Corporal Morgan as Wireless Operator and Corporal Marwood as driver. We hadn't been in position long when shells started to fall around us. We soon realised these were not the French 75's, but something much bigger. (We found out later that it was a 6 inch naval gun from a fixed emplacement not far out of Beirut). Also, the big wireless mast we spotted down the road near the road blocks, just happened to be their Observation Post. No wonder they were getting close to us. They fired a shell about every two minutes.

Occasionally they fired a few back up the road, but most of the time they fell in our area, sometimes very close. This went on for several hours until 0930 hours when a shell landed very close to us.

Lou Murphy was hit in the foot with a piece shrapnel. I cut his boot off and found his big toe had been half cut off and was bleeding freely. I bandaged his foot up with a field dressing then called out to Kevin Jonson to bring his carrier over to us. We helped Lou into the carrier and I instructed Kevin to take Lou to a field ambulance post which I knew was a mile or so up the road, then on the way back to report to Mr Brain and tell him our position. Kevin arrived back in about twenty minutes with a message from Mr Brain, saying we would have to stick it out for sometime yet. It was expected that our Infantry would lodge an attack sometime in the afternoon, then we could expect some relief. In the meantime he suggested that we keep our heads down and good luck. Well we were going to do that. He also said in the message that I would be acting Serjeant and to take Lou's carrier when we had to move.



The photo shows No 5 Troop being shelled and was taken from the top of the wireless mast on the outskirts of Beirut by the French. I received it a few months later. The carrier in the foreground was Mr Brain's. The edge of the stone house he was in can be seen. Lou Murphy and myself would have been about 150 yards to the left of the picture.

Later on in the morning when the shelling eased temporarily, I decided I had better tell Tom Greenburgh that I would be taking Lou's carrier when we had to move. When I reached the carrier, to my amazement it was empty. Where was Tom? The golden rule in the army was never to desert your post

and I couldn't imagine why Tom would choose now of all times to do so. About one hundred yards up the road I saw what looked like a culvert so I headed for there, and sure enough there was Tom. I called out explaining to him, while it was a nice safe place for him, he wasn't much use to the Troop in the culvert if we had to move out in a hurry. As acting Serjeant I also had to inform him that to desert one's post was a very serious offence. My heart went out to Tom. He was a very decent chap and without realising it, the fear of the situation that we were now in had made him react in a way that had not only endangered his mates lives, but had also endangered his own life. I explained to him he would be safer in the carrier than where we were, with only a low stone wall for protection. I told him that when we had to move, he was to follow me in the carrier and he would get further orders. Just as he assured me he would follow these orders, I assured him there would be no action taken on my part, then I walked back to the stone wall and within a few minutes the shells started coming again and the heat was on.

Our own artillery of course was blazing away all the time and keeping the "frogs" well pinned down, so there was not much danger of a counter attack from them.

About midday or a bit later Kevin bought us a billy of tea. He had boiled it in the carrier on the small primus. He also bought us some bully beef. It sure tasted great, good old Kevin!

The afternoon wore on and the shells kept coming.

I knew then there was a good chance we would get some relief. Ten minutes later however the shelling became heavier because the enemy had also seen our Infantry advancing.

Around about 1600 hours a shell landed on the other side of the wall to us. What a close call. We were very lucky. If it had landed on our side of the wall we would have all been killed for sure. A part of the wall was blown away. I felt a sharp pain coming from my thigh and realised I had been wounded. I had been hit in the thigh by a shell splinter. Apparently it came through the wall when it crashed down. Thankfully it was only a small wound and one of the boys dressed it. It felt alright, but I think we all were a bit shell shocked with the blast of the shell being so close.

It would have been only a few minutes after this we received a message from Mr Brain to withdraw, as Mr Wade's Troop were taking over from us. We weren't sorry to be handing over, it had been a LONG DAY.

I gave the order to make a dash for the carriers. The shells were still coming thick and furiously.

(Nearly half a century later at our reunion at Canberra in November 1989, Kevin and I were talking about this particular day and he astounded me by telling me that I had saved his life that day!)

According to Kevin he was out of the carrier inspecting the tracks of the carrier when I arrived with the Troop. He thought one of the tracks may have been damaged when a shell had exploded close by a few minutes earlier. Apparently I shouted to him "to get in the carrier bloody quick and get it going". He did just that and so did I. No sooner were we in, than a shell went off about thirty yards away. Jack Fisher was getting into his position from the rear of the carrier. He was still standing up, apparently when the shell went off. He was hit in the chest by a piece of shrapnel. I heard him say, "I've been hit". I leaned over the partition and pulled him into his seat. He was covered in blood and I didn't need to be told he was in a bad way. I yelled at Kevin to drive like hell to the Ambulance Post up the road. Kevin drove the carrier flat out as only Kevin could. I supported Jack and was more than grateful it was Kevin in the drivers seat. He was a terrific driver. We would have been only a couple of minutes reaching that

Ambulance Post. The Medical Orderlies carefully lifted Jack out of the carrier into the tent and the Medical Officer examined him and gave him first aid. He said he had a good chance of pulling through. That cheered me up no end. He looked at my leg and said it would be okay but would need to be checked by our Medical Officer that evening, and to keep off it until then.

We reported back to Mr Brain and he said because of our casualties we were going back a couple of miles in reserve. We moved back to the same spot we had left that morning, among the banana groves.

It was now 1700 hrs in the evening. It had been a long tough day under constant shell fire. Regimental Head Quarters were also in position in the banana grove, so I didn't have far to go to visit the Regimental First Aid Post. The doctor examined my leg and said I would have to go to hospital immediately to have it attended to properly. I was hoping I wouldn't have to go to hospital. I knew the Armistice with the French was only a day or two away and I was looking forward to taking part in that. However there was nothing I could do about it. I went back to the troop and told Mr Brain about it, then gathered a bit of gear and went back to the Regimental First Aid Post to await the ambulance. By this time my leg had stiffened up and became fairly sore so I didn't feel so bad about going to hospital. The ambulance picked me up about 1800 hours. There were three other chaps on board all with various injuries but I didn't know any of them. They were all from the Infantry. We seemed to be travelling all night, but it was only mid-night when we reached Haifa. Haifa is not far over the border in Palestine. We were taken to a British Army Casualty Clearing Station. They had taken over a large home by the look of it. Of course the doctors, sisters and staff were all English. A sister led me to a bed and it sure looked good. It was the longest, toughest day I had ever put in and one I was never likely to forget. I was the tireddest I had ever been.

- 10 Tired and all as I was, I slept for only five hours when I woke up and sat up in bed and wondered where on earth I was. It was just after 0500 hours and broad daylight. It was very quiet, no shells, then I realised where I was. I looked around the big room. To my amazement on the other side of the room, also sitting up in bed was Lou Murphy. I thought for a moment I must be dreaming, Lou said he had been there since sometime yesterday. It would seem that they could not keep us apart for long. I told him about Jack Fisher being hit. When a sister came in we asked if she could find out if Jack was in the hospital. When she returned she said he hadn't come in here. As he was serious, he may have been sent to 7th Australian General Hospital at Rehovet a fair way south of here. She said that is where we would be going by a special ambulance train today. At 1000 hrs we were taken by ambulance to the train. There were quite a few Red Cross ladies with cups of tea for us, also handing out cigarettes and chewing gum. Lou was a stretcher case and I was a walking wounded so we were in different compartments.

When we reached Rehovet, there were more Red Cross ladies with cups of tea, handing out toilet bags and more cigarettes. What a wonderful picture they made. I was most grateful to see their smiling faces and feel their friendly hands. In the late afternoon we eventually reached the 7th Australian General Hospital. This of course was our own army hospital. It was all tents and large marques set up as wards. Lou and I were in different wards. I was glad to get into bed again. I was so terribly tired and I guess still suffering from shell shock.

- 11 The doctor examined me thoroughly today. He told me the leg was okay but I was to have a course of M and B tablets to prevent any chance of infection or blood poisoning. He said what I needed most was plenty of sleep and I had no intention of arguing with him on that one!

- 12** Still putting in plenty of time sleeping. The doctor said if I keep improving I should be up tomorrow. The sisters and orderlies here are wonderful, they can't do enough for the troops.
- 13** Allowed up today and the leg feels quite good. I went and saw Lou who is doing fine but will be here for quite a while yet. The Armistice was signed with the French yesterday.
- 14** Nothing doing except more rest. The Red Cross ladies keep the magazines moving around so we have something to read.
- 15** More resting, more magazines.
- 16** Inspected by the doctor this morning. He said I was coming along fine and could move out to the Convalescent Depot tomorrow. It could be quite awhile before I get back to the regiment though. Well at least they won't be doing much up in Syria now.
- 17** Arrived at the Convalescent Depot, a place called Hafa Vichten, not far from the coast.
- 18** Inspected by the doctor and put into A Group, which means I will be here about ten days and then go back to base Head Quarters.
- 19** To my surprise Lou arrived here today. I thought he would have been in hospital for at least another week. However he has been put in C Group, so he could be here for several weeks convalescing.
- The sad news he brought with him though was that Jack Fisher had died from his wounds. It appears he never left the ambulance post where Kevin and I had left him. His condition was too serious for them to move him. That night he started to struggle, (the pain must have been tremendous) which caused another haemorrhage during which he died. This was an enormous blow to me as he was a good friend of mine and such a fine young man... but that is War ...it could so easily have been Kevin or I.
- Wrote a letter to Mum and Dad and tried to make my mind think of other things.
- 20** Went to church this morning. All we seem to do all day is eat and sleep.
- 21** Wrote a letter to Mr Burkett. He was a farmer in the Bridge Creek area north of Mansfield and had been kind enough to write to me and wish me well. Haven't received any mail for over three weeks. I guess there would be quite a bit on the way somewhere.
- 22** Lying about idling away the hours. Wrote some more letters to Ruth and Win.
- 28** Six days have gone by, doing nothing. Left Convalescent Camp for Nusuriat. Arrived at 1700 hours. Nusuriat is where our reinforcement and training unit is stationed for our Regiment. There are two chaps I knew in the Regiment who have been posted here.
- 29** I have been put on draft to go back to the Regiment in the next few days. This is good news. I'll be glad to get back to my mates. I am also Corporal of the Guard. Almost like old times.
- 30** Still here.
- 31** No news of going. I have a very sore throat. I hope it is not going to lay me up.

August

- 1 Received three letters. Great...these are the first for a month. One from Ruth, Win, and Tim Lester. Tim is the boss's son from Dueran Station. He informed me that he is going to join the Air Force. He has just turned eighteen.

(Some time in the following year he was coming home by plane on leave from up in New Guinea. The plane just disappeared...probably into the sea. It was never found. This would have been such a terrible blow to Mr & Mrs Lester).
- Still have a very sore throat but I am not going near the doctor because I would be taken off the draft for sure and we are supposed to be going tomorrow.
- 2 Not going today. Wrote to Alison. Met Noel Harris (brother of Norm Harris). He has been drafted here awaiting transport to his unit.
- 3 We are definitely going tomorrow, sometime early we have been told. The throat is a lot better thank goodness.
- 4 Left Gaza by train at 0500 hours. Arrived Haifia at midday. Arrived Beirut at 1700 hours. Reported into Regimental Head Quarters which was camped on the outskirts of Beirut. I camped the night there. I met Les Burchell who I knew well from the Light Horse days. He was a member of Alexandra Troop. He had just arrived from Australia as re-enforcement officer for our Regiment. We had a good yarn about old times in the Light Horse.
- 5 Returned to B Squadron which is camped a few miles on the north side of Beirut. It was great to be back to No 5 Troop. They were still on full alert in case of any trouble with the Vichy French. The troops are all dispersed in various locations so are still fending for themselves.

Mr Brain told me I would be acting Serjeant until Lou came back. The cook house does bring us one hot meal a day so that does help.
- 6 Went for a day trip up into the hills by bus. The scenery was beautiful. The hills are all terraced to stop the good soil washing away. The terraces vary from six to twenty or more feet in width and along these narrow strips the Syrians grow their crops.
- 7 Standing by, in case of trouble with the Vichy French Troops. Wrote a letter to Mum and Dad.
- 8 Received four letters, one from Mum and Dad, Ruth, Winnie and Mrs Dale. A cablegram arrived from Elsie...this was a sympathy one in relation to me being wounded. Mum and Dad would have received official notice from Army Head Quarters, but the letter received from them yesterday was written before they received it. Wrote more letters.
- 9 Started a wireless course.
- 10 Went on a two day trip to the ruins of Baalbek, then up into the mountains. We reached the highest point of any motor road, some 8400 feet above sea level. Stayed the night at a lovely little village 6000 feet up. The scenery was terrific.
- 11 Returned to camp via Tripoli. Had a very enjoyable trip. Received cablegrams from Ruth and Mum in relation to my being wounded. My promotion to Acting Serjeant came through officially. So as from the 5th August I received an extra one shilling a day.

- 12** Continued the wireless course. Wrote to Mr Lester and Ruth. Went into Beirut in the evening. It's amazing how many nationalities of troops there are walking the streets of Beirut. Beside the British, Australian and Vichy French Troops, there were the Foreign Legion with its various coloured Troops, Indian and African Troops.
- We were told to be on our best behaviour, it wouldn't have taken much to have caused a big free for all brawl!
- 13** Wrote more letters. Finished the wireless course. There is not much doing. Everybody has been taking it easy since the end of the Syrian campaign. Since Christmas of 1940 the Regiment has had it pretty tough and has sure earned a good rest.
- 14** We are moving up to join the Regiment near Tripoli. We are going to hand back the equipment we borrowed from the 7th Division Cavalry in April at Helwan, then return to Palestine.
- 15** We arrived at our new camp at 1100 hours. Received six letters, from Ruth, Marj, Elsie, Erwin, Alf Stephens and Alison. It's great the way the letters keep coming from the family and many friends around Mansfield and else where. It means a lot of writing answering them all, but it is sure worth it. Mail day is always a happy day here. A chap who doesn't get any mail is a very lonely man. I know the feeling, on a rare occasion I have missed out.
- 16** Cleaning up our carriers and doing general maintenance before handing them over. Wrote a letter to Winnie.
- 17** The 7th Division Cavalry arrived today. They have been on the Isle of Cyprus for the last few months doing guard duty there. Doing more work on the carriers. Wrote more letters in the evening.
- 18** Handed over our carriers.
- 19** Back off to Palestine by truck. Camped at Acre for the night.
- 20** Arrived at Julius mid afternoon. Julius is one of the many military camps in Palestine. It is on the main south road only a few miles south of our old camp Qastina. It was a wonderful change to have extra comforts of a permanent camp, like hot showers, all meals cooked, tents and a picture theatre. For me, for a while anyway, would be the extra privilege of the Serjeant's mess, with a bar, waiters at the tables, a place to write letters in comfort and a little peace and quiet. Also I will be sharing a tent with fellow Serjeants with only half the number that would normally be in a troop tent.
- 21** Received more letters, from Mum with a canteen order (five shillings), Alison, Elsie and Joan.
- 22** I have been rostered on Squadron Orderly Serjeant duty today. My job detail was to be in attendance at Squadron Head Quarters. In the morning, I accompanied the Orderly Officer of the day on a tour of the troop lines and inspected their tents to see that everything was clean and tidy and beds and gear stowed away correctly. Also checked the Squadron vehicles to see that they were clean and tidy and parked correctly.
- I was required to help the Squadron Serjeant Major in the Squadron Office with writing up of reports and sorting of mail.
- This job of Squadron Orderly Serjeant was for one day only. Within the Squadron there were usually about eight Serjeants so it came about only once a,,week while in permanent camp.

- 23** Wrote more letters.
- 24** Sunday. I went on church parade (attended church) today. Church parade was not compulsory but occasionally I found great peace in attending. A quiet day in camp.
- 25** Some drill, and a short route march for the troops. A letter from Mum. I can't begin to describe the wonderful feeling that comes over me on seeing my mother's handwriting.
- 26** Rostered on Squadron Orderly Serjeant again.
- 27** Rostered on Regimental Orderly Serjeant duty today. This job meant being in attendance at Regimental Head Quarters all day. We did a tour of inspection on our portion of the camp (there were other units in camp) with the Orderly Officer and the Regiment Serjeant Major, and sometimes the 2 I.C. (The 2nd in command of the Regiment with the rank of a major). This inspection meant checking cookhouses, mess huts and latrines for cleanliness. Sometimes the Regimental Medical Officer would accompany this part of the inspection. Also all Squadron lines would be inspected, with the occasional inspection of the interior of a tent. This job of Regiment Orderly Serjeant came around every two to three weeks when in permanent camp.
- After the morning inspection it usually meant sitting down in Regimental Head Quarters reading a book or magazines..
- 28** Wrote to Erwin.
- 29** A cricket match today between B and C Squadrons. I only helped organise it. Don't know who won.
- 30** Serjeant of the guard today. This was a twenty four hour job, going on duty at 1700 hours to 1700 hours the next evening. A guard consisted of a Serjeant, two Corporals and depending on the number of guard posts, twenty or more men. The time on duty for each guard was two hours on and four hours off. It was the duty of the Corporals to post the guards. It was the duty of the Serjeant to occasionally check each guard post throughout the day and night to see they were doing their job properly and were correctly dressed.
- 31** Church Parade again. Wrote more letters.

September

- 1** Just a year since we left Qastina to go to Egypt. How time disappears.
- 2** Nothing much doing except the usual parades, rifle drill and route marches.
- 3** Another party of personnel have set off to Cairo for seven days leave. I am in the party taking leave next Tuesday. Tomorrow I am instructing on the Bren Gun in the Regimental Cadre.
- 4** I am instructing the troops on the Bren today. It gets a bit boring for me as I have done so much of it before, but it is all necessary. It keeps the boys on their toes, in weapon handling.
- 5** The same again.
- 6** No instructing today. Instead we are digging slit trenches for a change. Lou came back yesterday so I revert back to Corporal again. I have been told that I can keep my third stripe on until I return from leave. It will entitle me to a few extra privileges while on leave.

- 7 Church parade today.
- 8 Going on leave today - seven days starting as from tomorrow.
- 9 Arrived in Cairo at 0130 hrs and stayed at the New Zealand Club for what was left of the night.
- 10 Found out we could not stay at the New Zealand Club for the rest of our leave. Who ever did the booking must have got their wires crossed somewhere. Eventually Norm McLeod (a fellow Serjeant) and myself got a shared room at the Kings Hotel. Being senior N.C.O's we had the privilege of only two to a room. Norm and I had got to know one another in the Serjeant's Mess. He also was from the 13th Light Horse Regiment in Gippsland. We found out we first met at a 2 Division Cavalry School for officers and N.C.O.s at Broadmeadows just out of Melbourne in 1937, so we had a lot in common. I knew he had a good chance to get his commission in the not too distant future.
- (What I didn't know was he would become troop leader of No 5 Troop and I the Troop Serjeant under him, two months later)
- Norm and I were having a quiet leave. We went to every picture show in Cairo. We would have a few drinks of an evening, but never hit the grog too hard. We were both of fairly sober habits. We did go to a couple of Night Club shows and on one occasion drank a bit more than we should have! We knew it could be quite a long while before we would get any more leave. We were not interested in the brothels and the call girls. The risks of being infected with disease were great and far outweighed any instant gratification a quick encounter might bring.
- 16 Going back to camp today after a very quiet and enjoyable leave.
- 17 Arrived back in camp. Five wonderful letters awaiting me. As usual one from Mum and Dad, Ruth, Erwin, Mr Lester and a Comforts Fund Order from Grace Coghill (the wife of a Bridge Creek farmer).
- 18 Back to the routine of camp life. Not so good now I am back to Corporal again, minus my Serjeant's privileges. Received a parcel from Mr Lester. I am sure getting well looked after from my family and friends at home. I will be forever grateful to them.
- 20 Wrote letters to Mum and Dad, Ruth and Winnie.
- 22 Received a letter from Alison and one from Marion Hemsley with a five shilling canteen order.
- Marion was the daughter of Jack and Doris Hemsley who had a two hundred and eighty eight acre farm between Dueran Station and Mansfield and a twelve hundred acre farm at Nillacootee about five miles away.
- Jack was my first boss on my first farming job at the age of fifteen. Two years later, I took over looking after his farm. There was an old cottage in which I lived and, of course, did my own cooking. I had to look after the sheep and, in any spare time, I had to dig out rabbits, and there was certainly plenty of them. Jack came along at least once a week to check out things and give me orders of things to do.
- Marion was only a little girl of five when I first went there, so I was ten years older than her. She was now seventeen, and in her letter she said she was at Mansfield Convent training to be a Primary School Teacher. At this time she wouldn't have had much money. To send me a five shilling canteen order was really wonderful.
- 24 A letter from Jack Stephens. They are still in Syria.

- 25** Rostered on Orderly Corporal duty today.
- 26** Nothing much doing - parades, drill, some route marches. Camp life is just the same. There is not much to do in the evenings. The camp is very over crowded, so there's not much enjoyment going to the pictures as one nearly has to fight for a seat. Beer is scarce. So too are cigarettes and tobacco.
- 27** Received some pictorial magazines (PICS) from Ruth along with two parcels. One from Elsie and the other from Mr Lester.
- 28** Wrote to Marion Hemsley.
- 30** Wrote to Jack Stephens. Received a letter from Elizabeth Thompson (Tommy) in England. She was at Dueran before the War for two years as a companion to Mrs Lester. Whenever she could get time off she would come and help me mustering sheep. She must have got my army address from Mr Lester. She left Dueran when the War broke out in September, 1939 to go back to her home in the north of England. She said in her letter she had joined the land army to help feed the troops and the people of England. Good old Tommy!

October

- 1** Corporal of the Guard duty today.
- 4** Nothing doing for us over the last few days. A lot of the 6th Division have moved somewhere. There are all sorts of rumours going about that we are going to move soon too. But just where to is the big question. So far the guesses have included just about every place on the globe!
- 6** Still the same - but at least the camp is not so crowded now with some of the units of the 6th Division gone.
- 8** Wrote some letters. It is now possible to get a seat at the pictures!
- 10** Went to Jaffa Rifle Range to see a mortar demonstration. When I returned in the evening I was called up to Squadron Head Quarters and informed I was promoted to Lance Serjeant. This was good news to me, and totally unexpected as I thought the only way I could be promoted was for Lou to move out. However I was told this does happen occasionally. Apparently, it was my reward for the job I did when I took over as Serjeant for Lou Murphy when he was wounded.
- A Lance Serjeant does not get any more pay than a Corporal. He does however get all the privileges of a full Serjeant and does the same duties.
- 11** I have now moved into the Serjeant's Mess and tent lines.
- 12** Today I am Serjeant of the Guard. It didn't take them long to get me on Serjeant duties!
- 13** Started a two day mortar class.
- 14** Learning all about the mortar.
- 15** Received a letter from cousin Alison.

- 16** Shifted to Khassa today. It's just another camp a few miles down the road. I don't know why we have shifted. Just giving us something to do I guess, packing up and unpacking one camp is the same as another in this part of Palestine.
- 18** Rostered on Squadron Orderly Serjeant duty.
- 20** Wrote some letters to Ruth and Alison. Sent some photo snaps to Mum and Winnie. Received letters from Dad and Bill Lester.
- 21** Reorganisation of troops today. Lou and I are still together with Lieutenant John Black our new Troop leader. There are a certain number of our officers and NCO's going home to Australia as instructors for the new armoured division being formed. Mr Brian and Corporal Morgan from our Troop are going. Corporal Morgan of course will be instructing on wireless. Good luck to him.
- Corporal Guy Baxter has come in as driver for Mr Black and Corporal Viv Daniels as wireless operator in place of Morgan Morgan.
- 22** Wrote to Elsie. Went for a route march.
- 23** It seems as if we will soon be going back to Syria again.
- 24** More drill and route marches.
- 25** Rostered on Squadron Orderly Serjeant duty.
- 26** Regiment Orderly Serjeant duty today. We are moving up to Aleppo tomorrow. Aleppo is in the far north, not far from the Turkish border. We are going via Damascus and Homs. It is to be a four day trip by trucks. It is possible that the Germans will attack through Turkey and we are going up there to join the 18th Brigade in defence of that area.
- 27** Started on our four day trip. Reached Alfara the first night. I was Serjeant of the Town Picquet. This job was to see that our troops who had a few hours leave in town behaved themselves and were all back in the camp by midnight.
- 28** We have reached Damascus. Some of us went for a few hours sight seeing leave in the evening to Damascus. It is a very old and a dirty city. We didn't think much of it. The only beer was "wog" beer and it was terrible. We did manage to get a reasonable meal in a cafe though.
- 29** Arrived Homs mid afternoon. No leave this time. Wrote some letters.
- 30** Arrived Aleppo 1500 hours. We are taking over the equipment of the 9th Division Cavalry who have been guarding the Nirab Aerodrome, a few miles north of Aleppo.
- Of course the first thing I did was to find Jack Stephens (Win's brother). This didn't take me long. I also found a few other chaps from Mansfield ... Jack Adams, Gilbert Anderson, Mick Sweeney and Jack McCormack. Also a couple from the Alexandra Troop. It was great to meet all those chaps who I knew in the Light Horse. Jack Stephens of course I knew extra well, he was a great mate of mine as I worked with him on Dueran before the War. There was plenty of talking about old times.
- 31** Taking over the equipment from the 9th Division Cavalry.

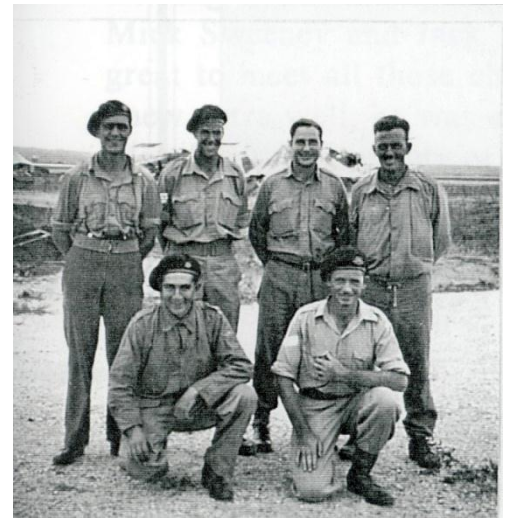
November

- 1 In the evening we had a reunion of the Mansfield and the Alexandra boys of the 6th and 9th Division Cavalry. Les Burchell managed to bring along a bottle of whisky he scrounged from the Officer's Mess. Lou and I managed to get hold of a few bottles of good old Aussie beer from the Serjeant's Mess. It was enough any way for us to get merry. The party went on until midnight. The 9th Division Cavalry were pulling out at 0400 hours so they didn't get much sleep. It was a very enjoyable evening.



Osie Stafford and Jack Stephens at Aleppo

- 2 We are camped in huts here with the electric lights on. The last time we had such luxury was at Ingleburn before we left Australia. The weather is getting colder all the time. The winter is almost upon us.
- 3 Two years since I joined the Australian Imperial Forces. Wrote some letters today.
- 4 Today is my twenty seventh birthday. I received a letter from Elsie Cameron my old school teacher at Bridge Creek. What a beaut surprise. A letter also from Ruth.
- 6 Our troop is on a moments notice to move in case of trouble in Aleppo.



Jack Stephens took this snap on Aleppo Aerodrome. A group of Mansfield boys of 6 Div Cav and 9 Div Cav, 15th November, 1941 (L to R) standing: Mick Sweeney, Osie, Jack Adams, Gilbert Anderson, kneeling : Jack McCormack and Lou Murphy.

- 7 I have been a bit off colour the last few days with sand fly fever.
- 9 Feeling okay again. Wrote to Ruth, Win and Alison. Received another parcel from Mr Lester. This makes four parcels from him. What a great sport he is. The parcels contain food such as tinned fruit, biscuits, cake and sweets. They are very welcome as something extra and just the fact that they come from home makes them rather special.
- 10 Preparing for a parade through Aleppo tomorrow.
- 11 Took part in Armistice Day service in Aleppo. There was only B Squadron from the Regiment, because the others were out on patrol. We along with other troops, Free French, Infantry, some R.A.F. and Armoured Cars from the Royal Dragoons, took part in a "march past" in front of General Catroux (Free French) and General Lavarack (Australia). When the parade was completed our Squadron went off on a patrol as far as the west bank of the Euphrates River and returned along the border. It is such poor type of country.
- 13 Back in camp. Received a letter from Mum and Dad.

- 14** Rostered on Orderly Serjeant duty. There has been a reshuffle of troops again. I am now Troop Serjeant of No 5 Troop. Lou Murphy has been transferred to another Troop. Our long association of eight years in the Light Horse and two in the Australian Imperial Forces has sadly been broken. We also have a new Troop leader...Mr Black has been transferred. Norm McLeod, who I went on leave with to Cairo, has his Commission and takes his place. I am sure Norm McLeod and I will get on well together, however I will have to remember to call him "Sir".
- 15** Received three letters from Marj, Elsie and Winnie.
- 16** Wrote to Mum and Dad, Grace Coghill and Bill Lester. Went to church this morning.
- 17** General maintenance.
- 18** Took over security duties. Our Troop and No 2 Troop are on a moment's notice to move if needed.
- 19** We are going to move camp again. This time down south and inland near Baalbek.
- 20** Rostered on Regiment Orderly Serjeant duty today. We are moving by train tomorrow.
- 21** Left the aerodrome at midday and loaded our carriers and tanks on flat tops at Aleppo Station. The train didn't pull out until 2330 hours.
- 22** Travelled all night and arrived at our new campsite at 1600 hours in the afternoon. The camp is a few miles from Baalbek at a little place called Labboue.
- We are to live in tents for the time being. The ground is very stony. There are no conveniences. The nearest hot showers are at Baalbek. A shower will be a once a week job.
- On one side of us are the Lebanon Mountain Range and on the other side is the Anti Lebanon Range. Both are very high and already covered with snow. We are going to be in for a cold time of it ... there is nothing surer.
- 23** Sunday and we are getting settled in. There was a very heavy frost last night. It is bitterly cold. It looks as if we will be here for a few weeks, then move into huts which are being built for us. The view of the mountain tops with the sun shining on the snow is beautiful. It's almost enough to take your mind off how cold it is. Wrote letters to Winnie and Joan Stephens.
- 24** Doing maintenance on our carriers. We are fairly comfortable in our tents. There are three of us sharing one tent ... Lou Murphy, Serjeant of No 3 Troop, Val Langlands, Serjeant of No 4 Troop and myself, Serjeant of No 5 Troop.
- 25** The weather is very cold especially at night. We boil the billy on the primus at night before going to bed and make a cup of Horlicks each. We generally have some cake or biscuits from parcels received to go with it. We have been issued with extra blankets so we do manage to keep warm at night.
- 26** A newsy letter from Jack Stephens arrived today saying they are taking it easy in Palestine.
- 27** Another parcel from Mr Lester. The "Boss" is sure looking after me. Also a big cake in a tin from Mum. Another parcel she mentioned in her last letter is yet to arrive. Wrote to Mr Lester and thanked him for the parcels. As from today I have been promoted to Acting Serjeant. That means a whole extra shilling a day! My rank of full Serjeant will be confirmed in due course.

- 28 Orderly Serjeant duties for me today. It was a terribly rough night last night. Quite a lot of rain and wind. Several tents actually blew over. Ours managed to survive. A fresh fall of snow on the hills today. Val was taken to hospital today to have his knee x-rayed. He has been having quite a bit of trouble with it.
- 29 Wrote to Mum and Dad and Alison.
- 30 Sunday ... went to church. Orderly Serjeant duties again. We had a Troop dinner today. Dick Lynch, (one of our new members of the Troop) was chief chef. We had soup, sausages and beans, fruit salad, plum pudding and custard. Most of it came from hampers and parcels we had received recently. Those present were ... Lieutenant McLeod, Corporal Eddie Quirk, Corporal Pat Marwood, Corporal Viv Daniels (our new wireless operator since Morgan left), Corporal Harold Waugh (our new Troop Corporal since I was promoted), Troopers Dick Lynch, Bob Shegog, Bill Petshack, Harry Beckett, Kevin Jonson and "Buff" Woodhouse. All except Eddie Quirk and Buff Woodhouse are members of the No 5 Troop. These two were looking extra hungry and we took pity on them and invited them in! There was no grog, it is in very short supply. However a good time was had by all.
- Wrote to Elsie and Marj.

December

- 1 Parade as usual first thing in the morning. A lecture by Corporal Len Cosgrove from Regimental Head Quarters Intelligence Section on security.

(After the war I discovered that Len Cosgrove was an uncle of my son Robert's wife, Meredith)

Wrote to Ruth and Erwin. We are going out on a reconnaissance tomorrow. We will probably be out three or more days and quite likely in the snow, so it is going to be cold.



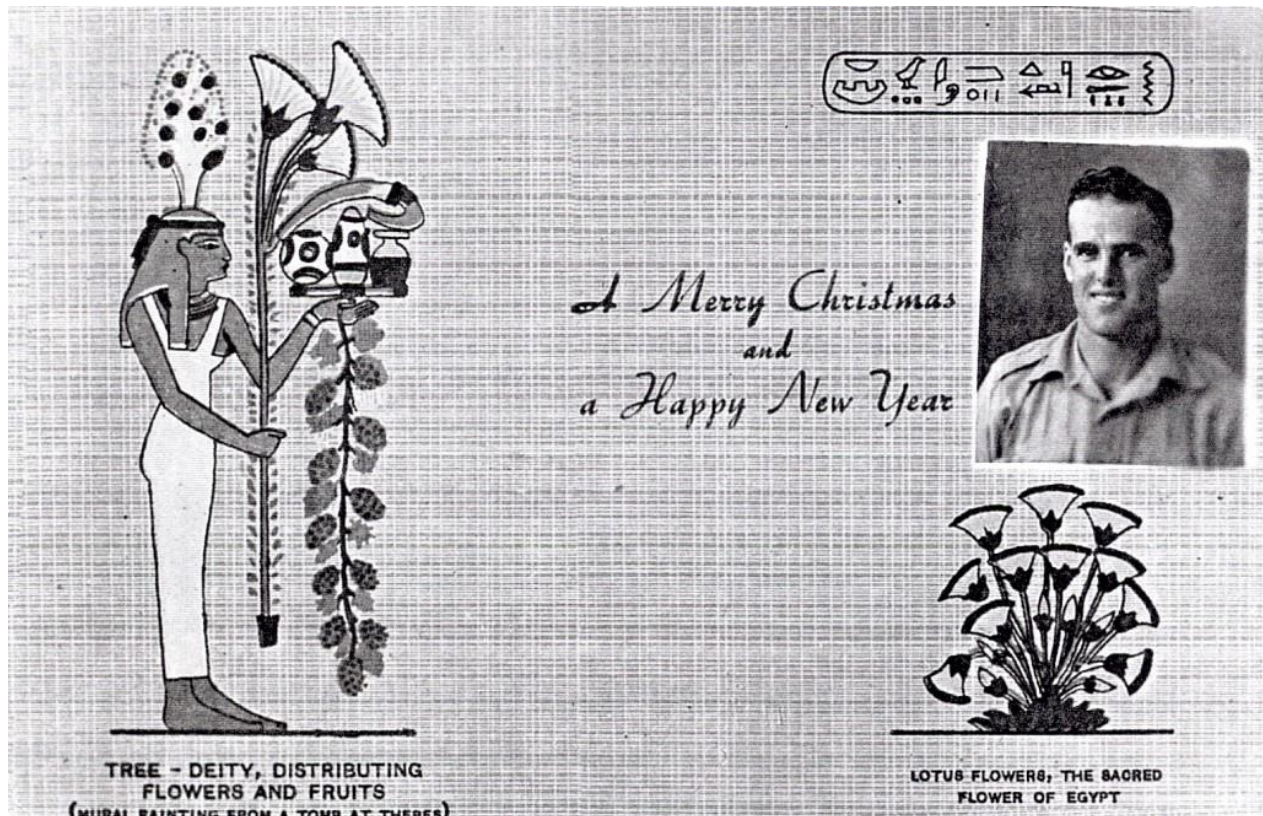
Lou shovelling snow from the entrance to our tent, Aarsal, Syria, Christmas, 1941

- 2 Here we are camped up in the snow. We are about 6000 feet above sea level. We have made a sort of humpy with our tarps. We should be fairly comfortable as long as the wind doesn't get up.
- 3 When we got up this morning we found there had been a lot more snow which had fallen during the night and it was bitterly cold. Further reconnaissance was out of the question so we returned to camp, where we found out they also had snow. We are now in the depths of winter. A letter from Dad brightened my day.
- 4 Six carriers went out again today but not our Troop. I have a sore throat so I am not sorry.
- 5 Spent a day in bed.
- 6 Much better today. Received a letter from Ruth and Alison. A wet cold day.
- 7 Wrote to Mum and Dad. It snowed again last night but it is melting fast today as it is nice and sunny.
- 8 Nothing doing except some maintenance.

- 9** We heard today that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour two days ago. They attacked the big American Naval Base at dawn on a Sunday morning with a surprise attack when most Naval personnel were asleep. Japan launched 360 war planes against the American Pacific Fleet. They sank and damaged 18 ships including 3 of the big Battle ships. There were apparently some 3,700 American casualties. Luckily, several of the Yank aircraft carriers and cruisers were out of the Harbour on exercises. So now the Americans are in the War. Nobody is the least concerned about it here. We think it will end the War all the sooner with the Yanks in it.
- 10** Received letters from Mum and Winnie with a five shilling Canteen Order. It is very good of her.
- 11** We are moving tomorrow to a camp a few miles away in the hills. We will be there for a few weeks digging gun pits across this giant valley, between the two mountain ranges, to build defence positions in case the Germans do push down through Turkey.
- The whole of the 6th Division is in this area, so they will sure earn the name of "Digger".
- 12** Moved to our new camp in the foot hills of the Anti Lebanon Mountains. We are up about 5,000 feet above sea level. There is no snow here, but the mountains in the back ground are snow white. We are very comfortable in our tents.
- Received a letter from Mrs Perrin and a five shilling Canteen Order from the Mansfield fund.
- Down in the valley about half a mile away is the small Arab village of Aarsal. Some of the boys reckon it is the "Arshole of the World"!
- The country around here is certainly rough and stony. Down in the valley where the village is, there is fair soil. The Arabs sow their crops and run a few sheep and goats. This is what they live off. It is well into the winter now, so the country is looking at its worst.
- 13** Received a parcel from Marj.
- Val, Lou and I are still camped together in a tent. We managed to scrounge a table top and two trestles from the Q Store and we were issued with a kerosene heater, so it is quite cosy in our tent. We started digging trenches today.
- 14** Sunday, a day of rest. Val Langlands has taught me how to play crib, so we put in a lot of time playing. Lou won't have a bar of crib so he goes off to his own Troop tent or some of the other Serjeant's tents.
- 15** Starting digging in earnest today. The ground is very hard and stony. We have to use some explosives, then plenty of pick and shovel work. As a Serjeant I am not supposed to work, only supervise, however a lot of the time when the Squadron Leader is not about, I like to do my bit.
- The weather is keeping nice and fine.
- 16** The digging goes on.
- 17** Back on Orderly Serjeant duty today, so I have to hang around Squadron Head Quarters. Received more letters today, from dear old Ruth, Alison and a nice Christmas card from Mrs Dale.
- 18** Another fine day- back on the digging.

- 19** Went down to Raas Baalbeck and had a beautiful hot shower. Received a Christmas parcel from Bridge Creek Dramatic Society per Mrs Perrin. I was in all the plays they put on before the War. It was great fun. They are sure looking after their "star" performer! !
- 20** Working again today.
- 21** Sunday, a day of rest and letter writing. Val and I managed a few hands of crib. Earlier in the month the Regiment had taken on its strength with the addition of two Officers and thirty one other ranks from the famous Household Cavalry Regiment. They were here for training on the Carriers and tanks. Horses were no longer of any use in this War. We had with us two Serjeants, and fine chaps they were. (However they were not with us for long, only about three weeks. By Christmas they had gone back to their Regiment).
- 22** Continued with the digging. Wrote letters to Ruth, Win and Jack Stephens. Heavy rain set in at night.
- 23** Everything is muddy after the rain.
- 24** Very cold and windy. It has started snowing. We are all betting a white Christmas.
- A few weeks ago we started getting a bottle a week of Aussie beer. In the evening I visited my Troop to see how my boys were handling the cold. They were doing very well, they had already opened a few bottles and were quite happy. They assured me they would keep back a few bottles for tomorrow.
- 25** Christmas Day. The ground is covered with about 6 inches of snow. There is a strong wind blowing, almost a blizzard. It is the custom in the army when not in action and in a permanent camp for the Officers and senior N.C.O.s to do all the duties on Christmas Day. I am on Mess Orderly duty today. I had to report to the cook house at 0900 hours to help prepare Christmas dinner. At least it is a nice warm spot.
- All the other ranks have a holiday today. The cooks did a great job. There was turkey and ham and of course plenty of plum pudding. It was beautiful after the rough stuff we had been getting.
- In the evening when we went off duty, Lou, Val and I cracked a few bottles.
- Later in the evening we had a visit from Joe Byrne a fellow Serjeant. He shared a tent with the Squadron Serjeant Major Max Ramsey and two other Serjeants. They all liked their beer. They had finished their ration and sent Joe over to us to see if we had any left. Of course we did. We loaded Joe up with five or six bottles. Joe of course was pretty full. We set him on his way in the right direction. He only had about a hundred yards to go to his tent, so we were sure he would make it alright. Next day we learnt he made it alright but arrived back with only two bottles. He told the other three Serjeants, that was all we gave him. Of course he had fallen over a few times, so we back tracked him in the snow and soon found three bottles of beer in the snow. It was almost completely frozen!
- (At reunions, Joe has been reminded of that little episode many times over.)
- In the evening I visited my own troop (No 5) and spent some time with them. I took along four bottles, enough to shout them all a drink. I am sure they were very grateful as they had finished their ration. They were a fine bunch of chaps. I was very proud of them.

Lieutenant McLeod had gone away to an Officer's School in Cairo, so now I was doing the job of Troop Leader as well as Troop Serjeant. I was determined to do a good job, and make No 5 one of the top Troops of the Squadron. I had a great Troop Corporal in Harold Waugh, who was a big help to me.



Christmas card sent home to my family from the Middle East in 1941

- 26 Still blowing and freezing cold.
- 27 Resumed work on the trenches.
- 28 A terrific gale last night. Many tents were blown down. Some were even ripped to pieces, but my Troop's tent managed to stay upright without any damage. Our own tent remained standing, but the fly is badly torn. Some trucks were brought up from Regimental Head Quarters, for Troops without tents, to sleep in.
- 29 Resumed work again today. Received some papers from home, sent by Ruth and Mrs Cameron.
- 31 The last day of the year. Working as usual.

1942

January

- 1 It is snowing this morning and there is a fair wind blowing. During the night a small hole in the tent just above my head grew large enough to allow the snow to sift in and cover my bed. Thankfully I have a valise made of canvas over the top of my bed to hold my blankets down and this prevented my blankets from getting wet from the snow. It is also handy when we have to move, just roll it up and put two straps around it ... makes it easy to carry. Another little privilege of being Serjeant. Received a letter from Elsie with two canteen orders which will be well spent.

The snow and wind is even worse than yesterday. Provisions and water couldn't get through. We have to try and get through with our Carriers. No 5 troop were the first started up and ready to move. I was complemented on this by the Squadron Leader. Of course I passed this on to the boys. After a lot of trouble we got through the Pass and down the mountain and arrived at the new camp at dusk. It was snowing all the time we were coming down. We were the only troop to get through. The credit for this must go to my three drivers, Corporal Pat Morwood, Troopers Kevin Jonson and Dick Lynch. They were great. They sure knew how to handle these Carriers in tricky situations. The buildings of the new camp are Nissen Huts. These huts are made of galvanised iron, oval in shape with a cement floor. At least they won't be blown down. It was great to get a good hot meal from the cook house after we arrived.

- 4 More Carriers have got through. I took one of my Carriers with Kevin Jonson as driver, to help get the rest of the Squadron down from Aarsal. The going was very tricky, with the track frozen in many places. However, Kevin handled it magnificently. We did two trips and worked very hard. We did not arrive back at camp until 2230 hours. It was a long day.

- 5 Up again today to Aarsal to bring back tents, equipment etc. This time with the three Carriers of the troop but only the drivers and myself. We had to load as much as possible on the Carriers. Three other troops of the Squadron went with us. We started pulling down tents. This was really hard going as the ropes were frozen. I noticed a dozen or so "Wogs" watching us from about 300 yards away and beckoned to them to come over with the idea of setting them to work. They never moved. The reason for this was we had left a small guard on the camp when the rest of the Squadron moved down to Labboue. When the guard saw any "Wogs" around they fired a few shots over their heads as a warning not to come near the camp, hence their reluctance to come too close. I decided to walk over to them.

After a lot of talk and sign language I managed to get them to come and help with the tents. As it turned out I couldn't have made a worse decision. They were a help with the pulling down of the tents alright, but in some tents there was still equipment such as small trenching shovels and picks, and in the cook house tent some cases of bully beef. It was impossible to keep an eye on them all. With their flowing robes they were able to hide a lot of things. I saw one Arab heading down the hills towards the village.

I didn't think he was leaving because he was tired so I set off after him and soon caught him. He was so weighted down with things he could not run very fast. I pulled his robe apart and was amazed at the things he had around his waist. Trenching tools, kitchen utensils and several tins of bully beef and packets of biscuits. I let him keep the bully beef and biscuits as I knew they were having a tough job of getting enough to eat. I pointed to his village and told him to get, then gave him a hefty boot up the backside to help him on his way. He gave a yell and took off at great speed. He possibly thought I

might fire a round or two from the pistol I carried on my hip, but he had nothing to fear as this was the furthest thing on my mind.

Now I was the one heavily weighted down and it was up hill in a foot of snow. I realised I had an audience of just about all the working party. They were greatly amused at the show I had put on. I must say I wasn't! I called out to Kevin and Dick to come and help me, which they did. The Officer in charge of our working party, Lieutenant Ryrie, said to me, "We had better get rid of these "Wogs" they are more nuisance than they are worth".

I turned around to dismiss them but there were only a few left. The rest of them had sneaked away out the back around the hill - no doubt with their pockets full!

We loaded up our Carriers with all the tents and gear and set off down the mountain in the dark. It was nearly midnight when we got back to Labboue camp. It had been a long and tiring day for all.

- 6 Parades as usual. Doing maintenance on the Carriers. The cabins of the carriers were full of snow.
- 7 Mail in today, the first for quite awhile. A parcel from Ruth and a letter from Dad and Winnie. Les Burchell paid back the rest of the money he owed me. I can never remember how much he owes me or even when he borrowed it, but you couldn't find a more honest bloke than Les, and I'm sure he never short changes me. Wrote a letter to Mum and Dad.
- 8 Nothing much doing today.
- 9 Our troop, along with three others from B Squadron set off for Aarsal to raid the place. We had with us Military and Civilian Police, also an interpreter. We recovered all sorts of things including kit bags and one complete wireless set which we knew they had stolen. It was from one of the Squadron Carriers that had broken down and had to be left overnight on the pass unguarded. Also found many coils of barb wire. I don't know what the wogs were going to do with these. It seemed that we recovered a lot more than we had lost.

The 2/4 Battalion were also digging in the hills not far from us, so a lot of it belonged to them. We pulled out of Aarsal in the late afternoon loaded up with recovered equipment. We knew we would never see Aarsal again, and nobody was sorry about that. It was indeed "the arsehole of the world".
- 10 Received a parcel from Mr Lester. This makes the sixth he has sent me. I am very grateful. Two years since we left Australia!
- 11 Did some washing. Wrote some letters.
- 12 Working on our new huts carting gravel.
- 13 Some troops are still shifting into our new Nissen huts. Went to Baalbeck with Leo Killen, where we had a bath and a wonderful meal, then went to a picture show. A letter from Jack Stephens arrived.
- 14 Still working on our huts. We have nearly got everything ship shape. It is very cold in them at night. We have had a petrol fire to keep warm. We cut the top out of a four gallon petrol tin, pour in about one inch of petrol then throw in a match. This will burn for about twenty minutes. Then we would repeat the process. After a couple of nights we had to stop this method because the burning petrol sent out a lot of black smoke. When we rose from bed of a morning we were coughing up black phlegm ...its a wonder we didn't kill ourselves. All our towels and clothes were going black in the process.

We now tried the old primus stove on petrol instead of kerosene, which it was designed for. The trouble with the primus was the noise. With seven or eight primuses going in the hut, it was impossible to talk. The noise was terrible. Eventually we were issued with a few kerosene heaters and managed to keep warm by wearing all the clothes we had until bed time.

15 Mail in today. One from Marion Hemsley with a canteen order. This is the second one from her. She wouldn't have much money to spare as a trainee teacher. I must write to her and tell her not to send any more money but her letters will always be welcome. Also received letters from Winnie and Alison.

16 Nice fine day for a change, it is quite warm.

17 It is blowing a gale today so we will probably get more rain and snow. Went into Baalbeck in the afternoon. Did a tour around the famous ruins of Baalbeck. Had a bath then a fine dinner from the cook house. It rained quite a lot.

18 Sunday. There are rumours of a big move soon and everything points to it, but just WHERE is the burning question. A lot say it is to Burma. The Japs are winning the War at present. Two British battleships, The Prince of Wales and the Repulse have been sunk off the Malaysian coast. The Japs are advancing on Singapore. Nobody is concerned about the situation here. However, it is very likely we will be sent to the Far East to help hold the Japs back.

Wrote letters to Ruth and Alison. We are having new engines put in our Carriers.

19 There is definitely a big move on somewhere. The camp is a buzz with all sorts of rumours now. So far I have heard everything from Australia. Burma, India to Malaya. Only time will tell.

20 Nothing doing today.

21 We have to take over guard duties from the 2/6 Battalion at the Ammunition Dump, a little way out of Baalbeck. There are fifty odd men on the guard. Myself and fourteen others from B Squadron are attached to A Squadron. I am in charge of the B Squadron party. In this party there are ten of my own troop and four others. We are all camped in comfortable barracks. The Serjeants are in one hut and the troops in three other huts. Guards have to be posted around the area but, with the numbers we have, they won't get a turn very often. It looks like being a bit of a bludge.

22 Four A Squadron Serjeants, including myself and some advance chaps, had a party last night. We all got a bit merry and there was a fair bit of noise. A "Pommy" Serjeant Major acting as orderly officer threatened to put us all under arrest if we didn't stop the noise. Eventually we did quieten down.

23 We learnt this morning that a certain number have been reported including the Regimental Serjeant Major of the area here. Nobody knows who is on the list so we will have to wait and see. Everyone thinks it's a big joke as the whole charge is ridiculous.

24 Sunday. Nothing doing today. Nothing more has been heard of the affair a couple of nights ago. Spent some time with my own troop yarning and playing cards.

25 This is the biggest bludge I have ever had. Nothing to do all day. I'll be glad when we get back to the Regiment.

26 We will be moving tomorrow.

- 27** Busy packing. We are moving back to Labboue. We start the first leg of the journey tomorrow, leaving at 0600 hours.
- 28** Left Labboue on time, bound for Palestine. We know that we are going that far, but from there on a mystery. Let's hope it is Australia, not that it is likely.
- One thing is for certain it will be a boat trip. We have said goodbye to Syria. Arrive at Haifa not far over the border at 1900 hours. Camped in the barracks for the night.
- 29** We are going the rest of the way by train. Left the transit camp at midday for the station and loaded our Carriers and trucks on flat tops, then looked around for carriages for ourselves. There were none! We had to ride in the cattle trucks! Left Haifa at 1400 hours. After a terrible trip we arrived at Al Majdal at 0400 hours on the 30th. We have taken fourteen hours to travel a little over one hundred miles and were bumped and bashed about all the way. We were not very happy. Arrived at Qastina at 0500 hours. We are back in the same camp when we arrived here two years ago. It looks like we will be here until we leave the Middle East.
- 30** Settling in. We had the rest of the day off.
- 31** I am Regiment Orderly Serjeant today. Numbers 2, 4 and 6 Troop have gone to Jericho for manoeuvres. Nobody has a clue what that is all about.

February

- 1** Nothing doing today. Caught up with some letter writing and washing. One thing, the weather down here is much warmer than Labboue.
- 2** More units are moving out to destinations unknown.
- 3** Some mail came in today, but I haven't received any for a month.
- 4** Serjeant of the Guard today. Went on duty at 1700 hours for 24 hours.
- 5** On guard duty all day until 1700 hours. Easy day today doing some maintenance on our Carriers with my troop. I am still acting troop leader. I have been for the last two months. Norm McLeod is still away.
- 7** Went for a short route march this morning.
- 8** Sunday. Went on church parade this morning. Wrote to Mum and Dad. The weather down here is glorious. A vast difference to Syria.
- 9** We began the day with hut inspection and handed in all our surplus gear. I am Serjeant of the Prowler Guard.
- 10** Moved to Julis Camp today. We have to guard most of the camp as all the troops have moved out. It looks as if we will be the last to leave. No trouble to get a seat at the pictures now, as it was when we were here last September.
- 11** Pay day. Not a lot to spend it on though.
- 12** Nothing doing these days, except preparing for our boat trip. We are still going to every place on the map according to the rumours!!

13 It is just two years today since we landed in this country. What a lot has happened in that time. And how much more will happen before we reach home again?

We had dinner in the Serjeant Mess this evening to celebrate our two years in the Middle East. We all got very merry, even I had more than I would normally have.

14 Nothing doing today. I am on Squadron Orderly Serjeant duties again.

15 Sunday. Went on church parade. Wrote some letters.

March

1 Two weeks have elapsed and very little has happened. We have been training with what equipment we have left. Our move has been postponed, for what reason we do not know. There has been no mail. Wrote a letter to Mum.

2 Serjeant of the Guard again today.

3 It doesn't seem as if it will be long now before we move.

4 We have learnt that we are going on Saturday. Where to is still unknown.

5 I am now a full Serjeant. My rank was confirmed from Army Headquarters yesterday. It is three and a half months since I became Troop Serjeant. Things like that move slowly in the Army. Of course, I have been drawing full pay for all the time, so it didn't make any difference.

6 It has rained most of the day. Outside is quite muddy and sloppy. We have been told that we are leaving at 0100 hours in the morning. Everyone seems to think it will be Burma. I wonder? We are all packed up and ready to go. It is hard to believe this will be our last day in Palestine. We leave at 0145 hours. Nobody has gone to bed. As I write, it is now 2300 hours and the lads of my troop are putting touches to their packs and as usual cracking jokes and going on with a lot of nonsense.

As I sit here waiting for our move my thoughts go to home and my family and many friends. Where will this move be to ...a little closer or perhaps a little further away? Are we really going to see them soon?

7 We have started on our journey and we got away on time. After quite an uneventful trip, we reached Kantara at 1230 hours on the Suez Canal. We had a meal there and crossed the Canal and boarded the train for Suez, or so we thought. Instead of going to Suez, we swung around at Ismalia and detrained at Qassassin about twenty miles from Ismalia. We then had to march about four miles to a camp set up in the desert. We were told we would be here about two days before moving on.

8 A day of rest.

9 No word of moving yet so rumours have been flying around. We have been doing rifle drill and marches ... all boring stuff, but we still have to keep fit and be prepared, for who knows what, at all times.

10 Still no word of a move and everyone is fed up.

11 We are off again today, leaving at 1600 hours. Where to, of course nobody knows, but it will probably be Suez. Let's hope it is straight on to the boat and there is no more mucking about. We left our camp at 1600 hours and marched to the station. The train left at 1800 hours. We arrived at Suez at 2230 hours where we camped the night at a transit camp. We are to board our ship in the morning. Three

drivers of each troop were not with us at this stage. They were looking after the Carriers and were going on a different ship at a different time. Our three drivers of No 5 Troop were Corporal Pat Morwood, Trooper Kevin Jonson and Trooper Dick Lynch.

- 12** Left the camp at 0900 hours. We had to march about four miles to the pier. It was extremely hot and dusty and hard going with full packs on. We had a few spells on the way and eventually reached the pier. We went aboard a Lighter (a small barge-like vessel) which took us out to our ship.

It is an American ship of 45,000 tons, built before the War as a passenger liner to compete against the "Queen Mary" on the Atlantic run. The American Navy had taken her over and converted her to a troop carrier. They installed a five inch gun, fore and aft of the ship. Captain Frank H. Kelly, United States Navy, is in command.

We eventually got aboard and after a lot of mucking around we were allocated a very small cabin for six of us. Serjeant Major Max Ramsay, Staff Sergeant Jack Moody from our Squadron Q Store, Serjeants Tom Pinnick, Joe Byrne, Harold Waugh, (who had been promoted to Lance Serjeant a few weeks ago but was still in my Troop and still doing the Troop Corporal's job) and myself. This cabin was originally the wireless operator center when the ship was a passenger liner. They ripped all that out and put in three tiers of bunks on each side. We drew matches for which bunk we would have. I drew a top bunk and was happy about that as it was nearest the ventilator where fresh air was forced down from above. We were eight decks down in the bowels of the ship. We were lucky to have a cabin; with 6,700 troops on this ship, most were given only enough space to sling a hammock at night on the decks and in the State Rooms which had been converted for this purpose. First thing of a morning they had to roll up their hammocks and stow them away. It was very crowded indeed.

We set sail at 1630 hours bound for the unknown, but all hoping it is for home! It took some time to find my way about and eventually find my troop, it was so congested.

- 13** We are now moving down the Red Sea but as yet we are not informed as to where we are going.

- 14** Sailing onwards, we are almost out of the Red Sea, but travelling without an escort. When we came from Australia we had at least ten warships with us. This is a very fast ship. It can do 32 knots, but presently we are cruising at 25 knots. At this speed it would be hard for a Sub to line her up, or, at least, that's what we all hope!! Rumour has it that we will be home in ten days. I hope so.

- 15** Sunday. We are getting used to the routine of the ship. Mess parades are just about continual throughout the day. It is all well organised and the meals are reasonable. There is no Serjeants Mess here so we must join the queue just like all the rest when it is our turn to go with our dixies and get a meal. We can however take our meal down to our cabin, so this is one little privilege we have as Serjeants.

- 16** Training, in way of exercises and drill were to have started today but it was found impossible to do this owing to the congestion of troops on the decks. It is actually posted on the ships notice board today that we will be in Fremantle on the 25th. WHAT MARVELLOUS NEWS ... it almost seems too good to be true. After being away from home for over two years, to see the shores of Australia again will be a wonderful moment. We know that this War is far from over. In fact it is going badly for us at present. There will be more fighting to do somewhere but a short stint at home can only lift the morale of all the boys.

Singapore has fallen and the Japanese are still advancing in the islands leading to Australia. We will certainly be needed to help stop that advance, and we are all confident this can be done. However, some leave for us will be great, to see our families and friends. We are hoping for four weeks leave. It will take all of that time for our Carriers and trucks to catch up to us. They were leaving later than us and sailing in slower transports.

Today we received some pay. There are plenty of two up and card games going on up on the decks. Plenty of money is changing hands. We have been playing cards in our cabin but not for money, just to pass the time away.

We are now in the Indian Ocean and travelling south down the coast of Africa. This is to avoid any Japanese submarines or warships. During the day our course is altered slightly every two minutes. This is to avoid any torpedoes that might be lined up on us from a sub up ahead. At night we run a straight course with a blacked out ship.

- 17** Another day is drawing to a close so one day nearer to home.
- 18** Crossed the Equator at 0700 hours this morning. It is very hot. We catch a breeze up on the top decks, but it is terribly crowded.
- 19** Up until today the sea has been as calm as a mill pond, but now there is a fair swell on and the ship is rolling and tossing. Hope I don't get sea sick.
- 20** We are now well down the coast of Africa, but still sailing south. The ship's crew had some firing practise with their 5 inch guns. They stopped the ship and dropped a target then went away a few miles and blazed away at it. At the finish of practise they were getting close to the target. We must be well out of the range of subs now or they wouldn't be stopping the ship. The ship is rolling but I haven't been sick. Quite a few have been though.
- 21** Another day closer to home. The sea is still rolling but I am going alright. Only four more days and we will be in Fremantle. What a wonderful sight it will be to see the old home land again.
- 22** Sunday. A day closer to home. The sea is calmer today but we are going into a head wind so are losing a bit of time. However we should reach Australia in three days time.
- 23** Only two days to go. The sea is very calm. There are all sorts of rumours as to when we reach Fremantle. Some say not until Thursday morning and others say early Wednesday. Of course they are only guessing.
- Only one more day to go until we reach Fremantle, then on to Melbourne, I hope! Everyone will be glad, as this is getting very monotonous with nothing to do.
- 25** Australia at last! We arrived at Fremantle this afternoon and what a glorious sight it was to see the coast of Australia loom on the horizon. How fresh and clean looking everything is after the dirt and drabness of the Middle East. What a feeling of relief and thankfulness after crossing the Indian Ocean, alone and unescorted. All Western Australian personnel were allowed to disembark and were granted a mere seven days leave. Now let us hope it is Melbourne next port!
- 26** Mail arrived on board this morning. I received seven letters, from Alison, Win, Una Dale with a canteen order, Mum & Dad, Marj and Ruth. Some of them had taken a while to catch up with me. One was dated 25 February. It was great to get some mail from the folks at home. The folks at this stage have

no idea where we are. This mail would have been addressed "Abroad". The Army postal service would have redirected it to meet this ship.

- 27** We are well on our way again heading for the East. Rumour has it that we are going to Adelaide, however rumour is seldom right, even though this is a very strong one.

Later - rumour is right, we have been officially notified that we will disembark at Adelaide.

- 28** Feeling off colour today, haven't eaten anything since yesterday, I hope it is nothing serious. Everyone is excited at the prospect of getting some leave, even though it will be only a small portion of what we are entitled too. However we realise that things are very serious on the war situation at the moment and that winning the war is top priority.

- 29** We will be arriving at Adelaide some time tomorrow.

- 30** Arrived Adelaide at about midday. Disembarked at 1400 hours. So at last we set foot on good old Aussie soil, a great feeling. We boarded a train and even yet we don't know where we are bound for. We arrived at Tanunda a small town in the Barossa Valley about thirty miles from Adelaide. We are going to be billeted here. The "powers that be" haven't any camps ready for us.

All the big permanent camps are full, with new recruits because of Japan's entry into the War. Most of the Regiment are billeted in private homes, either individually or in groups of two or three. I am in the remaining fifty and we are camped in the Public Hall. A cook house has been set up and we are quite comfortable. I would have preferred a private home and the comforts of home life but that was the luck of the draw. Wrote letters to Mum & Dad, Win and Alison.

It was now we could inform our folks at home that we were back in Australia and hoped to see them soon when we received some leave. What a surprise this will be for them!

- 31** This is a nice little town, most of the people are of German decent. Their ancestors migrated here towards the end of the last century. They are true Australians now and treated us all wonderfully. All the South Australians went on seven days leave. We hope to get ours soon.

April

- 1** Rostered on Regiment Orderly Serjeant duty today. Still feeling sick and have a heavy cold.

- 2** It seems we won't get leave for a while yet owing to lack of transport.

- 3** Went on Sick Parade this morning. The Medical Officer put me on light duties and told me to take it easy for a few days.

- 4** Still feeling bad.

- 5** Feeling much worse. Reported to the Medical Officer (Captain Saurey). He has diagnosed malaria!

I was evacuated to 9th Australian General Hospital later in the day and informed that I had pneumonia.

- 12** A week has now gone by and I recall very little of it. The Sister in charge of the ward said I had been very ill. I was vomiting a lot and couldn't keep the M and B tablets down. These tablets were intended to cleanse the blood. However today is the first day I have started to take notice of things.

- 13** Feeling a little better. Received a letter from Ruth. That cheered me up no end.

- 14** I am slowly getting better and starting to get my appetite back.
- 15** Wrote to Mum and Dad, it was quite an effort.
- 16** Sat up in a chair for a few hours today. Wrote to Ruth.
- 17** Up again today, I walked a few yards but I was very groggy. Still, I am improving.
- 19** Recovering like wild fire now. Eating well and starting to walk around. I still have a pain in the back.
- 21** A bus load of patients like myself who are recovering were taken for a drive up into the hills around Adelaide. It was great. There were Red Cross Ladies attending to our needs. Two Sisters from 9th Australian General Hospital came as well.
- 22** Discharged from 9th Australian General Hospital to a Convalescent Camp. The Camp was a Boys College in the suburb of Unley.
- I have heard that the boys of the Unit are all going on leave, then will re-assemble in New South Wales afterwards. Goodness knows when I will get my leave and catch up to them.
- 25** All we do here is some light P.T, then a short route march around a few streets of a morning, then we are free to do what we like of an afternoon. Of course there is no leave into the main part of Adelaide. They do have a picture show here most nights. I have been catching up on my letter writing. I am eating well and gradually putting on some weight. I am eager to get out of the place and away on leave. I have been told that the minimum time here is one week, then of course you have to be passed fit enough by the doctor in charge to be discharged. I have hopes it is only one week I spend here.
- 29** Went before the Medical Officer this morning and was passed fit for discharge. Great stuff. Went by truck with a few other chaps to a Transit Camp on the outskirts of Adelaide. Will have to await transit, then back to my Regiment. How long that will be is anyone's guess.
- 30** After arriving in this Camp last night I learnt that the Officer in charge is Captain Mick Hurrey. Mick was an original officer of our unit. He was Troop Leader of No. 2 Troop around Giarabub, then later when we received our full equipment, was made Troop Leader of No. 1 Tank Troop. In Syria his Tank ran over some mines, Mick had the turret open, lucky for him. His driver was killed, but Mick was thrown clear. He was injured, but not seriously. Because of the blast from the mines he suffered a permanent hearing loss. He was made B.2 which meant unfit for front line service, so he could not return to the Regiment, hence his job here at the Officer Commanding Transit Camp. Of course, this was great news for me, because I knew he would pass me through this Camp as quickly as possible. I paraded myself before him and he was very pleased to see me. He assured me he would get me away on my seven days leave as quickly as possible. I did not expect this as I thought I would have to return to the Regiment first before getting leave.

Of course he would have had my papers from the Convalescent Camp which would have had stamped on them, "Return to Unit". I am sure he did me a special favour in granting me leave so soon. That afternoon I was called back to his office, he informed me he had a seat for me and two other Victorians on a Troop Train leaving that evening for New South Wales. The best news I had heard in a long time. He really must have whispered in the Rail Transport Officers ear at Adelaide Station. I will never forget his kindness in getting me away so quickly.

The three of us were driven into Central Station at about 1630 hours and reported to the Rail Transport Officer. He informed us the train was bound for New South Wales and wouldn't be going into Spencer Street. We would have to get off at Sunshine and make our own arrangements from there. This would be in the early hours of the morning so we would probably need to camp on the station until the first morning train.

May

- 1 We arrived at Sunshine at about 0400 hours after travelling all night with very little sleep. This did not worry me at all. I was heading for home! There was a porter on duty at Sunshine, who informed us there was a shunter going into Spencer St in a few minutes time. He would arrange a ride on that if we wanted it.

We sure did. The three of us, with our kit bags, clambered up in the dirty old shunting engine. It was a bit of a squeeze, but it was getting us nearer to home. A bit after 4.30 a.m., we arrived at Spencer Station, Melbourne.

The first thing we did was head for the toilets to get some of the dirt and grime off and freshen ourselves up.

Then we looked for a taxi. We didn't really expect to find one at this hour of the morning, but to our surprise we did. I wanted to go to Burwood to my sister Elsie's place. The other two chaps were going north and east of the city. The taxi driver said he would drop me off first. It must have been nearly 5.30 a.m. when we arrived at Elsie's. She was sure in for a surprise, but I knew I would be very welcome even at that hour.

There was great excitement, even the three children, Elaine, Jean and Bill woke up and joined in. Elsie's husband Bill Smart was away up country somewhere with his Boring Plant. Elsie cooked me some breakfast, then I had a sleep for the rest of the morning.

Whilst I was sleeping Elsie rang Alison Power to come over and meet me in the afternoon. Alison was a second or third cousin of ours but I had never met her before. It was Elsie who had given her my address and she had written me many kind letters while I was in the Middle East. She was quite an attractive girl, about nineteen years of age. Late in the afternoon I walked her to her bus stop. We didn't hit it off too well with one another. She was a real city girl and I, a dyed-in-the-wool country bloke. As far as I was concerned, never the twain shall meet ... and it appeared to be true in this case!

(Alison did write to me again a few weeks later but I must admit that I did not reply. I had so many people to write to and I just couldn't see what we had in common. I hoped I had not offended her, but surely she was of the same opinion)

Now I had to make arrangements to get home to Mansfield. Elsie rang Dueran Station in the evening. They assured her somebody would meet the coach next day at Mansfield.

- 2 Up early in the morning and caught a tram to Flinders Street, then caught a train to Lilydale where the coach started its trip to Mansfield. Arrived in Mansfield about 1300 hours. Mum and Dad were there to meet me. What a wonderful sight it was to see their smiling faces. It has been two and a half years since I have seen them. They now had a model T Ford. Bill Smart had got it for them. This was luxury for them after the old spring cart. The old home was ten miles away at Blue Range Creek, but sitting

back in the T Ford it hardly took any time at all. It was such a marvellous feeling to see it again and I couldn't get over how well the country looked.

- 3** I had many friends around Bridge Creek and Dueran I wanted to visit. Petrol rationing was now in so I could not borrow the old Ford from Dad. There was still the old push bike though and that's what I used to get around. I only had a limited number of days. Mick Hurrey was very generous with the leave pass he gave me. Seven days leave started when one reached home, travelling each way didn't count.

On studying the leave pass I found I did not have to report back to Watsonia Transit Camp in Melbourne until the 13th May. He had allowed another week for travelling. Good old Mick!

One of the first places I visited was Dueran Station, the place I worked for four years before joining up. Mr Lester was very pleased to see me and of course I was delighted to see him. He assured me my job would be waiting when I came back after discharge.

Joan Stephens who had written me many letters, was the only one on the staff at Dueran that I knew, so I had a long talk to her. Winnie, her sister had joined the W.A.A.F. and was up at Lake Boga. I was disappointed about that and I couldn't see how I could make enough time to get up there to see her. The Stephens family had moved to Shepparton so I missed them too. My sister Ruth had joined the land Army and was working on a sheep station at Casterton in the Western District of Victoria. My other sister Marj is in Brighton. I plan to look her up when I get back to Melbourne. I visited the Dales at Bridge Creek, also Mrs Perrin and the Hemsley's.

My Mum and Dad's farm was 940 acres. They had cleared and ringbarked about 100 acres or more, the remainder was bush. They ran four to five hundred sheep, milked a few cows and as well, my father still found plenty of work about when he wanted it, in the carpentry trade.

I took many long walks through the bush and soaked up the surroundings. As a boy I spent a lot of time in the bush rabbiting and hunting kangaroos with a pack of dogs. I loved the bush and these walks I was doing now were helping me to get my strength back.

- 11** My leave seems to have gone very quickly. Mum and Dad drove me to Mansfield to catch the coach for Melbourne. It was sad saying goodbye to them, not knowing what lay ahead. I can only hope and pray that it is not two and a half years before I see them again.

Arrived back in Melbourne and went out to Burwood to stop the night with Elsie.

- 12** Went to Brighton and visited my sister Marj. It was good to see her again. She now works for a doctor. She can only do light work as she has a lot of ill health. In the afternoon I went into the city for a look around. The city is full of people in uniform. Thousands of "Yanks" as well as our own troops. Nobody I knew. The Regiment, of course, is now in Ingleburn, New South Wales. They would have finished there leave before I started mine. Seeing all these troops in the city gave me a yearning to get back to the Regiment and all the great mates I have there. Went back to Burwood and stayed my last night with Elsie and the children.

- 13** Up early, had to be at Watsonia by 0800 hours to answer roll call. This I did with time to spare. My name was not on draft for today's troop train. I collected a leave pass for the day and went into the city. Stayed the night at the Y.M.C.A.

- 14** Out to Watsonia for 0800 hr roll call again. This time my name was on the draft for Ingleburn and I was happy about that. Hung around the camp all day. At about 1600 hours we were taken by truck to

Spencer Street Station and boarded the troop train. There would have been around three hundred troops on it. It was a sit up job all night. We reached Albury at about 2000 hours. We had to change trains because of the different rail gauge. We had the usual railway meal there of sausages and mash!

Next morning at about 0630 hours we stopped at another small country station for the same again, sausages and mash for breakfast.

- 15** Pulled into Ingleburn at about 1000 hours. We marched from the station to the camp which wasn't all that far. This was the same camp we left on January 10, 1940 to go overseas. It was much bigger now though and had seen many troops pass through its gates.

I reported into Regimental Head Quarters then B Squadron Head Quarters where I was given a rousing welcome back. It was sure great to be back with my mates.

The first thing I did was to go to my No 5 Troop who had just got back from a route march. I had been informed about this already at Head Quarters. I walked into their hut and yelled at them, "Come on you bludgers, on your feet, you have to go on a route march!" Even with my most serious look I didn't frighten them one bit. They knew I was kidding and trying to pull the wool over their eyes.

It was sure terrific to see them, Harold Waugh, Pat Marwood, Kevin Jonson, Dick Lynch, Bill Petschack, Bob Shegog, Harry Beckett, Sailor Livingstone, Lionel George and Gordon McAlphine were now in our troop. The three drivers, Kevin, Pat and Dick had only returned from their leave two days ago. They arrived in Sydney with our Carriers and trucks from the Middle East towards the end of April.

There was much to talk about and catch up on, especially with the three drivers whom I hadn't seen since leaving the Middle East.

On the home front, for the first time since the "Japs" had entered the War, there was good news. Last week on the 8th May the "Yanks" had a good victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea. For the time being, this took some pressure off the likelihood of the "Japs" invading Australia. However there is still a long, long way to go and, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, one can't be too sure of what they might have up their sleeve. But one thing is for certain, we are all very confident that we will win this war no matter how long it takes.



Bill Petschack

- 16** Back to the same old grind of a permanent camp life. Parades, guard duties, maintenance and manoeuvres. We are occasionally granted night leave to Sydney which is only twenty five miles away. There is also some day leave granted on weekends. So all together, things are going pretty well. However we know it won't last long.

There is talk of us heading north in the near future. Perhaps the Northern Territory because the "Japs" could land up there at anytime. In the meantime we will make the best of our time here.

One piece of news that has just filtered through is that two "Jap" midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour, but were soon destroyed before they did any harm.

- 17-30** Plenty of mail from family and friends. Now that we are back in Australia it only takes a few days to arrive instead of weeks. Of course receiving letters means writing letters so this keeps me very busy some evenings.

We now have the Carriers in working order again after their long boat trip. So we are doing a few exercises out in the country with them.

Ingleburn is a very comfortable camp, much improved from when we were first here.

Of course I now have the extra comforts of the Serjeant's Mess and Quarters. Plenty of hot water for showers, a nice quiet room for writing, a bar in the Mess and a well equipped recreation room.

I have mated up with a fellow Serjeant by the name of Tom Pinnick. Tom came from near Echuca. He was a fine chap. He knew of a quiet pub in Bronte where we could get a room on a Saturday night, with not many Yanks, and plenty of beer. It wasn't every Saturday night because on occasions one of us would cop guard duty or some other duty. I didn't try to keep up to him as far as the beer drinking went, but I did have more than I usually had.

Tom also knew a family in Bronte by the name of O'Halloran. There were two daughters, Alison and Josephine. Alison was about twenty three and Josephine nineteen. We visited them occasionally when we could get night leave during the week. On this leave we always had to be back in camp by midnight. Tom would take Alison and I would take Josie. It was usually pictures or a trip around the harbour on the ferry. We usually went our separate ways but we always had those girls home by 2300 hours because we had to get back to Central Station to catch the last train back to camp. They came from a very strict Catholic family so we had to behave ourselves and have them home by a certain time anyway.

- 31 The days are moving by, no news of a move for us yet, but I am sure it won't be long before we are heading north. In the meantime, camp life goes on just the same. We still haven't an Officer for No 5 Troop. So I am still Troop Leader as well as Troop Serjeant. This keeps me busy. As well as this, I still cop the usual duties such as Regiment Orderly Serjeant, Orderly Serjeant and Serjeant of the Guard.

June

- 7 We have been informed that in the near future we will be heading up to the Northern Territory. Most leave has now stopped. Tom and I have said our goodbyes to the O'Halloran girls but, of course, we couldn't say when or where we were going.

I have had lots of letters from my family and friends while here and spent many nights busy answering them all. I haven't mentioned anything about moving. All outward mail is censored anyway.

- 12 Today we have learnt of another great naval victory for the "Yanks" at the Battle of Midway. Now we have really turned the corner on the way to final victory.

- 15 Today we have learnt that we will be moving out on the 19th. We are busy packing up, storing food and equipment on our carriers.

- 19 At 0800 hours we moved out of Ingleburn Camp with our Carriers and trucks to Campbelltown Station where we loaded them on flat top trucks. It took three trains for the whole Regiment. The day was cold and wet and it took several hours before all were loaded. B Squadron was on the last train, so it was late in the evening before our train moved out. We travelled on the flat tops with our Carriers. We had about ten feet of spare space between two of the Carriers where we rigged a tarp up for our sleeping quarters. We were in for a long hard trip and a dirty one, as the tarp couldn't keep out the soot and grime from the old steam train. It took two days to reach Brisbane. The Railways supplied us with

meals, mainly the old "sausages and mash" along the way. While travelling we would boil the billy on our primus stove and have a biscuit or two from the tucker box. This would pass the time quite nicely.

- 21** We arrived in Brisbane in the late afternoon. We unloaded everything and reloaded it all onto Queensland flat tops because of the different gauge of tracks in Queensland. It was late at night before we finished loading.
- 22** In the early hours of the morning we set off on the long haul to Mt. Isa crawling up the coast of Queensland. The engines coughed out more soot and grime than the New South Wales ones. We carried several water tins on the Carriers so we had a sponge down wash occasionally. It didn't seem to get much of the grime off and it didn't take long to get dirty all over again.
- 25** We have reached Townsville. The boys managed to find some beer from a truck in a siding. I didn't enquire too closely how they got it. Sometimes it paid to keep your eyes closed or even a little diverted! I know I helped them drink it and it sure was good to wash down all the soot and grime from the long trip.

Bob Read, who was our first Serjeant Major and now the Regimental Serjeant Major, found some beer too. Bob was an engine driver in civvy life. Bob took a few bottles up to the engine of our train and soon kidded the driver to let him have a go. I am sure we must have broken all records for the fastest trip between Townsville and Charters Towers. The brakes weren't quite good enough and on reaching the station at Charters we bumped into the rear of a stationery train. Luckily no damage was done but I am sure all evidence of any grog was quickly disposed of.

- 26** After leaving Charters Towers we started crossing the great western plains of outback Queensland. Railway stations were few and far between, as were the sheep and the cattle stations. The only life we saw was plenty of kangaroos and emus.

- 27** The engine drivers were much more causal now. They would pull up anywhere along the track and we would go up to the engine with our billys to get boiling water for tea. This saved us from lighting the primus. After we passed Hughenden we were into the hot bore country. The driver would stop beside one of these artesian bores and we would all strip off and have a good bath.



Bath time on the way up to the Northern Territory. Hot water from a bore somewhere between Hughenden and Cloncurry in Queensland.

- 28** Reached Cloncurry in the morning and were told it would be two hours before we left so we went for a walk down the middle of the main street. It was dry and dusty, not many shops and the pubs were shut as they were rationed on beer so they didn't open until the afternoon. So we left Cloncurry with a very "dry" impression of the place.
- 29** Finally reached Mt. Isa at the end of the line. We unloaded all our equipment. There was an American Army Transport Company waiting to take us on. We loaded our Carriers onto big ten wheeled trucks. This Company was comprised mainly of Negro personnel with white Officers.

We camped the night at Mt. Isa on the outskirts of the town. We did find a pub selling some beer to wash down the dust of the trip but little did we know just how much dust lay ahead!

- 30 We set off early in the morning. All Cavalry personnel were travelling in 4.5 ton, covered trucks driven by Negro drivers. They didn't have a clue what convoy driving was all about. The main trouble, of course, was the dust. This was just a dirt track and it was the dry season. (Not a lovely road like the one that my good friend Clive Dunn and I drove on 43 years later, on our trip around Australia). These 'Bong' drivers of course, were scared of getting lost if they didn't keep up to the trucks in front. The dust, of course, was terrible, so we had other ideas about keeping up close to the truck in front. We would yell at him and threaten to kick him out of the driver's seat if he didn't keep back out of the dust. He would for a while, then, down would go his foot on the throttle and into the dust again. We were sure glad when we stopped for the night and camped at a little station homestead called Barkly Station. They had plenty of water there from a bore so we were able to have a good wash.

July

- 1 Another hard long day and plenty of dust. Met the Stuart Highway at Three Ways. It was in the process of being constructed and sealed from Larimah to Alice Springs by an American Construction Company. We spent the day still eating dust and camped the night again at Helen Springs.

- 2 Not far to go now. Reached Larimah just after midday and were sure glad to say good bye to those Negro drivers.

Larimah is the end of the rail line from Darwin, and we are to load our Carriers on flat tops again. However, there are no flat-tops here so we have to wait until they arrive. The country around here is mainly light scrub and I imagine the rainfall wouldn't be very high. The nights are fairly cold here as we are still a long way inland, however, the days are beautiful and warm. Of course, we have long since discarded our winter uniforms that we had in Sydney. It's mainly just shirts and shorts here.

- 3 We have been informed we will have to wait a few days before the flat tops arrive. Just as well the "Japs" are not landing at Darwin!

- 6 Idling away the days waiting for the flat tops. We could have driven the Carriers all the way there by now. No mail since leaving Sydney. Hope there will be lots waiting for us when we reach our new camp.

- 7 The rail trucks arrived at last! We soon got them loaded and the trains set off in the late evening. Travelled all night.

- 8 Some excitement this morning. One truck loaded with drums of fuel on our train developed a hot box on one of its wheels and caught fire. We had to fire a few shots past the engine driver to catch his attention. Once he stopped the train there was a flurry of activity to get the fire extinguishers from our Carriers. The fire was quickly put out. Should it have gone unobserved for any further length of time it could have been disastrous.

We arrived at Brooks Creek at about 1600 hours, unloaded and camped the night there.

- 9 Set off early in the morning for Green Ant Creek, the site for our new camp about thirty miles away. It was only a rough track, so it was midday before we arrived. It was a very pleasant spot with plenty of clear running water. We had to set to in making a camp. We got most of the tents up in the afternoon. It was great to have a bath in fresh running water

Mail had arrived and it was wonderful to get news from the folks at home. Received letters from Win and Joan Stephens, and their brother Jack who is still in the Middle East with the 9 Division Cavalry.

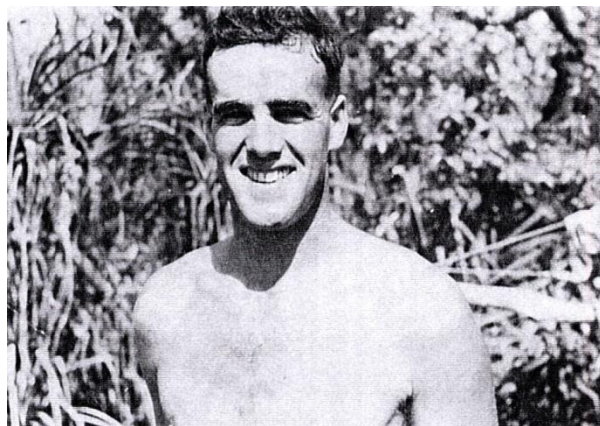
10-30 We set to work and over the next two weeks we built ourselves a comfortable camp.

The mess huts were built mainly out of bush timber. The bamboo that grew on the creek edge was very handy for making beds, but we had to split it first.

We even managed to build showers with water being pumped from the creek.

Patrols were already going out checking the country around us, so we would be familiar with it.

No. 5 Troop at last have a newly appointed Troop Leader, Lieutenant Kon Riedel. Our last one was Norm McLeod back in Syria. We also have a new Sergeant by the name of Jeff Bate. He was still a member of the NSW State Parliament at the time of joining up.



Tarzan of the Territory - VX259 Sjt O H Stafford

(In later years after the War, he served as a member of the Federal Parliament for many years. In the late 60's he married the widow of Prime Minister Holt, Sara Holt.). Jeff was a happy go-lucky, jovial chap and could crack a good joke. I shared a tent with him and got to know him well. However he was only with us for about four weeks when he was transferred to the Armoured Division and gained a Commission.

August

1 Our new Troop Leader Kon Riedel has only been with us two weeks and now he has also been transferred to the Armoured Division.

I was only just getting to know him. Now I am back as Troop Leader and Troop Sergeant. I am sure the Army is trying to do things on the cheap. The correct establishment of a troop is one Lieutenant, one Serjeant and three Corporals, so the pay is a good deal less.

Harold Waugh is the Lance Serjeant. He is doing the job of the Troop Corporal and on the same pay.

The weather up here is beautiful; lovely warm days, everyday the same, no rain, no clouds.

2 It is now the dry season. There will be no rain until November. The nights are mild and we only need a blanket. We are about one hundred miles south of Darwin and about twenty five miles west of the highway. All of the 6th Division is in this area from here to Darwin.

There was a big Divisional Parade, at Batchelor. Major General Herring addressed the Parade. He welcomed us to the Northern Territory. He said we were here to defend the area if the Japanese landed and that we should never forget that this was still a big possibility. Should this be the case, we knew there would be no retreat! He wished us the best of luck and said he was very proud to be our leader.

Our Regiment is to defend and patrol the Daly River. The river is a very big tidal river with tides coming forty to fifty miles inland. If the "Japs" did land, one obvious spot would be the mouth of the Daly River where they would come up the river on barges, with the fast flowing tide.

There were several defensive posts set up along the river from the mouth to about twenty miles inland. This was the area that had to be defended. A Squadron went out there on the 15 July. There will be one Squadron out there all the time for a month, then they change over. Its my Squadron's turn next.

- 15** B Squadron is moving out to take over from A Squadron on the Daly River. The going was rather rough and dusty through the bush on the trip out. We reached Litchfield Homestead in the early afternoon. Litchfield Homestead is a tumbled down old place built of galvanised iron and has not been lived in for some time. It is to become B Squadron's Headquarters. The Daly River is still several miles further on from the Homestead.

We have set up camp at Litchfield for the night. Each troop has to cook for themselves. There is no cook house or Serjeant's Mess out here.

In our troop, we have started a fund for the tucker box ... just a few shillings a week each. With this we will be able to buy extra sugar, tinned fruit, cheese and biscuits. A few weeks earlier a couple of our troop, (Kevin Jonson and Dick Lynch) were sent back to Base for some stores. On that trip they 'raided' a Yankee Supply Dept and came back with tinned fruit and other odds and ends. So our Tucker Boxes were well stocked up already. Of course we get our usual rations from the Q. Store. As well as that we have been informed we will get a regular ration of fresh beef. Mr & Mrs Byrnes, the owners of Tipperary Station have given the Squadron out on patrol, permission to kill a beast as required to distribute among the troops. It looks like we are going to live very well. As well as all this, the Northern Territory is a sportsman's paradise - wild pigs, turkeys, magpie, geese and plenty of fish in the streams that run into the Daly River. What a contrast to the desert in North Africa!

"Tipperary" is a big Cattle Station. There are miles of good grazing country along the Daly River, open range country, free of scrub and timber.

(I don't know how many acres it consisted of or how many cattle it carried in 1942, but in 1985 on a trip around Australia with my mate Clive Dunn, we visited the station and had a talk with the Manager. It was very interesting. In the 60's they started off experimenting with growing various crops, most of these were not successful. They concentrated on pasture improvement to run as many cattle as possible. Before we left, the Manager gave us a brochure about the station. It now covers an area of 2,214 square miles (1,416,787 acres). At any given time it runs well over 30,000 head of cattle, plus some buffalo. Its average rainfall is 46 inches. They do grow some crops of sorghum and sugardrip, a total of 650 acres. There was still a lot of scrub country as we knew it in 1942, only light scrub with good grazing for cattle.)



No 5 Troop, B Sqn, 6 Div Cav. Somewhere on Tipperary Station, Northern Territory. (L to R) rear : Osie, Lionel George, Bob Shegog, Sailor Livingstone, Dick Lynch, seated : Tich ?, Bill Petschack, Harold Waugh

- 16** The Squadron had set up four defence posts along the Daly River from the mouth to about twenty miles inland. One troop was stationed at each post. Numbers 1,2, 3 and 6 troop were going out to the Daly

River to take over these posts. No. 5 Troop (our troop) and Mr Ryrie's No. 4 troop were staying with Squadron Head Quarters at Litchfield for the time being.

My troop, at this time consists of myself as Troop Leader and Troop Serjeant. Hal Waugh as Lance Serjeant, Troop Corporal and Crew Commander of No. 2 Carrier and Corporal Pat Marwood as Crew Commander of No. 3 Carrier. In my Carrier, with the wireless, I had Bob Shegog as Wireless operator and Kevin Jonson as driver. The remainder of the troops were placed in the other two Carriers. The two drivers were 'Sailor' Livingston and Dick Lynch. There were also Bill Petschack, Lionel George, Gordon McAlphine and Harry Beckett.

- 17** The Squadron Leader called up Ted Ryrie and myself this morning to inform us we could go out on a patrol for three days to get used to the country. This was great news. We went back to our troops and told them to get packing. We would need extra petrol, rations and ammunition. We moved out at 1330 hours. All six Carriers as happy as sand boys! We thought we would be stuck at Squadron Head Quarters until it was our turn to go on outpost duty.

We camped the first night beside a small creek. On its banks grew fairly big paper bark trees. We soon had a good fire going and we would sure need it to keep the mosquitoes away. They were terrible. We have been issued with mosquito nets, so we should be able to get a good nights sleep. One of the boys had shot a wild pig in the afternoon, so we were having roast pork for supper followed by tinned fruit, thanks to Kevin and Dick relieving the U.S.A. Army of some of their supplies!

- 18** We set off early in the morning and went out to some of the open country that adjoins the Daly River. The grass is five to six feet high in places. It is dry now as this is the dry season. The grass will be burnt in October before the wet season begins.

The magpie geese come on to these plains in their thousands to feed. They would get a lot of seed from the grass. It is hard to get close enough to shoot them as they can hear us coming. They fly overhead in big mobs. The boys brought down three with the Bren gun so it looks like roast goose for tea tonight!

In the afternoon we received a call on the Wireless from Squadron Head Quarters to return to Litchfield. We were to have had another day. There must be some job for us.

Arrived back at camp base late in the evening. They have drawn up a new roster for the Out Post duty. We have to go out on the 20th August to the No. 4 Post about twenty miles from the sea.

- 19** Mail came in today. I received many letters - Mum and Dad and all the family. Also one from Win and Joan Stephens and Marion Hemsley who is still at Teachers College. There was also a cake from Mum. It was packed in a tin so it arrived in good order. Its wonderful to get all these letters. I'll have plenty of time out on the Daly to answer them. Today we are busy servicing the Carriers and packing them with rations, fuel and supplies for our week out on the river.

- 20** Set off from Squadron Head Quarters at 0830 hours and arrived at No. 4 post around 1030 hrs. No. 6 Troop were there with Lieutenant Rus Purbrick, the Troop Leader. He handed over to me, then set off back to Squadron Head Quarters. One of our jobs out here is to record the tides. No. 6. Troop had put a fifteen foot pole, marked off in feet, down the bank of the river. We had to record on a chart the rise and fall of the river twice a day. At low tide the water was fifteen feet down from the top of the bank. At high tide it was only three feet down. This meant a rise and fall of twelve feet twice a day. Because

of this fast flowing water up and down the river, the water was always muddy. There would be no swimming for us! Anyway, there were always plenty of crocodiles going up and down with the tide.

We have been informed that there are plenty of sharks. We were also told that some very high tides had been known to come over the bank. No. 6 Troop had built their bunks about a foot off the ground. I decided they were not nearly high enough. I sent Pat Marwood with his crew and carrier to get some timber we could see growing up the river. They got some straight poles and also some bamboo. There were a fair clump of trees where we were camped but they were twisty old paper barks. Pat arrived back a couple of hours later with the carrier well loaded with poles and bamboo. We set to work and made our bunks about three feet from the ground. The bamboo had to be split into narrow slats to form the base of the bed. With a blanket spread on that our bed was made. With another blanket to pull over us and a spare pack with a few spare clothes in it to make a comfortable pillow.

The mosquito net was suspended from a ridge pole above the bed. We sure needed that. There were no mossies in the day time, but as soon as the sun went down they came in their thousands. Big black ones about twice the size of the ones down south and could they bite!! They are a bloody nuisance! We tried rubbing stuff on that we were issued with but it was useless. The only way to get away from them was to get under the net. Luckily some of the boys had candles so when we got under the net the first job was to light the candle and with it burn any mossies. It was very effective, but one had to be very careful not to hold the flame too close otherwise a hole in the net would result.

We had plenty of wood from the old paper barks for our camp fire so we did try putting green leaves on it to try to keep the mossies away. I think the smoke was worse than the mossies!! We always made sure we finished our evening meal before sunset which wasn't far off 1800 hrs. Here in the Northern Territory the days never varied in length more than one hour throughout the year. So sunrise or sunset was never far away from 0600 and 1800 hrs.

Dick Lynch was our main cook and all the boys took it in turns to help him. Even I took a turn occasionally. Dick had scrounged a big empty biscuit tin from the Q. store and turned it into an oven. It was set into mud bricks, stones and some flat iron he found at Litchfield Station. It was a real work of art and what's more it performed beautifully.

Cooking utensils were non existent so he made a baking dish from another small biscuit tin. Many a roast goose, turkey, and piece of beef came out of that oven tasting magnificent.

- 21** The Daly was at least three hundred yards across in this area. The bank opposite us sloped back a lot more than on our side. At low tide a big sand bank became exposed. In the morning, or when it was low tide in the day time, there would be two or three crocs come out and sun baking on the sand. They made good target practise for us. We had permission to use a certain amount of ammunition for game and target practice. It was the Vickers heavy machine gun that we used on crocodiles. We would only get in a couple of bursts of fire and the crocs would be back in the water. We knew that some of them had to be hit by the sand that flew up around them from the burst of fire. It would be impossible to stop a croc unless you hit it in the brain or the heart, and even then, being so close to the water, their reflexes would take them in.

(In later days at high tide or when the tide was running out fast we would see a dead crocodile floating down stream. We knew it could be one of ours or the troops further down the river).

Fishing was another thing the boys spent their time at. This time we only had light lines so they were not much use in the Daly where we knew there were big catfish and sharks. The first thing Kevin Jonson did was to write home to his family to send him up some heavy fishing tackle.

Kevin did manage to catch a small shark about two feet long that made excellent eating. Somebody else caught a small catfish but it wasn't much to eat. The good fish like the barramundi were not in these waters. They were many miles up stream in clean water, free from the effects of the tide. Every evening, a bit before sunset, enormous mobs of magpie geese would fly over us. They would be very high up so we didn't waste any ammunition on them. They were going to their camping grounds further inland. Next morning they would be back to feed on the river flats. It was then we got the odd one to make a meal.

23 The days are going fast. It is hard to realise that a terrible War is on in this very peaceful spot. However we are still aware of the fact that those bloody terrible "Japs" could still land here. We certainly don't lose any sleep over that fact. We will enjoy what we have at the present which is the best living conditions we have had since the War started.

24 The Squadron 3 tonner paid us a visit today with supplies and more mail. I have just caught up with answering the last lot. The truck will take our outward mail back for censoring and posting.

I received another two letters from Ruth and Win. Winnie is a cook in the WAAAF at Lake Boga, a Catalina flying base.

One job I have to do every afternoon is to report to Squadron Head Quarters on the Wireless. This is not done by talking, but by Morse Code. The message is first put into a secret code from a code book I have with me, then transmitted. This of course is to prevent any Japs who may be listening, gaining any information.

Bob Shegog is the Wireless Operator. The practice is good for him and he is improving with his Morse sending. One disadvantage here, is the bad reception over the wireless due to iron stone hills not far away.

Over in the Middle East we could pick up various cities in Egypt, Syria and at times, Rome. The only thing we can receive here is Head Quarters and if they were more than twenty miles away I doubt if we would get them. The only way we can get news now is from papers which may be two to three weeks old. Regimental Head Quarters has promised to send out a bulletin twice a week - we haven't seen one yet, but we are hoping!



Bob Shegog

26 Our week is almost up. I have had the boys cleaning up the camp site to hand over to the next troop tomorrow.

27 Handed over to Mr Purbrick of No. 6 Troop. Then headed back to Head Quarters at Litchfield.

28 Doing maintenance all day on the carriers, guns etc. We must have our equipment in top condition at all times in case those "Japs" do come and we have to move in a hurry. I am always hammering this into my troop and I guess they get a bit sick of it at times, but on the whole they do a great job keeping everything just right.

- 30 We have been going out on short patrols through the bush. This helps us to find our way about and learn how to live off the land. We do see a few blacks occasionally. We traded some tobacco for a beautiful barramundi fish off one lot. We roasted it on the hot coals in the evening. It was delicious!

September

- 1 It is three years since this War started and I think it will go on for a long time yet. At least we are starting to win in most fronts. The Russians are doing a great job holding the Germans at bay.

- 3 We are off to the Daly out post again for another week. Kevin is disappointed that his heavy fishing tackle hasn't arrived yet. He won't get a chance to use it now until our next turn in November. Again we go and relieve Troop No. 6. Nothing much happening during the week we had there. More fishing went on, a few cat fish and two sharks caught.



Mail arrived with the ration truck half way through the week. More letters from the family. Another from Win. We are writing to one another more frequently now.

*Our little home. Some of No 5 Troop at cup of tea time on outpost duty.
(L to R) : Dick, Harold, Bob, Bill and Osie (lighting up the pipe)*

- 10 Our week is up. Its back to Headquarters.
- 11 We have got the job of taking some supplies to the outpost at the mouth of the Daly on our way back to Headquarters. It was a long rough trip and very slow going in places. We are camping out tonight as we are still several miles away from Litchfield and darkness has set in.
- 12 Arrived back at Headquarters about midday. Plenty of maintenance to do. Travelling through the bush is hard on the carriers. It is still the dry season so dust is the major problem.
- 14 C Squadron has arrived to take over from us.
- 15 The take-over has been completed, so we are moving back to Regimental Head Quarters base camp at Green Ant Creek. Arrived back dusty and tired. We did, however, have the comforts of a shower and a hot meal.
- 16 Its back to the old routine of Regimental life - parades, guard duties and drills, after the free and easy life out on patrol, fending for ourselves. I must say it's rather hard to take. There will be two months of this. However I believe we are to move this camp soon, on to higher ground beside the Stuart Highway before the wet season sets in.

To build a new camp will give us something to do. Quite a bit of mail has come in and also some papers. We are catching up on a lot of reading. I had letters from the family, Mr Lester, Marion Hemsley and, of course, my penfriend Win.

October

1-21 Two weeks have gone quickly and now we are starting to move this camp to its new site on the Highway, ninety seven miles from Darwin.

(On 17th of June 1985 on a trip around Australia with a good friend of mine, we set up camp at Adelaide River. I left the caravan there and set off down the old Highway to where the road to Tipperary Station branches off. I estimated this was about ninety seven miles from Darwin. I searched along, just off the highway on the east side hoping to find some concrete slabs, the remains of cook-houses or showers but I wasn't successful. My friend and I then went down to Tipperary Station. I asked the Manager if he knew the exact site of the old camp but he couldn't help me. He had heard about our Regiment and the Race Meetings, with Tipperary horses and Mr & Mrs Byrnes).

Over the next few weeks it was a hive of activity at this site. A bore was put down and a good supply of pure water found. Cook houses, showers and latrines were built with cement floors. Mess huts for Officers, Serjeants and Men's Mess. A big office for Regimental Head Quarters and three smaller ones for the Squadron's.

The Regimental Head Quarters office was soon to get the name of 'Bullshit Castle' and this is what the men called it for the rest of the stay in the Northern Territory. They certainly poured out of it, plenty of orders and bulletins, a good deal of which the men didn't like. However, that was army life and discipline had to be maintained.

By about the end of the third week in October the move had been completed. Tents, of course, were our sleeping quarters and again we built our cane beds.

A Squadron were now out on the Daly River. C Squadron came back to a new camp. They were the lucky ones! They missed out on most of the hard work.

It was certainly a well laid out camp. I shared a tent with Eddie Clugstan and Guy Baxter who were Troop Serjeants of 3 & 4 Troops. Our showers were only a few yards away. They were only bucket showers of course but did the job quite well. A fire place or camp fire is shared by two or three tents. Water was heated for a shower in a petrol tin on top of these fires, then put into a special shower bucket. With about 3 gallons of warm water, one could have a lovely shower. We used these same petrol tins for washing clothes.

Now that we were under the eye of Regimental Head Quarters, as a Serjeant I had to have a clean shirt and shorts every day, so one had to wash clothes at least twice a week. Out on the Daly it didn't matter so much.

22 Mail has been coming in about once a week and it takes about that long for a letter to come from down south. We are very isolated up here, so its great to get plenty of mail. My family and friends certainly keep it up to me. Win is doing such a great job with her letters to me. She is a beautiful letter writer. I wish I was half as good.

We are now getting news of what's going on in the country and overseas. The great battle of Alamein in the Middle East is being waged and the Allied Forces are gradually winning. The 9th Australian Division is playing an important part in this. Jack Stephens, Win's brother is in the 9th Division Cavalry, so he will be in the thick of it. On the home front the Australians in New Guinea are having a rough time on the Kokoda Trail but are beginning to hold back the "Japs".

23 This morning I was told to report to Regimental Head Quarters. I didn't have a clue what this could be about. I reported to the Adjutant, to be informed I had been selected to attend a Field Engineering Course at the Northern Territory Training School, commencing on October 28 to November 12. I was to get myself a big exercise book to take notes. I was a bit taken aback at first with this news, but soon realised it should be very interesting and something new for me.

I reported to B Squadron Head Quarters to tell Max Ramsey our Squadron Serjeant Major about it. He said a notice had already arrived from Regimental Head quarters referring to it. The Squadron Second In Command, Ted Ryrie, now promoted to a Captain, was in the office. I asked him how my Troop would be without a Troop Serjeant or Troop Leader while I was away. He said he would get Lieutenant Purbrick of No. 6 Troop to keep an eye on them. He also said Hal Waugh would get some experience at being Troop Serjeant. I wouldn't be having him much longer after I came back anyway as he was due for promotion, (but I am to keep this information to myself). Well that was sure good news about Harold, but he would be my loss.

24 We were settling down to camp life with a parade every morning and of course all the other duties that came with it. So far I haven't copped the Orderly Serjeant or Serjeant of the Guard jobs yet. Perhaps they will let me off them, seeing as I will be going away in a few days.

25 Kevin finally received his heavy fishing gear. He can't wait to get out to the Daly River to try it out. We are due to go out there again on the 15th of November, two days after I return from the school.

That is providing the wet season isn't too bad. So far it hasn't started. I have been catching up on answering all my letters, I won't get any time to write letters at this school. I can tell my folks I am doing this school but not where it is or any finer details about it. Censorship is very strict.

27 At 10.00 hours this morning I was picked up in a 3 tonner and headed up the Highway towards Darwin, calling in at Unit Camps and picking up chaps along the way. I think there were twenty five to thirty of us by the time we arrived at the school site at about 1300 hours. The place was called Winnellie about three miles out of Darwin on the Stuart Highway.

There was thick bush all around the campsite (today, in the 90's, it is still named Winnellie but the nearest bush is miles away. It is all houses and a suburb of Darwin).

After we had a meal we were called out on parade and addressed by Major McLeod the Commanding Officer of the Training School.

He explained the program and what was expected of us. There was going to be an enormous amount of information to take in over such a short time. It was certainly going to be interesting. We were divided up into three groups of about ten in each group. We were mostly Serjeants and a few Corporals. We were shown around the camp and allocated our quarters.

Of course sleeping quarters were tents. It was a well set up camp. The Serjeant's Mess was first class.

28 Reveille was at 0600 hours. At 0615 hours we assembled for twenty minutes of P.T. to keep us fit and start the day right.

Our school started at 0830 hours. There was a Serjeant Instructor for each of the groups. They were from the 6 Division Engineers. Lieutenant Davies was in charge of the instructing and did quite a bit of instructing himself with each of the groups. We started off with simple field geometry, laying out angles, squares etc. From there we advanced to boning rods, to find the level over uneven ground for the

purpose of laying pipes and drains, construction of weapon pits, camouflage and different methods of concealment. By this time, three days had gone by and I had already written many pages of notes in my exercise book (I still have this book in my possession today).

November

1 And so it went on, anti personnel obstacles, tank traps and making barb wire entanglements.

3 Some mail came in. It was good of Regimental Head Quarters to forward mine onto me here. I didn't expect any until I got back. Letters from my family and, of course, Win wishing me happy birthday for tomorrow. I am sure I would not have remembered it. Too busy on this job. It is three years today since I joined up.

For most of the subjects we had a lecture first, then had to go out in the field to do the practical part of it. Map reading was a big subject. It went on for a couple of days and even some night work, finding our way at night with the aid of a compass and the stars, through the bush. I was in my element with this subject. I had already done lots of map reading from way back in Light Horse days and of course I had spent a lot of time in the bush at Mansfield before the War. A Military Map is nothing like a civilian one. There are hundreds of conventional signs and markings one must learn. Over the years I had learnt most of them. As well as this, we were given a list of ninety Japanese conventional signs to write up in our notes.

From map reading we went on to knots and lashings with rope. There are five pages of these written up in my book. We were given a piece of rope and told to practice them in our spare time! What spare time? We did however manage to find some spare time, at night.

(A lot of these knots and lashings stood me in good stead in later years on the farm, I never forgot them.)

6 The days go by - we learnt about cordage block and tackle, hold fasts and Derricks.

7 Today we started on explosives. This was a very big subject. It went on for four days. We learnt about all the different types of explosives, detonator, fuses, anti tank mines and how to plan a mine field.

From there to booby traps. These came in all types, shapes and sizes. We spent two days and some of the nights working with these. This information will be vital if we are sent into the jungle. One group would set up booby traps around a defensive position at night. The other group would have to try and find them, then delouse them. If they had been the real thing one thing is for sure, there would have been a few casualties. They were real of course, but the charges had been removed. A bell rang instead, which indicated that you had done the wrong thing.

We did a lot of work with explosives. We tied a one pound block of gun cotton to a tree about 15 inches in diameter, set the fuse and fired it. The tree crashed to the ground. Then we tied a pound brick of TNT to a piece of railway line and put a long fuse on that one so we could get a long way back. It blew the rail line in half. Then came the highlight of the course, so our instructor informed us.

We went out into the bush well clear of the camp area. We bored a hole with a three inch auger to a depth of five feet. Down this hole we lowered a few sticks of gelignite with detonator and fuse attached, this was called a bull charge, to make a hole at the bottom, large enough to take the main charge. After this went off, we placed 80 lbs of gelignite at the bottom of the hole, lit the long fuse and walked back a

few hundred yards. It certainly went off with a bang. It blew a hole twenty feet across by seven feet deep. This was a quick way of making a tank trap in front of a defensive position!

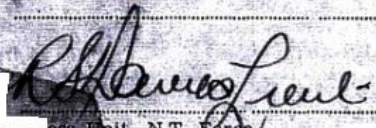

- 12 The last day today. The subject is road works. Mainly learning how to corduroy boggy patches to enable heavy vehicles to get through. Also making small culverts with timber available. This could be handy knowledge in this country, in the wet.

In the afternoon we had a closing address from the Commanding Officer of the School. He was very pleased how everyone behaved and how we made every effort to learn as much as possible.

We had a small break up party in the evening. The Serjeant's Mess turned on the beer. It had been a dry "one", for the length of the course. It was great to have a few beers with the boys and wind down before the trip back to Camp.

- 13 In the morning before leaving, we were all issued with our school results. There were two copies, one for ourselves and one for our Unit Head Quarters. I was very pleased with mine, I did not expect to get 10% above the average.

Arrived back at Mount Camp 6 Division Cavalry about midday. Reported in to Regimental Head Quarters, then Squadron Head Quarters. Then to my wonderful No. 5 Troop. They were all rearing to go to get out to the Daly again away from the regimentation and "Bullshit Castle". The Squadron are moving out tomorrow.

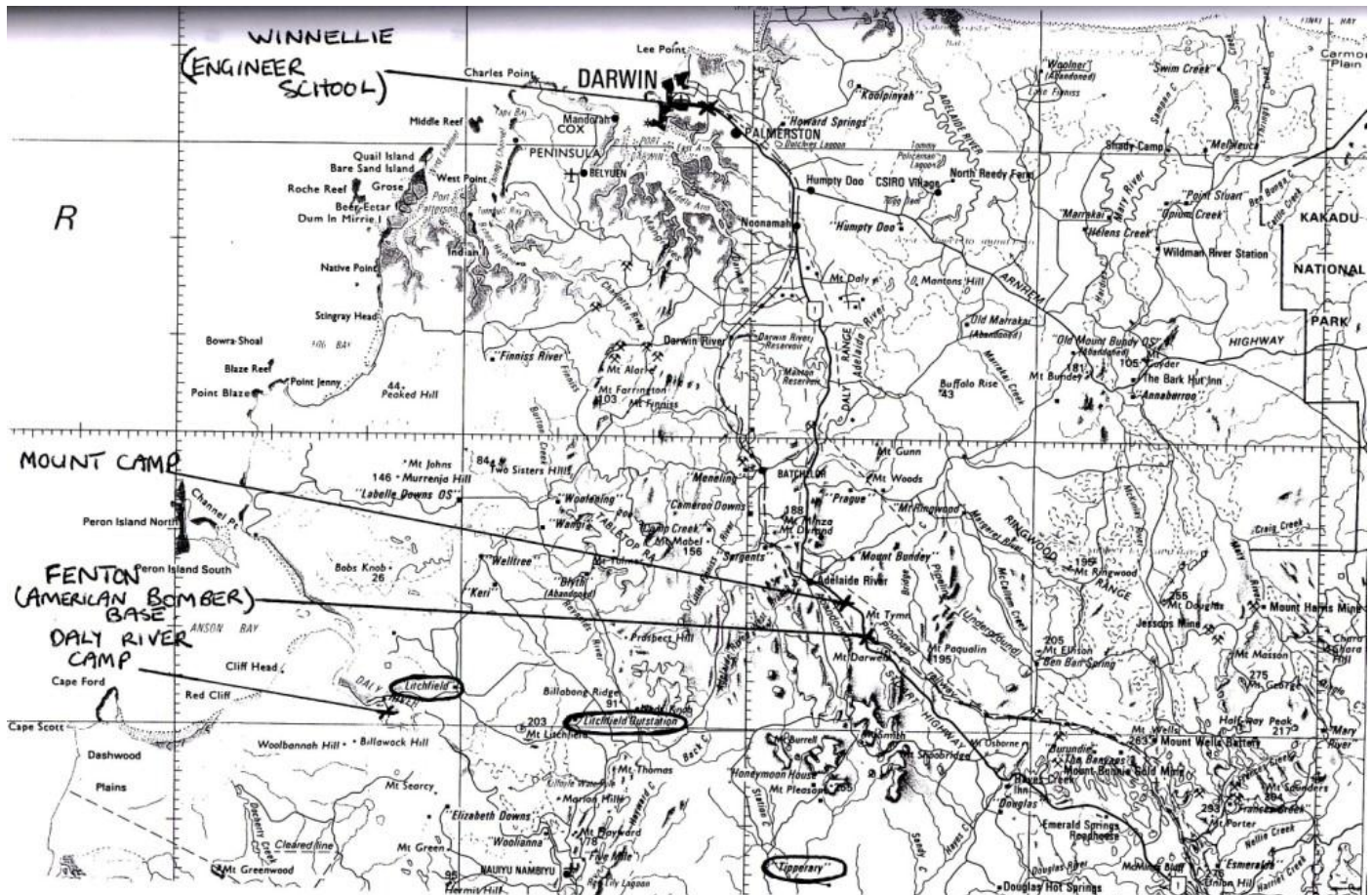
CONFIDENTIAL REPORT		(N.T.F. S1)
NORTHERN TERRITORY FORCE TRAINING SCHOOL		
No.	VX 529	RANK Sjt NAME STAFFORD G.H
UNIT	6 Aust Div Cav Regt.	
COURSE	Field Engineering (No 7)	
DURATION	28 Oct -- 12 Nov 42.	
RANGE PRACTICE (possible)	Results Obtained	
KNOWLEDGE	V Good	
VOICE CONTROL	Do	
BEARING	Do	
INSTRUCTIONAL ABILITY	Do	
WRITTEN EXAM (%)	83	Course Average 73%
PRACTICAL EXAM (%)	85	Course Average 75%
RESULT:	Distinguished Pass. Passed. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Failed.	
RECOMMENDATION AS TO PROMOTION OR FUTURE EMPLOYMENT.		
GENERAL REMARKS:—		
Good type. Very reliable. Work during Course has been of high standard.		
 C.I. Course		
 Maj. Comdt. N.T. Force Trg. School		

Engineer School confidential report - Northern Territory

They were busy packing the carriers and doing maintenance. They were very happy boys.

The great Battle of Alamein has been fought and well and truly won. Rommel and what is left of his army has retreated to Aleppo. (Later news has it, that they have completely left Africa).

- 14 The Squadron set off for Litchfield at 0830 hours. There has been some rain, not enough to make it boggy but it has laid the dust which is a good thing. My troop is the same. There have been no changes. The track was very rough which made it slow going. We did not arrive at Litchfield until late afternoon.
- 15 No. 5 Troop are going out today to take over our old Post. The Officer Commanding said that because we had built it up into such a comfortable camp site, we were entitled to go there again. We were all happy about that. We arrived at midday and changed over with the A Squadron Troop.



Kevin couldn't get his line baited quick enough. He had scrounged some meat for bait from the cook house at Mount Camp before we left. It was already on the nose! Kevin said, "the smellier the better, the cat-fish will fly for it!" They did too! He hauled out a 20 lb Cat-fish in a very short time. I told him, that he now had plenty of bait, because nobody here would eat it!

That didn't worry him, he was happy just to catch them. The weather was much hotter now and humid. We only wore shorts and boots, stripped to the waist and all developing a deep tan. We had to cover up as soon as the sun set because the mozzies were still here, thicker than ever I think.

- 16-17 Dick had to do a few repairs on the oven. We have made a bough shelter to keep the hot sun off for meals. We have also rigged up tarps over our beds to keep the rain off that is sure to come.

Kevin has caught another enormous cat-fish! It took him a long time to get it in. Then he had to have help to get it up the bank. We all had a guess at its weight. We averaged these guesses out and came up with an estimate of 80 lbs! I asked him what he was going to do with it. He said, "catch more cat-fish and sharks I hope". I told him he had better use it up quick because it would stink the camp out before twenty four hours were up in this heat.

- 18** I am catching up with my letter writing. I haven't had a chance to write any for the last three weeks. The 3 tonner came in today with more mail from the family and Win. A letter also from Joan Stephens. She has joined the W.A.A.A.F. and is doing her training in Melbourne.

The truck also brought some fresh beef. We will have to cook it right away, it won'tt keep long in this heat.

More target practice with the Vickers this afternoon at low tide. This is when the crocs come out to do their sun baking on the sandbar. One of them just managed to make it back into the river. The last high tide was the highest we have measured. It was only 6 inches from the top of the bank. Hope it doesn't come over the top tonight.

- 19** The tide did come over the top during the night, but only a few inches. It left a muddy mess behind! It should dry out quickly with the hott sun though.

Kevin caught a shark which measured about three feet. We intend trying some of it to eat.

The wet season is starting. A heavy thunder storm in the afternoon washed most of the mud away left by the tide.

- 20** The night high tide just remained within the banks. Hope the peak has passed. Maintenance now is a day by day event. The rain and the high humidity rust things up if they are not attended to.

- 22** We gladly handed over the Post to No. 6 Troop today. Another high tide came over the bank last night by at least six inches. It sure left a mess behind. We headed back to Litchfield and a nice clean dry camp.

- 25** Caught up with all my letter writing.

- 26** We have to go down to the river to one of the Posts with supplies as it is too risky getting the 3 tonners bogged in that area. The ground is still quite firm on the higher ground away from the river. On the way back we managed to shoot a few geese. One went to the Officer Commanding to keep sweet with him!

The last few days have been fine. The big wet hasn't really started yet. We go out to our post on the Daly tomorrow.

- 29** Out to the Daly and relieved 6 Troop. They said there hadn't been any more high tides over the bank. The camp site was nice and dry. Thank goodness for that.

In the afternoon Kevin put his lines in the river. I told him to catch something besides bloody sharks and cat-fish! He wanted to know if a crocodile would do.

A few of the other boys have fishing gear now which has created quite a bit of rivalry among them to see who can catch the biggest fish. However Kevin's 80 pounder will take some beating. It's keeping them happy having a go though.

- 30 The wet season has really set in now, with a lot of rain last night. One good thing is that it soon gets away from this site. It never gets muddy, except of course when the tide comes over the top. We won't see that again this trip.

December

- 2 Nothing much happening. The boys caught some small sharks about two feet long. They were good eating.
- 3 Two carriers of 6 Troop came out today with some rations and the mail. I received letters from the family, Win and Joan Stephens, Mrs Dale at Bridge Creek and Marion Hemsley. I also received three parcels. The folks back home are getting in early for Christmas. One was a hamper from Mum, another from Ruth and a cake in a tin from Win.
- 7 We have completed eight days this time. No. 6 Troop have taken over for the final week. We will be moving back to Mount Camp on the 16 December. It could be the last time we are out here, certainly until the dry season starts in April. Of course we could get a shift before then, some leave home for a start, then a move up to the islands to the north perhaps!
- 10 Squadron Head Quarters along with Q. Store and several trucks have set off for Mount Camp. It is feared that if they wait any longer the trucks will get bogged down. We are getting lots of rain now. No. 5 Troop is remaining here at Litchfield until the other Troops come in from the outposts. We also have here two 3 tonners to help with spare equipment and heavy gear. Two troops went with Squadron Head Quarters to assist in pulling out any bogged trucks.

There are only three troops mounting three outposts now. Our troop makes four. We will all leave here on the 16th December. We here at Litchfield, will make a wireless link with the out lying troops and base camp. Lieutenant Bob Piper's Troop is out at the mouth of the Daly. Lieutenant Reg Edwards's Troop is at one of the middle Posts and, of course, Lieutenant Rus Purbrick with No. 6 Troop who took over from us at No. 4 Post. Bob Piper's troop has been advised to evacuate his post on the 13 December because it is very boggy down at the mouth of the river.

- 11 I have to keep a man by the wireless set all of the time now, in case there is a call. We are camped in part of the Old Litchfield Homestead, so we are quite comfortable.

Apart from the man on duty we spent most of the day playing cards. The troop talked me into playing pontoon with them. The stakes of course weren't very high, but they still managed to win quite a few shillings off me - much to their delight!

- 14 Been in touch with Bob Piper's Troop over the wireless, they are making slow progress but hope to be here tomorrow. Reg Edwards with No. 4 Troop has also pulled out and will be here tomorrow.
- 15 All three Troops are now back at Litchfield. We have been busy packing the 3 tonners with all the surplus gear and our carriers as well. There has been lots more rain, the country is very wet now. It will be a long, tough, slow haul back to Mount Camp on the Highway.
- 16 We set off early in the morning. Lieutenant Purbrick is the senior officer of the three Troops, so he is in charge of the convoy. For the first few hours the going was good. We were following high ground but then we had to move off it, because of stony out crops. As soon as we got on to lower country down went our two trucks, nearly to the axles. We lashed a heavy pole to the front of the trucks about twelve

feet in length and on to this we attached three tow ropes, spaced out for three carriers to pull abreast. This way we wouldn't cut up the ground so much. In some places the track through the scrub wasn't wide enough. We did make some progress but it was slow. The sun set and we had to camp. We had done twelve miles (the distance from Litchfield to Mount Camp is sixty miles). A long way to go yet and the track can get wetter. Hope we can make it by Christmas.

17 Off again early in the morning. We struck some areas where the trucks could do it on their own and other areas where it only needed one carrier to keep them moving. Then, there were a few places where they went right down and three carriers were needed to pull them out. We made about ten miles for the day.

21 In the last three days we covered about 30 miles, averaging about the same mileage per day. This left us with only eight miles to go to camp. The country ahead of us was low and flat and free of timber. It was named Tombstone Flat. There were lots of giant ant hills across it, hence the name. The country each side of this flat was rugged and rough. We could have possibly got the carriers through, but no way the trucks. So off we set across the flat. Of course we didn't go far forward with three carriers pulling a truck before the carriers were also bogged. We four Troop leaders had a conference. It was obvious that corduroying was the only answer. I told them that the last day of my school at Winnellie was on corduroying, so of course I was immediately put in charge of the job.

The first thing I did was to get the bogged carriers out. This didn't take long. The carriers were carrying quite a few poles. Once we unhooked them from the trucks we soon climbed the carriers out on the poles. With all the carriers we set off for the bush to cut more poles. Luckily we had about a dozen axes. Finding straight poles in this bush was difficult, we couldn't be too fussy. I was in my element swinging an axe and I could use one reasonably well as I had plenty of practice in the bush on my Dad's farm before the War.

Mr Purbrick had other ideas, he thought I should only supervise. Well I didn't argue with him because I would have to go back with the first load of poles to start the corduroying anyway.

Before we started corduroying we decided to have a good look at the direction to take. The country close up to the timber line looked the best bet. We angled our corduroy track towards the timber about two hundred yards away. Hundreds of poles were needed. We worked hard at it until dark.

22 First thing next morning we decided to get the trucks onto the corduroy. By digging and winding we eventually got them there. While this was going on, more of the team were extending the track to the timber line.

When the trucks reached this we decided to give it a go without corduroy. We hooked on two carriers to a truck and away we went. We got bogged plenty of times but we did make some progress. By night fall when we made camp, we estimated we were only three miles from Mount Camp.

23 That last three miles took us all day, but eventually we reached the Stuart Highway which was now a beautiful bitumen road. It was great to be able to tear along on a good road. Within minutes we were at Mount Camp.

One day to spare before Christmas. We had won the battle with Tombstone Flat! Everything was covered in mud including ourselves, we were filthy and very, very tired. It was one time we were happy to get back to a permanent camp for the extra comforts, like a hot shower, clean clothes, and the cooks

had a good meal ready for us. The Serjeant's Mess even released some Christmas beer and boy did it sure taste great!

24 The big clean up - carriers, equipment and clothes. At last we got rid of all the mud and everything was spic and span again. A lot more work had been done on Mount Camp in the five and a half weeks we had been away. Parade ground levelled, Mess hut floors cemented and drive ways through the Squadron lines gravelled. A loud speaker address system now operates from Regimental Head Quarters and can be heard in all areas of the camp. Bullshit Castle was in its glory! However it was a lovely camp. No matter how much rain came, it would not get muddy here. It was so well drained. More mail had come in over the last ten days. I had lots of letters from family and friends with Christmas greetings. More parcels from my sisters Elsie and Marj. A hamper from the Mansfield Comforts Fund which contained tinned ham, pudding, fruits, dried fruit and sweets. It is truly remarkable how the folks at home look after us. We are very grateful.

I went down in the evening and visited my Troop. They were a happy group of boys, fairing very well with parcels and hampers.

Later in the evening it was back to the Serjeant's Mess, where we were having a party because we wouldn't get much of a chance tomorrow. Christmas day was a day for all the Serjeants and Officers to go on duty. All other ranks have the day off.

The Serjeant's Mess had a fair quantity of beer in (we had been saving it up for weeks!). It was a contrast to this time last year when we were snowed in at Arsal in Syria and the beer was nearly frozen. Now it is hard to get it cool enough to drink. That doesn't worry anyone, I think they would drink it whatever the temperature. It was a great party, everyone got merry, some more than others. Of course, a few passed right out. There will be some big heads in the morning when they have to report in at the cook-house at 0630 hours on Mess orderly duty!

25 Christmas Day - I was on cook-house duty and was peeling spuds for hours. It gave me plenty of time to think of past Christmas days with family and friends back home, and to ponder of where we might be Christmas next year. The war won't be over, that is for sure. So it will be in the field. The islands most probably.

The cooks of course didn't get the day off. They cooked a wonderful Christmas dinner. When the Troops were fed, we sat down to ours. There were plenty of leftovers and many returned for a good helping of seconds. It sure was delicious. The day was hot and humid. We are still getting a lot of rain. In the afternoon, we workers in the cook-house were allowed a few hours off.

We lay on our bunks and I had a snooze. We had to report back to the cook-house for the evening meal at 1700 hours. Most of the Officers are on guard duty, so that is keeping them quiet. After the evening meal we did a great heap of washing for the cooks so they could knock off early.

And so my fourth Christmas Day in the Australian Imperial Forces comes to an end!

26 It's almost back to normal today.

31 Last day of the year. Back to the routine of camp life. I have already copped Squadron Orderly Serjeant, Regimental Orderly Serjeant and Serjeant of the Guard duty. (This is a 24 hour duty starting at sunset and finishing at sunset the following day entailing a ceremonial drill of the new Guard and the Old Guard at Sunset each day). The Old Guard is formed up on the Parade Ground, less the number of

sentries (about four) that are posted around within the Camp. The New Guard marches on and lines up facing the Old Guard. The Old Guard presents arms to the New Guard. The New Guard presents arms to the Old Guard, then both Guards order arms and stand at ease. All these orders are bellowed out by the two Serjeants at the very top of their voice range. The two guard Corporals now march off the new sentries to join the Old Guard. The Bugler sounds the last post. The old and new guards present arms to each other. The old guard marches off the parade ground and is dismissed. The new guard is dismissed to the guard house. It is a boring job for everyone. The Corporal changes the Sentries. The Sentries do two hours on and four hours off. The Serjeant must check each Sentry's post at least twice during the night to see that the guards are doing their job and are correctly dressed at all times. It is a job nobody likes but must be done.

1943

January

- 1 New Years Day means nothing in the Army. It's just another day! Sunday is the only day recognised. When we are in a permanent camp such as this, Church Parade is the only parade for the day and that is voluntary.

Harold Waugh has now been promoted to Troop Serjeant of No. 6 Troop. He has replaced Tom Pinnick who was Troop Serjeant of No. 6 and has been sent south because of health reasons. Harold has shifted into my tent with Eddie Clugston. It's good to have him here, though I have lost a good Troop Corporal.

Pat Marwood is now my Troop Corporal and of course I know he will make a good one. I hope we at least get a second Corporal in the Troop (we are entitled to three, the other two being a Corporal Driver and Corporal Wireless Operator). We will be lucky if we get one extra. I am sure the Army is trying to do things on the cheap. I have been doing two jobs now for the last thirteen months, except for two weeks when Kon Rediel was Troop Leader in July of last year.

We are all settling into this permanent camp life again, not liking it much, but we have to put up with it. All persons have to be correctly dressed at all times when on duty or just moving about the camp lines. We can't go about stripped to the waist like we did on the Daly River.

There are schools and cadres being organised to keep us all occupied, along with short route marches of a morning to keep us fit. Then of course there is the constant maintenance that must go on all the time. The carriers, arms and equipment all need to be carefully inspected in this damp and humid climate. Even ones clothes will go mouldy if not aired occasionally.

- 8 A week of the new year has gone by. We get mail at least once a week now. I received letters from the family and Win. Winnie and I are exchanging letters every fortnight now. A very warm and deep friendship for each other has developed. She is a great girl. We get plenty of time to write letters as there is not much to do of an evening here. Then all of Sunday is free except for the odd one when you cop a duty.

A travelling picture show is starting up doing the rounds of all the Units in Northern Territory. It is hoped this will visit us once a week. A screen is slung between two trees. They plug in a power generator and then away it goes. We have to provide our own seat, which is either the ground or an empty petrol tin to perch on. We have seen two so far and they were both quite good films.

- 10 The Yanks have built a big aerodrome just a few miles down the road from here. It is the main bomber base for the Northern Territory. The Japs have bombed it twice in the last couple of weeks. They flew directly over our camp but were very high up. We could just see them. We heard the bombs go off and heard later the nearest bomb to the drome was a mile away in the bush. The Yanks now have two fighter bases nearer Darwin. It is their job to detect and go after the Jap bombers. This is the reason the Jap bombers stay as high as possible. The Japs are now being pushed back in New Guinea and the Islands to the north. There is not much danger of them landing here now. Certainly not while the wet is on. They wouldn't be able to move except on the highway.

- 14** I have just learnt that I am on a Regimental Cadre commencing on the 19 January for one week. It's all about gas and anti gas drill. Not looking forward to that in this sticky climate. Also, as of today, I have lost Trooper Gordon McAlpine from the Troop to Head Quarters Squadron. He has a job there as the Regimental boot repairer. He will get a little extra pay so I guess that is why he put in for the job. Gordon is a half caste aborigine. He always worked well in the Troop and was a fine chap.
- (On my trip around Australia with Clive Dunn in 1985 we called on Gordon. He lived with his wife in the little timber town of Nanup in Western Australian, south of Perth. We were invited to stay for tea with them. Then we talked for hours about 6th Division Cavalry days and the Northern Territory in particular. I learnt from him how the Troop used to put it over me when they were supposed to be doing maintenance on the carriers at Mount Camp during the wet season on humid drowsy afternoons. I would set them the job, then retire to my own tent which was in the Serjeant's lines about one hundred and fifty or so yards away. There I would probably do some "spine bashing" which was the favourite pastime when ever one could get the chance. Bill Petschak had found a cow bell out in the bush. They set this up in a tree, one of them stayed on guard ("The Cockatoo"), as soon as he spotted me coming down the drive he would ring the bell and the rest of the troop would get off their spines and be working on the carriers when I arrived!! How I was deceived! Further to this at our Annual Victorian Cavalry reunion in 1989 I met Bill Petschak. I hadn't seen him for years. I told him about meeting Gordon McAlpine and the cow bell. His big grin from ear to ear told me immediately that he knew all about it. Not only that but he went on to tell me that he has the cow bell at his home taking pride of place on the mantle piece. (I must suggest to him when I see him again that we get the names of No 5 Troop of that time engraved on the bell)
- 19** First day of the gas cadre. Mostly lectures and taking notes. Not too bad.
- 20** Learning all the different kinds of gases, their effects and what first aid that should be applied.
- 21** Much the same.
- 22** Using respirators and oilskin clothing as protection. I don't know who was the smart Alec who thought up this school. I wish he was here to suffer with us today. Wearing this stuff in the heat and high humidity is no joke!
- 23** I have broken out in prickly heat and so have several others. It's most uncomfortable. At midday we had a cold shower, that helped take the sting out just a little. We had a couple of minutes in a gas chamber with the mask on. It was only tear gas so we didn't have to wear protective clothing, thank goodness. Had to remove the mask for a few seconds. It was sure hard on the eyes. There were plenty of tears!
- 24** Last day and sure glad it is. I have taken ten pages of notes in my exercise book, but I do hope I never have to use this information in a war situation.
- 25** Back to normal today, but only for a week, I have been informed I will be doing a D and M Course, (Driving and Maintenance) starting on the 1st February for two weeks duration. The chief instructor will be Captain Roberts, Officer Commanding of our Light Aid Detachment. This will be a lot better than that gas school.

We now have a new member in the troop in place of Gordon. A very tall chap. Must be six feet, five inches! Nelson Webster is his name. He is a fine young man. He is a member of the concert party that has started up within the Regiment to help break the monotony of this camp life. Nelson has a beautiful tenor voice and it is a pleasure to listen to him. The concert party have already put on one show, and it was terrific. A, C, and Head Quarter Squadron started on it about six weeks ago when we were out on the Daly. They have done a great job to get it going in that time. They sent home for women's clothes etc.

There were several women impersonators. They sure looked the part and did we all take the mickey out of them.

- 26 Mail today. A beaut letter from Win and a letter from young Marion Hemsley. She is at home on holidays from Teachers College. My family keep the letters coming too.

February

- 1 The Driving and Maintenance course commences today and goes for two weeks. It's main objective is to keep our minds occupied during a very boring time of inactivity while the wet is on. There were several other Cadres going on at the same time within the Regiment. Our course was called Driving and Maintenance but there was very little of that. It was mainly lectures on the workings of the Ford and Chev motors. I filled up fifty pages of my big exercise book with the working of these engines. The gear boxes, clutches, diffs, electrical and cooling systems.

There was too much theory attached to the course. However we got through it and I certainly learnt quite a bit about motors.

- 15 It's back to ordinary duties today. Half the Troop have been on Cadres and some are still in the middle of theirs. Wireless, map reading, weapon training etc. The remainder are doing camp duties and maintenance. In spite of all the Cadres etc., there is a falling off of morale. We feel we are dumped here and forgotten as far as the War is concerned. We have seen enough of the Northern Territory and would like to be on the move again to take our part in the winning of the War. The Japs are being pushed back so there is no risk of them landing in Australia. When we will get a move is anyone's guess. When we do, we are hoping it will be down south for a start to get some well earned leave.

- 26 To try and keep the morale up the "Powers that Be" in charge of Nor them Territory Force have started a Rest Camp at Berry Springs on the Darwin River about twenty miles south of Darwin. One troop from each Squadron is going out at a time for one week. No 5 Troop is off next week.

March

- 3 Here we are at Berry Springs. As a rest camp it is well named because there is nothing else to do here except spine bashing (lying on your back on your bunk) and even that is not very pleasant after awhile on these hard surfaces.

The rainfall is higher here than Mount Camp, so the humidity is also higher. The mosquitoes and flies are here in the millions. The only way to get away from them is under the net while you spine bash some more.

Kevin and some of the boys bought fishing lines along but they have only caught a few cat-fish so far. The Darwin River is only a small river, not far from the sea, so it is tidal. Nobody was game to go for a swim because of the crocodiles.

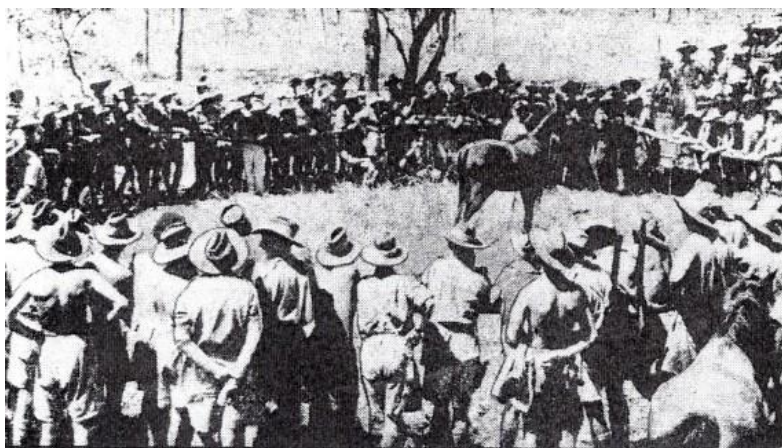
- 7 We had a bit of excitement today. Dick Lynch had a brain wave on how to fix the flies. He scrounged a tin of petrol from the Q Store, poured a liberal amount down the dunny under each seat, (it was a pit job) then threw in a match!! The result was spectacular to say the least! There must have been a lot of gas down the pit as well as flies, because there was one big explosion. It really brought the camp to life. Everyone dashed out of their tents. We thought the Japs were bombing the place. It certainly got rid of the flies, it also got rid of the dyke!! The Camp Commandant was not at all pleased. Neither was No 5 Troop. We had to set to and rebuild the dyke! It took us nearly the rest of our stay to do it. Dick Lynch came in for plenty of ribbing. He was named "Dirty Dick the Dyke Destroyer".

Somebody suggested to Dick that his brain wave would be a great way to get rid of "Bullshit Castle" when we returned. We certainly got plenty of laughs out of it, so that was something. As a rest camp it really was a disaster. The meals were not much. Everything was going mouldy. Even the tents were mouldy and smelly. I think we were all happy to get back to a good camp even though it meant a lot of regimentation.

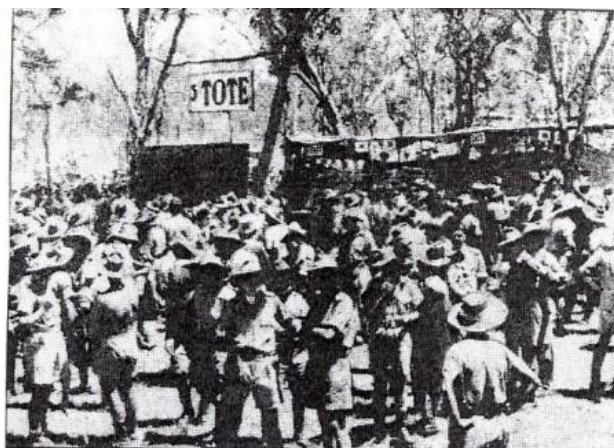
- 11 Back to duties again. We have learnt one bit of good news. We are to have a race meeting here in two weeks time. Great excitement. Mr and Mrs Byrnes of Tipperary Station are lending us about fifty horses, and will assist us in organising things. We are to do all the work in getting the race track ready. The camp is already a hive of activity. Men of the Regiment formed a committee. Corporal Finn was chairman, Corporal Ferris secretary, Trooper Burns treasurer, Corporal J Strahorn judge, Corporal J Cleaver clerk of course, Corporal Bill Hutchison starter, and Troopers Cleaver and Troutbeck stewards.

It was a big job getting the course ready as a lot of timber had to be cleared. I was in my element helping clear the bush. We were lucky to get a Yank Construction Company to help grade the running track with one of their big graders. The carriers did a great job dragging away logs and trees. We even built a totalisator and judges box. Also a canteen to cater for the big crowd expected from the other units. Twelve races in all were programmed but some of these were for the aboriginals and their children. There were six horses in each race. Mr Byrne graded them for each race.

- 24 It is now three days before the big race meeting. This morning the six horses of each race were put in the ring and auctioned one at a time to the highest bidder. The money from the auction would make up



► Bidding at auction three days before race day



● The makeshift tote which held £4,644

the stake money. My troop pooled their resources and came up with 17 pounds, which was as much as we could afford. We all had a fair amount of our pay deferred home, so there was a limit to what we could draw out of our pay books, all we could do was hope and pray that we could get a decent nag for 17 pounds.

Before the bidding started we made a good inspection of the horses. Of course, so did everyone else. Only personnel of the Regiment were allowed to bid. I had a good knowledge of horses, having worked with them all my working life before the War. Also I had eight years in the Mansfield Troop of the 20th Light Horse Regiment before joining the Australian Imperial Forces. My Troop appointed me to do the selection and bidding. In the Darwin Derby, the main race of the day was a smallish mare I liked the look of and thought she could be a real goer. Because of her size she might not be so attractive to other bidders. I decided to wait until this lot came up before doing any bidding. The bidding started for the first race and the prices ranged from 10 to 30 pounds, so I knew I had a fair chance of getting the mare.

When it came to the auction for the Derby, the first four horses made from 25 to 35 pounds. My hopes sank. The mare was next and I got her for an unbelievable 15 pounds. Great stuff! We now had a starter. Some of the Troop were sceptical of her chances, they weren't dashing off to the Tote to back her. Neither was I, but then I was never a betting man.

The smallest member of No 5 Troop was Bob Shegog, he had done some riding so he was appointed jockey. There had been a committee set up sometime before Race Day to name these horses, and provide a program. Our mare was Pipe Dream by Heading South out of Wishful Thinking.

27 Race Day! The first race was due to start at 11.30. The crowd had started arriving. We had the band of the 2/8 Battalion playing to the crowd. There were nursing sisters from the Military Hospital at Adelaide River, Major General Allen commanding the Northern Territory Force, Yanks from Fenton Aerodrome and hundreds of Troops from all units in the Northern Territory area. It was a very big crowd.

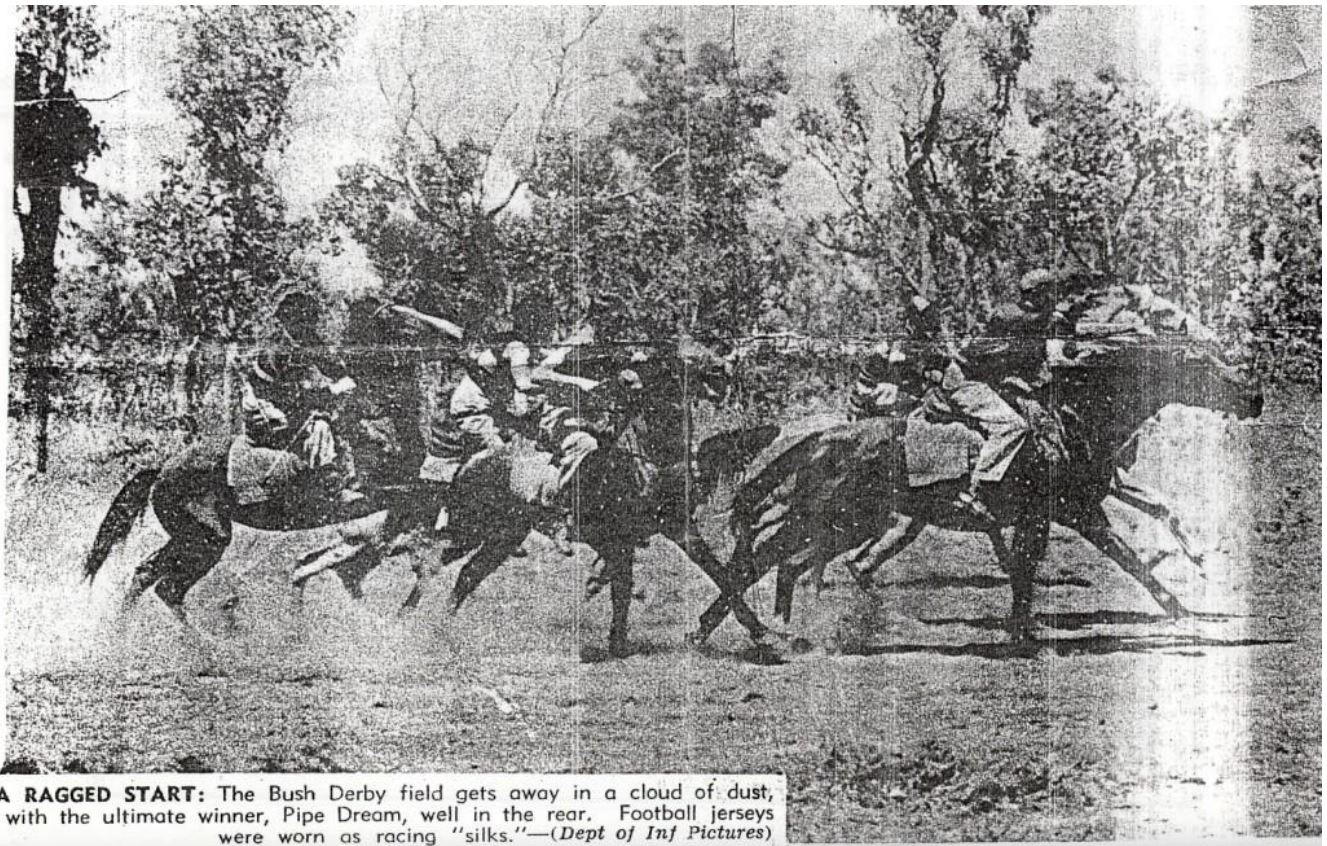
There were quite a few black stockman from Tipperary Station and their children there also. They were having a wonderful time.

The wet season was easing off so the track was dry. The going was pretty hard on the dirt track so the races were only run over a length of about four furlongs. The day was beautiful and sunny. The first two races went off without a hitch. Nudist won the first and Gay Hilly the second.

Then came the Darwin Derby at 1300 hours. Bob got Pipe Dream away well and she soon headed the field and won easily. No 5 Troop were exultant. We couldn't believe our luck. Our prize money was 120 pounds (the highest of all the races). The next highest was 110 pounds for the Tipperary Stakes. A horse purchased by Squadron Head Quarters named SOL, by Feeling out of Sorts was ridden by Max Ramsay, our Squadron Serjeant Major. Max also rode another horse in the next race, the Cavalry Handicap and managed a third. I don't know who owned that one.

It was a great day. Our Troop decided to put the money in our Troop Fund. We knew we would be going out into the "Mulga" again before long so we used the money to stock up our Troop tucker boxes.

That night the Cavalry Concert party put on a great show. Nelson Webster's singing was magnificent and the crowd really got into the spirit of things.



Newspaper cuttings of the Cavalry Picnic Race Meeting



THE finish of the Bush Derby at the Cavalry Picnic Races, with Pipe Dream (listed in the

racebook as 'by Heading South out of Wishful Thinking') on the rails taking the prizemoney

28 The big clean up after yesterday's great day. We were told that the Prisoner of War Fund had benefited by 540 pounds from the Totalisator profits. Also we were told not to pull anything down as there could be another race meeting in a months time. This has lifted the morale of the troops enormously.

30 Twelve months today since we arrived at Adelaide from overseas. How the time flies.

31 Win's birthday today. She is twenty three. I wrote her a letter ten days ago with birthday greetings so she should have it by this time.

April

1 Back to the old grind of parades and duties.

5 Regimental Orderly Serjeant today. Now this is a twenty four hour duty. The Orderly Serjeant must sleep in the office of Regimental Head Quarters. He is there in case of any messages that could come in at night from Brigade Head Quarters. At 0600 hours he must announce reveille over the public address system to stir every one out of their beds. Then he puts on a record of music played very loud to make sure they are awake. It is the duty of one of the guards to wake the Orderly Serjeant a few minutes before 0600 hours. In the evening of my tour of duty I was sitting in Regimental Head Quarters, alone. All office staff had finished for the day. In came Lieutenant Joe Byrne. Joe was a mate of mine. He had not long been promoted from Serjeant. He had a job he wanted me to do for him. In the collection of records of music kept at Regimental Head Quarters he knew there was one called "Mary Its a Grand Old Name". He wanted me to play this record at reveille next morning, and to announce over the air before playing it "This is by special request for Lieutenant Edwards". Reg Edwards was another of B Squadron's Troop leaders and a fine chap. Joe wouldn't let on what the joke was all about, (but I did find out later that Mary was his girlfriend's name). I did as requested next morning. During the day Reg came along and wanted to know who put me up to playing the record. I told him I wasn't allowed to divulge that information. He just laughed and off he went. These little practical jokes gave us all a good laugh and took our minds off the boredom.

More mail from family and friends and of course the letter I am always looking forward to receiving these days from Win.

The dry season was on us again now. The country has dried out. The patrols and out posts are starting up. C Squadron are going out next week. Each Squadron will be changing over every two weeks.

Our next race meeting will be on Easter Monday, April 26th. C Squadron will be back the day before and A Squadron will go out the day after, so nobody will miss the race meeting. There is no danger of the Japs landing now. These patrols and outposts are more for training and keeping the morale of the troops up.

9 C Squadron left for the Daly today. Guy Baxter is in our tent now. There are now four of us, Guy Baxter, Hal Waugh, Eddie Clugston and myself. We all get on well together. There is always plenty of rivalry when talking about our troops but it never gets too serious.

The mobile picture show is still coming once a week. It is very popular and the films are good. I would say everyone from the Regiment would attend except for the Guard. Now that the rain has stopped, the weather is very pleasant, continuous sunny days and not too hot.

12 I am Squadron Orderly Serjeant today. This is a relatively easy job. I go around on inspections of a morning with the Orderly Officer and the Squadron Second in Command checking tent lines, cook houses, latrines etc. to see that everything is what it should be, then not much else for the rest of the day. Occasionally Squadron Head Quarters might need me for some small job, otherwise it is a good chance to get some letter writing done.

16 Mail in again. A letter from Win with a lovely post card size photo of her in uniform. She sure looks great. When I last wrote to her I asked for a photo. It has pride of place on the little table beside my bed, it sure looks good there. We have all managed to build a small cupboard beside our beds out of bamboo or petrol tin cases to store things in. It is much easier to make ourselves very comfortable while in a permanent camp.

Guy Baxter has been made a judge for the coming race meeting. We have had the track graded again, but it is sure going to be dusty this time.

*Racebook for the
Easter
Cavalry Picnic
Race*

Cavalry Picnic Races

EASTER MEETING

To Be Held (You know where)

Commencing 1030 H rs., on April 26, 1943

(Last Race Run at 1725 Hrs.)

**Proceeds to go to PRISONER OF WAR FUND
(Totalisator Only)**

Under the Patronage of

Major-General A. S. ALLEN, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., V.D.

Organised and run by the (censored) (undisclosable) Cavalry
Regiment Somewhere in (suppressed). Under the auspices of
Lt. Col. J. E. ABBOTT.

Horses kindly loaned by Mr. H. BYRNE of TIPPERARY STATION

COMMITTEE

R.R.R. (Regimental Riff Raff)

Chairman:	Cpl. J. F. FINN	Tote Managers:	Cpl. G. STALL-
Secretary:	Cpl. M. J. FERRIS		ARD & Tpr. V. G. CARTER.
Treasurer:	Tpr. C. M. BURNS	Stipendiary Stewards:	Tpr. T.
Clerk of Course:	Cpl. J. CLEAVER		CLEAVER & Tpr. G. LOWRY.

JUDGES

L/Cpl. J. A. STRAHORN, Sgt. G. M. BAXTER & Cpl. D. HARRICKS
Starter—L/Cpl W. L. Hutchinson.

24 Everything is ready for the race meeting. It is going to be the same as the last one. No 5 Troop are not all that keen on buying another horse. They have done a lot of buying up at the canteen in recent weeks to stock up our tucker boxes, so there is not a great deal of prize money left from our win on Pipe Dream at the last race meeting. They reckon it would be highly unlikely to be so lucky again a second time around. We will see how they are selling, I may be able to talk them into buying one yet.

26 Easter Monday. And what a beautiful day it is. The horses were divided up. I had a good look around. There were some of the same horses as last time, but Pipe Dream was not amongst them. If she had been, she would have made a lot of money at auction. All horses were given a new name for this meeting. After two race lots had been sold, I consulted the Troop and we decided we would not be in it this time. I was a bit disappointed but they were selling higher than last time and it would have stretched our resources to buy one.

It was another very successful day, similar to the last one. The dust on the race track made it very hard for the jockeys though.

The Cavalry Concert Party put on another fine show at night.

27 A Squadron went out to the Daly on out post duty today. We will be going in a fortnight's time. We are sure looking forward to that. This life is getting very boring.

May

1 Mail in - letters from the family, one from Mrs Perrin at Bridge Creek, Mansfield, and the fortnightly one from Win that I look forward so much to receiving these days. We have a lot in common to write about. I know all her family well, her brother Jack was my best mate before the War, and my sister Ruth and Win worked together along with Ann Harris in the big homestead at Dueran Station. They were great days.

9 The days have dragged by, but here we are on our way out to the Daly. There is plenty of excitement in the air. The track is dusty but it is the last thing on anyone's mind. Everyone is on a high just to be away from "Bullshit" Castle.

We arrive at Litchfield in the early afternoon. It is nearly five months since we were here last. Camped the night at Litchfield.

11 No 5 Troop left early this morning to take over from A Squadron Troop at No 2 Post about ten miles from the mouth of the Daly. It was about 1100 hours when we took over and the other Troop left.

The banks of the river at this site are not so steep, but just as high as our old Post. There is a track leading down to the waters edge at low tide and a sand bank at low tides on the other side of the river, look out crocs!

The A Squadron Troop had made a good camp, so there was not much to do in that respect.

Kevin soon had a line in. I think he was keen to break his record for the biggest cat-fish. A few crocs did come out on the sand bar at low tide and we took great delight in giving them a burst of the Vickers.

11 A day to remember. At about 1300 hours and not quite low tide, some of the sand bank on the other side was showing, with a couple of lazy crocs sunning themselves. We gave them a couple of long bursts with the Vickers, and they quickly disappeared. About a minute after this we heard somebody

"cooeeing". Way off in the distance we could see somebody in a small canoe on the other side of the river, a little up stream from where we had been firing. We "cooeed" back and waved. Although the river was very wide the canoe set off paddling across the outgoing tide which made it a little easier. Eventually he made it to us. We grabbed the canoe and helped him out. He was very weak and exhausted and couldn't even talk. We carried him up the bank to our camp and lay him on my bed. Dick made him some soup and that livened him up. He told me his name was Brannelly, a flying officer in the RAAF. A week ago he had been on a night exercise in a Beaufighter with a wireless operator (gunner in the rear cockpit). They got lost and eventually ran out of petrol, so had to bail out at about 0200 hours. Brannelly landed okay but there was no sign of his mate. He called out many times, but no answer. He waited where he was until daylight, went searching and calling but never found any sign of his mate. He kept walking for five days and then found this big river. He thought it was the Roper River. He was really lost. He decided to follow the river down to its mouth in the hope of being picked up on the coast. He found a big log and was going to try riding that, but he gave that away when he saw the crocs. He was lucky enough to find an old native canoe. It had two small holes in it but he repaired these with his socks and some mud and grass packed on the inside and made a fair job of it (I will add here, in Shaun O'Leary's book, it was quoted he tore strips off his flying suit to repair the canoe and this same flying suit saved him from bites and scratches to his legs and arms; he never had a flying suit. If he did have one when he bailed out he would have soon discarded it the next day when walking through the bush in the heat of the day. He was wearing a long sleeved shirt, which did save his arms a bit.)

His legs were in a terrible mess with scratches and insect bites. The only food he had eaten was a few berries. He was very weak. Coming down the Daly in the canoe he could only use it when the tide was running out, then with the incoming tide he would have had to pull the canoe up the bank, (this would have taken some doing in his weakened state) then wait for the out going tide. He was very lucky that he heard our shooting. If we had not been shooting, he could have easily gone past without us seeing him, or he seeing us.

I sent a message to Squadron Head Quarters to report the matter and to send for the Regimental Aid Post truck with medical aid. I knew also that his mate might still be out in the bush alive. He could have easily walked in the opposite direction on landing to Brannelly. He was now recovered a little more with the help of Dick's good soup, and a little custard and a cup of tea.

I produced a military map of the area and between us we worked out an approximate spot where he and his mate baled out. I sent the map reference in my message so a search party could be organised to try and find the lost gunner operator. The message had to be converted to code which Bob Shegog sent out in Morse to Squadron Head Quarters. Bob had improved with his Morse sending but was still a long way from first class. After a few repeats he got the message through at 1530 hours. Within an hour the Regimental Aid Post truck arrived with Serjeant Brian Mole in charge. He gave the patient some treatment to his legs before heading back to the main base. Brannelly thanked us all, said goodbye, and away they went.

We just happened to be in the right spot at the right time and even the Vickers gun played its part. He was indeed lucky. I heard later he only had a week in hospital at Adelaide River, then returned to his Unit. (I have never heard a word about him from that day to this, some forty-eight years later.)

We also heard later that the search party spent over a week looking for the gunner operator, but found no trace of him. They found the crashed plane, but the only clue that gave them was that at least they were looking in the right locality.

12 All the excitement is over and its back to normal again. Later in the day a troop from further down the river handed over the boat "Pharsee" to us. I don't know how the Regiment came by this boat, but it was now being moved around for each troop to use in turn. It was about twenty foot long and a very solid boat. It had an inboard diesel motor, that was very reliable. It would chug away all day at a steady rate of knots. We took it for a few trips up and down the river. Kevin caught a few young sharks off the side. We were now enjoying life again. It was great. Our tucker boxes were full and we were having beaut meals. Our favourite morning snack was jam with cheese, on army issue biscuits. These were large, square flaky biscuits from South Africa.

Other goodies in the tucker box included things like tinned fruit, tinned butter (not so good), extra sugar rations, tea and the odd fruit cake from home.

I found a packet of junket tablets that must have come in somebody's hamper. We had plenty of powdered milk so I decided we would have junket with our tinned fruit. I mixed the milk in a big tin, put in the required number of tablets and at tea time I was looking forward to surprising the troop with a lovely junket. I was the one who got the surprise, because when I went to it nothing had happened. It was still milk. What I didn't know was you cannot make junket with powdered or condensed milk, it must be fresh. Of course my troop didn't think much of me as a cook!

Dick had an oven going again and was turning out some great meals. We were getting some fresh beef again from Tipperary Station.

16 Our week is up, however we are only going back to Litchfield and it's not too bad there. (I still have in my possession today the original decoded message form that I received from Squadron Head Quarter on May 16, 1943. It reads "TO DETU 5 FROM - DETU. Evacuate Post today.

MESSAGE FORM										Serial No.	
CALL AND INSTRUCTIONS.										No. of Groups	
IN										GR.	
OUT										OFFICE DATE STAMP	
(ABOVE THIS LINE IS FOR SIGNALS USE ONLY.)											
TO DETU 5											
FROM DETU											
Originator's Number				Date				In Reply to Number			
CW 2				16							
Evacuate		Post		Today		①		three		tonnes	
coming		to		collect		drums		heavy		beav	
①		Land		PHARSEE		over		to		six	
troop		①		Sqn		code		name		DETU	
from		from		now							
<div> <div> THIS MESSAGE MAY BE SENT AS WRITTEN BY ANY MEANS: () WIRELESS </div> <div> THIS MESSAGE MUST BE SENT IN CYPHER IF LIABLE TO INTERCEPTION OR TO FALL INTO ENEMY HANDS. </div> <div> ORIGINATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS LEGACY OF PRIORITY </div> <div> TIME OF ORIGIN 1047 </div> </div>											
<div> <div> SIGNATURE * ORIGINATOR MAY DELETE "EXCEPT" AND INSERT "INCLUDING." </div> <div> SIGNATURE </div> <div> (BELOW THIS LINE IS FOR SIGNALS USE ONLY.) </div> </div>											
SYSTEM	TIME	READER	SENDER	SYSTEM	TIME	READER	SENDER	SYSTEM	TIME	READER	SENDER
IN	IN			OUT	OUT			OUT	OUT		

Original message form received with instructions to hand over post on the Daly River to No 6 troop

Three tonner coming to collect drums heavy gear. Hand Pharsee over to 6 troop. Squadron code name DETU from now". Squadron code names were changed fairly frequently. This was to make it harder for the Japs to break our code.) The post we were at wasn't going to be used again. Number 6 troop were going to another post further up river and, of course, taking the boat with them. We returned to Litchfield in the afternoon.

17 Off on a short patrol with Number 4 Troop, Lieutenant Reg Edwards is the Troop Leader. We get on very well together. Back to Litchfield in the evening. The mail has come in from Regimental Head Quarters. Several letters for me. Should get plenty of time to answer them over the next few days.

18-21 A couple of days in camp and a couple out on patrol.

23 Today, we headed back to Mount Camp. The track is rough and dusty. I have made a change around in drivers just for the time being. I have Sailor Livingston as my driver. He isn't in the same class compared to Kevin and Dick. He wasn't doing too bad of a job, that is, until we were about two thirds of the way back. I was not sitting in the crew commander's seat, because it was too dusty. I was sitting up high on some gear in the middle compartment but close to the left side of the carrier. Bob Shegog was on the other side with the wireless. Somehow Sailor ran off the track and ran over a stump. The jolt threw me off. Lucky for me I didn't hit a tree, I landed in the dust, so I wasn't hurt. But my dignity sure was. I was angry. I sure did the bun and, of course, Sailor copped the lot. I ordered him out of the driver's seat and I said I would drive the bloody carrier myself, which I did. Poor old Sailor never said a word. His pride was hurt too. When we reached the highway I had cooled off so I let him back in the drivers seat again to drive the short distance to the camp. Of course that was not the only reason I let him drive. A Troop Leader is not supposed to drive so it would have looked very odd if I was driving while entering our camp. If spotted by an officer I could have been in big trouble.

24-31 Another week back in camp and, of course, the old routines and duties. There is a change of program as far as the outposts are concerned. They are not serving any purpose now, so they are to be abandoned. From now on we will be doing more patrols and training in the bush. Also some good news, the Regiment have been allowed to set up a rest camp near a police camp on the Daly. This place is south of Tipperary Homestead where the Daly is well clear of any tides. Each Squadron will use the camp for a week at a time. The Pharsee will be there for the use of the troops. Sounds great. A Squadron is going this week. We will be next.

June

1 More mail in today. A great letter from Win. More and more I have been thinking of Win, and now of course I realise I am very much in love with her, as I have been I guess for the last six months or more. The thing is what am I going to do about it. Will I write now and tell her all about my feelings for her or wait until such time as we get leave. Goodness knows when that will be. I will just have to give the question more thought.

3 Number 4 and 5 Troops are off on a two day patrol. Reg Edwards is in charge. We headed south west into the bush. We made camp early in the afternoon beside a small stream. It was a lovely spot. After getting everything set up in the camp I went for a walk alone into the bush to think over my problem. Alone in the bush I soon reached a decision. I would write to Win at once and tell her I was very much

in love with her and ask her to be my wife. I returned to the camp site and went straight to my carrier. I always kept my writing paper and pen in my map case. I sat in the carrier and wrote my letter of proposal to the girl I really loved. I could only hope that she could return that love and we could marry some day. I sealed the letter up and took it over to Reg Edwards. He had told me a few weeks ago to seal my own personal letters and he would put his censor stamp on them. This was very decent of him, he was a perfect gentleman, he trusted me and I would have never let him down on that trust. The most important letter I had ever written in my life was now on its way. Now I will have to wait at least two weeks for a reply. It will be the longest two weeks of my life!

(As I look back now over the years it was truly a wonderful decision I made that day in the bush of the Northern Territory. From that decision came a wonderful married life with Win and five marvellous children)

4 We carried on with our patrolling. We met a tribe of aboriginals. They spoke just a little English. We gave them some tins of bully beef and packets of biscuits which they were very pleased about. We moved on and arrived back at Mount Camp in the late afternoon.

7 It is now our Squadron's turn to move out to the Rest Camp on the Daly for one week. Arrived there in the late afternoon. A Squadron had already pulled out. We set up our camp, in a peaceful spot among the gum trees. A cook house is operating, so we won't have to cook for ourselves here. Looks like being a very restful time!

The Daly is a clear fresh water river, so we will be able to go swimming. The boys have their lines in, hoping to catch some barramundi.

12 Over the last four days we have had a great time swimming, playing sport and just lazing about. The boys haven't had much luck with the fishing though. A few small brim is all they have caught.

Today is our Troop's turn with the Pharsee. We set off early taking some lunch with us and headed down stream. I had received some information about the possibility of finding some schools of mullet just where the tide cuts out. With this in mind I bought some grenades with me.

It was great cruising down the Daly. We were moving with the current so the old Pharsee moved along at a fast clip. We sighted the odd fresh water crocodile lazing in the sun. They only grow to six or seven feet. We came to some sand bars around 1100 hours, so decided it was a good spot to have lunch. We pulled in on one of the sand bars. While the boys were getting the billy boiled, I had a look around. Between two of these sand bars I found a big pool of crystal clear water and in it were dozens of mullet swimming about. I went for my grenades in the boat and took two! I threw one into the middle of the pool but nothing happened. It was a dud. (It went through my mind, that it would be terrible if a Jap was after me and I threw that grenade at him!) Well I threw the second grenade and it sure went off. A geyser of water, sand and mud shot up into the air. When it settled down a bit, all I could see were two fish floating on the top. I was very disappointed. I had expected to get a big haul, twenty or thirty at least.

I stripped off and waded in to collect my two fish. The water was between four and five feet deep. By this time the water was beginning to clear. I felt something wet and slimy under my feet. I duck dived to the bottom and could see fish lying on the sand everywhere. I came up with one in each hand and yelled to the troops to come and help me. The ones that could swim came out and we had a busy time of it all duck diving and bringing up as many as we could at a time, with gales of laughter. It took all of

twenty minutes to get the mullet all out. The final count was one hundred and twenty. Everyone was amazed including myself. I turned to Kevin and said, "Now that's fishing, you won't break that record". "No", he said, "But that's not fishing, its most unsportsmanlike". I said, "Well whatever it is, we will feed the whole Squadron with this lot".

The fish were all mullet between one and two pounds. There were about ten fish too knocked about by the explosion to keep, so we threw them back. I worked it out that the reason that only two floated to the top was that their air sacs were intact and they were only stunned. The ones on the bottom were killed outright by the blast.

After we had some lunch we loaded the fish in the boat and headed back for camp. The boys spent the trip back to camp cleaning and scaling the fish in hope that the cooks would cook them for our tea.

We were about halfway home when we saw two blacks standing on the banks and holding up between them a five or six foot crocodile. They were beckoning us to come over which we did. They wanted us to give them a ride upstream to their camp. It was, only a couple of miles down stream from our camp. I saw the tail of the croc was twitching a bit. I wanted to know if the croc was quite dead. One of the blacks replied, "Him berry dead fella oright Boss". "Okay" I said, "come aboard". Away we went. We had only gone a mile when that "BERRY DEAD FELLA CROC", became a "BERRY ALIVE FELLA CROC". There were yells and some panic. Somebody reached for a rifle. I yelled "Drop that bloody rifle"! Then I yelled "Throw the bloody croc over board". Nobody was rushing to obey that order. However, the two blacks very soon had every thing under control. They quickly put that croc back to sleep with their nulas (a large wooden club).

I wasn't taking any more chances, I threw them a rope and told them to tie up its jaws. There was sure some excitement in the boat when that croc started thrashing about!

We arrived at their camp site and unloaded them. That croc would soon be roasting on their camp fires. It would probably feed the whole tribe. What a day we had. Marvellous. It was certainly a day to remember. We handed over our big haul of fish to the cooks. They already had the evening meal on, so the fish would have to keep until tomorrow.

- 13** A few of the boys visited an old chap who was peanut farming not far up the river from here. They bought a bag of peanuts, a chaff bag full. It cost one pound. We sure have got ourselves a lot of peanuts.
- 14** Our last day here in this very pleasant spot. We ate the mullet for tea last night. There were plenty for the whole Squadron and they sure tasted great. I have spent the day lazing about in the beautiful sunshine. We have all had a wonderful week.
- 15** Back to Mount Camp and duties.
- 19** The mail has at last come in. The letter from Win that I have been so anxiously waiting for has arrived. She was very surprised to receive my letter of proposal, but at the same time, she writes, `very honoured". She did love me a lot, but thought it would be better to wait until we met and could talk it over before making a final decision. I was happy to do that. It was a great letter. I was very confident of what that decision would be. Of course, as there was nothing definite, I could not let my family know at this stage. I had told them of my friendship for Win and our frequent letter writing. I am sure it will

come as no surprise to them when I am able to inform them of our true relationship. I know my Mum and Dad will be very pleased about it, because they think a lot of Win.

As to my troop and fellow Serjeants, Win is just my girl friend, that is obvious because her photo takes pride of place beside my bed.

It was hard for me to hide my true feelings on the day that letter arrived, I sure felt like celebrating.

- 30** The old grind of camp goes on. However, we do get out on short patrols which helps to break the monotony.

July

- 1** Twelve months since we arrived in the Northern Territory. We are really getting sick of it now. We feel we should have been out of here long before this and doing something worthwhile. Of course, the "powers that be" have their ideas and we must try to be patient.

Lots of rumours are going around of course as to when we are moving. That's the burning question; when?

Win and I are now writing weekly and its great to get her letters. They are a real morale booster!

- 15** Two weeks have gone by and nothing much happened. The rumours of course are still flying around, but nobody takes any notice of them.

- 22** Another week. I have caught some wog and have diarrhoea, so I am on light duties. B and C Squadron have set off on a thirty mile route march through the bush. They will be camping out for two nights. I have to stay in camp because of my complaint. I would much prefer to be going with them than staying here.

Mail in today. A great letter from Win. It really cheered me up. Also one from Ruth. She is engaged to be married. Great news. Her man is Matt Maher. I have never met him. Good luck to her.

- 24** The two Squadrons have returned from their route march, very dirty, very tired and very unhappy. They reckon that this route march was the last straw thrust upon them. They will soon get over it. I hope I soon get over this diarrhoea, it's no better yet. I have been on sick parade every morning. This morning Captain DeGaris, our Regimental Medical Officer put me on a different medicine. I sure hope it does some good.

- 27** That medicine was great stuff. I am cured thank goodness for that, I have lost quite a bit of weight but should soon put it back on again.



Win and Joan Stephens

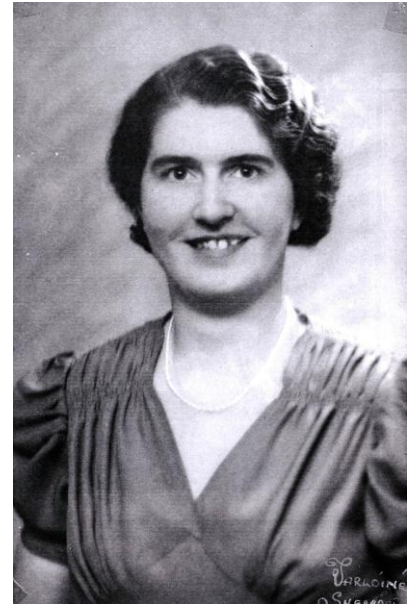


Win Stephens, Lake Boga RAAF Catalina Flying Base

- 31 Great news! At long last we have been informed that we will be moving out of the Northern Territory within a week. We will be moving to our various states for twenty eight days leave. The advance party of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, who are taking over our equipment have arrived. There is great joy within our Regiment, everyone has great smiles.

August

- 1 Another letter from Win, I won't be able to inform her of my leave until I get to Adelaide when I can send a telegram. I also received another letter from my sister Ruth. She is being married on the 28th August at Albert Park, Melbourne. It is possible I may be able to get to her wedding. It would be great to surprise them all, if I can.
- 3 The 8th Cavalry are moving in. We will be moving out in groups according to the state we live in. The Queenslanders are moving out today on the same track we came in on, thirteen months ago, via Mt Isa. All other groups will go via Alice Springs to Adelaide but on different days.
- 5 All equipment has now been handed over. All we will be travelling with is two blankets and personal effects.
- 6 New South Wales group moved out.



Win Stephens on her 21st birthday, March 1941

- 7 South Australians and Western Australians have moved out.
- 8 We Victorians left Mount Camp at 0700 hours, travelling to the Adelaide River by trucks and caught the train from there. We sure are a happy lot of boys!

We travelled to Laramah where the line ended, then on to trucks and down the Stuart Highway to Daly Waters. By this time it was late in the day.

A new transit staging camp had been built here. It was very bare though. There were Nissan huts with concrete floors for sleeping, similar for a mess hut, a few cold showers, a latrine and that was it.

We were issued with an extra blanket and we sure needed it. We were now about four hundred miles inland. The nights are extremely cold. One blanket was used folded several times to make a pad to sleep on, and the other two on top. That concrete was sure hard. That didn't worry us though, we were heading home for the first decent leave in nearly four years. I think if it had been a bed of nails we wouldn't have complained. A cook house was operating and we received a fair meal.

- 9 Away at 0800 hours on the next leg of our trip. It was a beautiful road so the trucks could move along at a rapid speed. It was so smooth the boys were playing cards to pass the time away. We made Tennant Creek, our next staging camp by 1530 hours. The camp was exactly the same as the last one. We were one day closer to home.
- 10 Away early at 0700 hours. Arrived Alice Spring at 1500 hours. Here the army had established big Q Stores. We were issued with a full outfit of new clothing. We sure needed them, because all we had in the Northern Territory were shorts and shirts and a jumper. We were issued with our winter uniforms coats, shirts, underwear, new berets, boots, colour patches, badges, and stripes for N.C.O.

Their organisation was great. They had us all through in under two hours and everything fitted perfectly. How different from the early days. We were given a good meal, then boarded the train. By this time it was dark and very cold. We appreciated our new warm clothes. There was an hour's wait on the siding for the up train to come in. When it did finally arrive, it was quite a surprise to us. It was all lit up with several sleeping cars. It was a concert party with several ladies as well as men heading to the Northern Territory to entertain the troops. Some of our boys remarked that they could entertain us right now! They had stopped right beside our train so they came in for plenty of wolf whistles and wise cracks. That soon stopped when our train pulled out for the long trip to Adelaide.

- 11** We are somewhere in South Australia and going very slowly through the semi-desert country, however it doesn't look like desert now. A week ago they had several inches of rain. There are wild flowers everywhere. It looks beautiful and so different to what we had become accustomed to in the Northern Territory.

The rain is the reason we are going slowly. The rail track is soft and we can only go at about ten miles an hour in lots of places. At this rate it could be a five day trip to Adelaide. We were all busy this first day on the train sewing on colour patches, stripes and chevrons. The chevrons were something new. They were for years of service in the Australian Imperial Forces - one for every year of service. They are worn on the lower part of the right sleeve of the tunic. The 39ers (those that joined up in 1939) were issued with four.

- 12** We are still pushing along slowly. Meals are a problem. We were issued with some hard rations (bully beef and biscuits) when we left Alice Springs, so at least we, won't starve. Late in the evening we arrived at Oodnadatta - only about half way there, but we were given a hot meal. Set off into the night.

- 13** The track is a bit better now, and we are travelling a little faster. We should make Marree by this evening. Made Marree and another hot meal for us.

- 14** Reached Peterborough late in the evening - not far to go now.

- 15** Arrived Adelaide at 0800 hours in the morning. Went to the transit camp for the day. Will leave for Melbourne this evening. Managed to send Win a telegram to say I would be in Melbourne on the 16th for twenty eight days leave, and that I would send her another telegram from there, to let her know what train to expect me on, to Lake Boga. I am so looking forward to seeing Win and hopefully making plans for our future together.

- 17** Arrived Melbourne 0900 hours. The leave and transit camp is now at Royal Park, where we were issued with leave passes and I managed to get four extra days for travelling to my home town.

I made some enquires about train times to Lake Boga. They told me the next train to Lake Boga would leave at 0800 hours tomorrow. To fill in time I went into the city with some of the boys also waiting for trains. Rang RAAF to pass on a message to Win, to say I would see her tomorrow. Had a few beers with the boys. Stopped at a pub not far from Spencer Street Station. So did Eddie Clugston and a few others. We were all going in different directions next day, and it would be good to have one night together before going our separate ways.

- 18** Wednesday. Left Spencer Street at 0800 hours on the Swan Hill train. Eventually arrived at Lake Boga around 1630 hours. It was a long trip. Win was on the platform to meet me. In fact she seemed to be the only one on the platform. I guess I only had eyes for her. It was a great moment. It was nearly

four years since I had seen her last. She was looking terrific in her WAAAF uniform. Words failed us for awhile. We kissed and hugged each other then away we went arm in arm. Win only had another half hour off duty. Then she had to go on for the evening meal at the Serjeants Mess. She would be off duty again in about 3 hours.

I naturally thought I would be staying at the local pub and would get my meals there. Win had arranged things otherwise. She had mentioned to her section officer that I was arriving and would be staying for a few days at least. The section officer said, "Seeing he is a serjeant, we will put him up in the Serjeants quarters and he will have his meals in the Serjeants Mess." It certainly was better than putting up at the local hotel. I was most appreciative of their warm hospitality.

Win walked me up to the Serjeant Mess and introduced me to one of the members there, then Win went off to her duty.

This chap, Jim (can't remember his surname) seemed to know about my arriving and had everything organised for me. He showed me around, took me to the sleeping quarters and showed me where I would sleep, - a nice stretcher with mattress, blankets and sheets all made up ready for me. I was dumb founded. After a clean up shower etc I went back to the Mess and met a few more of the Serjeants. They couldn't do enough for me. After a couple of beers we had our evening meal. It was excellent, so it should have been - my girlfriend had a hand in cooking it!

Lake Boga is a repair and training base for flying boats, mainly Catalinas:

(Little did I know, but there was at that time in the repair section, a chap by the name of Clive Dunn. It wasn't until forty-two years later in 1985 when I got to know Clive well, through the Bowling Club at Mortlake, that I learnt of this fact. He became a very good friend of mine. In that same year we did a trip around Australia and have had several smaller ones since.)

At seven o'clock that evening I had to excuse myself. I had a date with one of the cooking staff. They seemed to know quite a bit about that too. I met Win as promised and we went for a walk. We got to a shelter shed down by the Lake and talked and talked, mostly about ourselves. Again I asked her if she would marry me, and to my great delight she answered, "Yes of course I will". I am sure she had made her mind up long before this, and just wanted to tell me face to face instead of by letter and I could not blame her for that. This was marvellous! We were both very happy about it all. The next question was, when? Well we didn't talk much about that then. We decided to leave that for tomorrow. I walked her back to her quarters, she had to be in at 2300 hours. It was a great day!

19 Thursday. Saw Win for a few minutes before she went on duty. I suggested to her that I might go into Swan Hill to do some shopping. I was keen to formalise our decision of last night with an engagement ring. Win said it would be better to wait until after the war when there would be a better selection. There was not much available now and they were an awful price.

Win went off to her duties. I caught the bus to Swan Hill. I was disappointed about not getting her a ring. I gave it some thought going in on the bus. I wanted to give her something. I went to a jeweller and bought her a nice brooch instead. I did some shopping for myself and returned to Lake Boga about midday.

Win had a few hours off in the afternoon, so we went for a walk around the Lake.

I gave Win the brooch which she was very pleased with. We did a lot of talking about getting married. If possible, I wanted it to be on this leave. Win wasn't so sure. Eventually she agreed.

We decided that I would ring her Mum and Dad in the evening and tell them the good news and our decision about wanting to get married in the near future. Of course I knew her Mum and Dad very well from the pre-war years when they were share farming a dairy farm on Dueran Station for Mr Lester, and I had no doubts they would be pleased with our decision.

(Before I started full time on Dueran in 1936, I had done some part time work for Frank Stephens on the dairy farm, harvesting etc. They were now living at 68 Clive Street, Shepparton.)

In the evening when Win came off duty we went down to the Post Office where there was a public phone. We rang Shepparton. I had to do all the talking, for a start anyway. Of course they were very happy to hear the great news. I asked Win's father if he would see the minister and arrange a wedding for next week. He agreed to do this and we were to ring back tomorrow night. Then away we went to the shelter shed by the lake for more talking.

20 In the evening we rang Win's parents again. It was great news, Win's father had seen the minister and had arranged the wedding for Friday, 27th August at 2 pm in the Shepparton Presbyterian Church. The minister was the Rev Paton. He wanted to see one of us at least two days before, to get our particulars. It was decided I would go to Shepparton on the Monday. There was a coach service from Swan Hill to Shepparton. Win would come over on the Thursday, 26th. She could only get two weeks leave from the 27th.

Win and I decided that after our wedding we would catch the evening train to Melbourne so we could attend Ruth's wedding the next day in Middle Park. Things were sure happening all at once. This was of course quite common in war time.

I rang my sister Elsie to ask if she could find a nice hotel or guest house in Melbourne where we could spend our honeymoon. It wouldn't be easy with Melbourne crowded out with Yankee servicemen. Elsie was sure surprised and delighted to hear our news. She would do her best to find some where for us to stay. Of course it was impossible for her to make it to our wedding. We would meet next day at Ruth's. I walked Win back to her quarters, we were very happy. It would have been much nicer to have had more of our brothers and sisters and for me, my parents, at our wedding but that was impossible with the War on.

21 I knew that Lionel George, one of my troop, lived in the Lake Boga area. It didn't take long to find out where that was, so I decided to pay him a visit. He had a small farm about half a mile away from Lake Boga, an irrigation block belonging to his parents where they were growing grapes. We had a good old yarn and then he came back to Lake Boga with me and had a few beers in the Pub. In the evening of course, I met Win and we did more planning for our wedding.

23 Monday. Set off for Shepparton and arrived there in the afternoon. Mr and Mrs Stephens made me very welcome at 68 Clive Street.

24 Went to Church and met the minister who is to marry us. I made an appointment with him for the next day. Later in the day I managed to get Rich Stephens on the phone at Barwite near Mansfield. Rich is Win's brother and the oldest of the Stephens family. He, along with his mate John Camerford, own a grazing farm near Barwite. This made him exempt from War service. He agreed to come to our wedding and be my best man. Mrs Stephens had been in touch with Linda Moses who lived in Mooroopna to be Win's bridesmaid. Linda is Jack Stephens girlfriend and also a friend of Wins.

Jack was somewhere up north with the 9th Division Cavalry. At least we would have some members of Win's family at the wedding.

25 Made the appointment with Mr Paton and gave him all the necessary information on Win and I, and our parents. I have organised another meeting with him when Win arrives tomorrow.

26 Win arrived in the afternoon. Win's Mum and Dad and I met her at the bus depot. It was a very happy meeting.

27 Our wedding day. A wonderful day. A day to remember. Rich Stephens arrived during the morning. I forgot to mention that on Saturday 21st, Win had a few hours off so we went into Swan Hill and purchased a wedding ring. I gave the ring to Rich to look after when he arrived.

At about 1.30 pm, getting near the time to head to the church, Rich suggested we head for the Pub for a couple of whiskies to calm the nerves. I sure agreed to that.



A wedding photo of win and Os

The wedding went off without a hitch. Win looked radiant. After the service Mr Paton presented Win and I with the bible he used to marry us with. He had written our marriage details in the fly leaf and signed it. (This bible is my most cherished possession today.)



Our Wedding group. (L to R): Pop Stephens, Os and Win, Mother Stephens, Rich Stephens, Linda Moses (Linda married Jack Stephens a few months later) and Don Stephens in front.

Win and I were married in full uniform. After the ceremony we went back to 68 Clive Street where Win's mother had prepared a very nice wedding breakfast. Given the very strict food rationing that was then operating, she did a wonderful job. Present were the bride and groom, Rich Stephens, Linda Moses, Pop and Mum Stephens, Don Stephens (Win's younger brother was about nine years old), and Moira, a niece of Linda's. A few of the guests had cameras, including Win, so there were quite a few shots taken. Our tiny wedding party had a great reception.

I had been in touch with Elsie on the weekend. She had arranged a room for us at the Prince of Wales hotel in St Kilda for the 27th.

The evening train left Shepparton about 1800 hours so we all headed to the Station after the wedding breakfast.

We reached St. Kilda at around 2230 hours. It was a nice room but didn't have a lock on the door. We didn't think much of that. Around two or three in the morning the lights came on and some yanks were at the door starting to come in. I yelled at them, "Get to hell out of here!" To their credit they did just that very quickly.

28 In the morning we complained about no lock on the door. They promised to have it fixed during the day and by the end of the day they had been true to their word.

Today is my sister Ruth's wedding day. The service is to be held at St Brendan's Church, Middle Park at 2 pm.

Win and I were early so I could meet my family and have a talk. My Mum and Dad were the first ones we met, then my sisters Elsie and Marj. My brother Erwin was looking after the farm at Mansfield.

After the wedding service we met Ruth's husband Matt and his family for the first time. We also met Ann Harris who was Ruth's Matron of Honour. She was sure surprised to see us and to hear we were married. Norm was in the armoured Division, and some where up north. Ruth and Matt's wedding party would have out numbered ours about 10 to 1. There were a lot of Mahers.

The wedding reception was at Albert Park. Of course Win and I hadn't been invited. Firstly, they had no idea I would be home and certainly no idea that I would have a bride with me. The arrangements had all been finalised. Ruth was upset about this, but it couldn't be helped. When the wedding party left for the reception Win and I went into the city to arrange to have our photo's taken. We found a place in Collins Street and made an appointment for the Monday.

30 We had our photos taken and we can collect them in one week. Went to the pictures. In the following two weeks Win and I went to many shows. One I can remember, "My Little Chickadee". W.C. Fields was the main actor. It was a great comedy. We shared lots of laughs. I called Win My Little Chickadee many times after that. She thought it a great joke.

September

1-10 The days of our honeymoon are flying by. Win and I are very much in love. We go for long walks and we are doing all the shows in the city. We have been out to visit Elsie at Burwood, and also Marj at Brighton.

Win has only one day left of her leave. I have another eight days of mine. Win rang one of her mates in the W.A.A.A.F. at Lake Boga to book us a room at the Pub there.

We caught the morning train at Spencer Street, and arrived at Lake Boga in the afternoon. We went to our room at the pub. I think Win had made a big mistake ringing her mate Peggy. The room was well and truly done over. There were lots of notes on the dressing table giving us advice on what to do and what not to do. The bed had been short sheeted and sprinkled liberally with flour. Girls will be girls!

12 Win is back on duty. It was a lonely day, but I spent most of it letter writing to friends in Mansfield, and to Joan and Jack Stephens.

- 13** Win and I had been invited out to Lionel George's place for tea. It was not far across the paddocks. Lionel's wife gave us a lovely meal. Afterwards we played cards and we had a great evening.
- 14** Lionel and I planned to meet at the pub at 1700 hours for a few beers. I was to meet Win at 1900 hours when she came off duty to go to the pictures which was within the camp. Well I kept that appointment, but only just. In the previous two hours I had consumed far more than my usual moderate quota of beer. I managed to sit that picture show out, but I didn't have a clue what it was all about, it seemed to be going around in circles. It was only a one-film show so it was all over before 10 pm and Win and I went back to the pub and had some supper. By this time I was starting to sober up. I don't know how Lionel got on. (I can't remember seeing him again after that. I think he must have got his discharge to help out on the farm.)
- 15-18** The last few days of my leave went all too quickly. Win had some time off, to see me off on the train on the morning of the 18th. It was a sad goodbye. We didn't know when we would see one another again. It had been the best four weeks of my life, but now it was back to the army and the unknown.
- We knew the Regiment would reassemble in Queensland but after that nothing was certain. It was an awfully long and lonely trip back to Melbourne. Arrived there about 2230 hours at night. Went straight to the Y.M.C.A. where I knew I could get a bed for the night. Met a few Cavalry chaps there so that made me feel a lot better, although it was hard to get Win from my mind.
- 19** Reported into Royal Park Transit camp at 0800 hours to answer roll call. We will be leaving in the evening by troop train for Queensland. We were given leave until 1600 hours. Back to the city with some of my mates. Max Ramsey, Guy Baxter and several others had also been married on leave. We had plenty to talk about. It certainly took away the gloom of leaving Win.
- There were beer rations on so all the pubs were shut in the morning. Most of them would open by 1400 hours in the afternoon. They were terribly crowded with troops. It was hard to get a drink, but we managed a few before going back to Royal Park.
- The train left Spencer Street at 1800 hours. The Railways had things much better organised for the troops. They had ripped out all the seats of their old carriages and built three tiered bunks down each side. We could now stretch out and have a decent sleep while travelling.
- 20** Reached Sydney in the morning with no delays. We went straight through, heading for Brisbane.
- 21** Arrived Brisbane in the early morning. We changed trains there on to the narrow gauge line. Arrived in the small town of Murgon about one hundred and eighty miles north west of Brisbane in the mid afternoon. This is where the 8th Cavalry Regiment, similar to our own, were camped. It was a Militia Regiment, originally the 8th Light Horse Regiment. It was a dirty looking camp, including carriers and other equipment. Perhaps it looked worse in our eyes coming back from leave and an uncertain future ahead. One thing for sure, there would be a lot of work cleaning it up and that would be good for us.
- Coming up on the train I became aware of two very sore spots on the knee and thigh of my left leg. They looked like boils developing. The one on the knee is very painful.
- 22** I went along to the Regimental Aid Post, to have these sores investigated. Captain De Gares was in charge and said they were boils and the one on the knee would have to be lanced. He couldn't do it as none of his equipment or stores had arrived yet, so I would have to go to Field Ambulance Depot for treatment. This was in the area, not far away. Somebody drove me there in a utility. The doctor there

lanced it right away and said I would have to wait two or three days to see how the other boil went. The one on the knee already felt better. It had oozed a lot of muck. Too rich a food on leave I guess, after four years of Army food.

I was put in a sick bay tent with a decent bunk, so at least I am going to be comfortable and able to do some writing. So I immediately wrote a long letter to my wonderful wife. I also wrote letters to my own family whom I had badly neglected over the last five or six weeks.

23 The second boil came to a head and didn't need lancing. The doctor said I could go back to my unit tomorrow. Wrote a few letters to friends at Mansfield.

24 Back to the Regiment and work. Not all the troops are back from leave. My troop is down to eight now, Pat Morwood, Bill Petschak, Kevin Jonson, Sailor Livingston, Bob Shegog, Nelson Webster, Harry Becket and myself. All these chaps have now returned from leave. The old carriers are nearly worn out and in an awful mess. We can at least clean them up and make them more respectable. We cannot, however, do anything about the worn out parts

25-30 My boils are healing fast thank goodness. A marvellous letter from Win - a terrific morale booster. She too found it hard settling down after I had left, but is coping alright now.

We have got the camp looking a bit better. It has now been decided to build a new camp a few miles away at a place called Broad Water. Work there has already commenced with work parties going there everyday. At least it is giving us something to do. Murgon is only a small town but in a good dairying district. Kingaroy is several miles away and a fair sized town. There is a picture theatre there, so our own trucks take troops there three nights a week.

October

1-15 The new camp is now finished and we have moved in. It is much more comfortable, however morale within the Regiment is low. There is no use for a Regiment such as ours in jungle fighting. Carriers would be useless. We are not sure what will become of us. The thought of becoming infantry men is not good, especially us 39ers, a lot of us having spent several years before the War in the Light Horse. We will just have to wait and see and hope for the best. Of course a lot of men have already put in for transfers to other units. Some have been successful, some not.

Several of our wireless operators have applied for transfers to RAAF. All have been successful. The Regiment is gradually losing men. There have been no replacements. We have been going out with the carriers and doing some exercise to give the troops something to do.

I have had three letters from Win since getting back which is great. We have agreed to write a letter each week.

16 I have been notified that I have been selected to attend an aircraft recognition school at the RAAF Base at Maryborough for ten days. Maryborough is on the coast about one hundred miles from here. Left in the afternoon by train and arrived in the evening. Once again I am quartered in an airforce Serjeant's Mess.

17 The school commenced. Lots of lectures. They have models of all enemy war planes and the allied forces. They also have film of these planes. We have to get familiar with all these planes so we can recognise them at a glance. Some of course we know well. The remainder will take all of the ten days

to get to know them. I find it very hard to concentrate, my mind keeps on wandering back to my wife. In the afternoon when school is finished for the day, a few of us went for a walk around Maryborough. It was just a medium size country town, and as it was war time, there was not much to see. There was a picture theatre we could go to at night and it was sure well attended.

18-27 The days went quickly by. The Serjeant's Mess looked after us as if we were something special. Our overseas service, I think, had something to do with that. It wasn't hard to take. Eventually the last day came. There weren't any exams. I am sure if there had been I would not have received very good marks. My mind was just not on the job.

28 Returned to camp at Murgon, quite a lot of mail for me, including two from Win which was great. Nothing new had taken place in the Regiment except more transfers.

Plenty of rumours flying around as to what is going to happen to us. One piece of good news. Farmer's sons can apply for twenty eight days seasonal leave to help out on the farm during the harvest, shearing etc. I have applied and should have a fair chance of getting it. Will not know for sure for a couple of weeks as it has to be checked out. The strength of the Regiment is now down to nearly half. The ones that are left are not happy because of the uncertainty of what is to become of this once great Regiment.

November

1 Settled back into camp life. At least we have a good Serjeants' Mess here. I am sharing a tent with three fellow Serjeants - Guy Baxter, Harold Waugh and Eddie Clugston - all good friends for four years now. We manage to keep cheerful mainly because of our long association together. Guy, of course, was married in the August Leave. We all have a lot in common, coming from the country.

3 Four years today since we joined up. One can't help wondering, will this war ever be over.

4 My birthday. Twenty nine today. Somebody in the Mess started the silly idea that who ever had a birthday had to shout for the Mess. I thought it should have been the other way around. Well anyway I had to abide by the rules. The Mess was now getting a fair ration of beer and at a cut price. I shouted a nine gallon keg. It cost me just under one pound. Even with our reduced numbers of senior NCO's our numbers would have been about thirty, so it was a reasonable amount of beer per man. I was always a small beer drinker so I went to bed sober, and of course there were a few non drinkers as well. Eddie Clugston was one of these, I thought none the less of him for that, he was a fine chap. The heavy drinkers soon polished off the niner.

5 Great news. My leave has been approved from the 13th November to the 16th December. This is from Royal Park Melbourne back to Royal Park, including two days off for travelling. That means thirty one days leave at home in Mansfield. This would be made up of seventeen days leave with pay and fourteen days without pay. It will take three days to reach Melbourne from here so I will be leaving on the 9th.

This is terrific. I immediately wrote a letter to Win with the good news to say I would be arriving in Melbourne on the 12th. Hopefully she can get some leave to spend with me on my parents farm. If so to send me a wire if she can meet me in Melbourne on the 12th or 13th. I also wrote a letter home to my Mum and Dad to tell them to expect me home on the 13th or 14th of November.

6 Wonders will never cease. Today I was called up to Regimental Head Quarters by the Adjutant Captain Norm McLeod. I wondered what for. For a minute I thought my leave might have been cancelled. It would be if I accepted what he had to offer! It had been approved by higher authority that I was to

attend "OCTU" (Officer Cadet Training Unit) for six months to receive my Commission. This was sure a surprise. I asked him if I had a choice and told him about my leave. He said I did have a choice, but if I accepted, my leave would have to be cancelled as I was to go to OCTU within a week. He said I would have twenty four hours to consider it. I said I would have to think it over. If it had been offered to me six months ago when in the Northern Territory I would not have hesitated in accepting. Now things were different. I was now married. I had been in the Australian Imperial Forces for four years, so I had served my country well. I thought I had a fair chance of getting a discharge in the not too distant future to return to farming and settling down with Win. If I accepted the offer to go to Officers' School it would be six months of very tough training. It would be very hard to take after all the years I had in the army. I was sure if I did take on the course I would get my Commission. Then there would be no chance of getting a discharge until the War ended. That could be two or more years away. Then of course I could be posted to the Infantry Battalion and the thought of that really turned me off. I also knew that if I did not accept this offer I would never get another one. I would remain a Serjeant for the rest of my army life, or at the best, get promoted to Serjeant Major. I suppose I was also a little bitter against the army at not giving me my Commission in the field. I had been acting troop leader of No 5 Troop for nearly two years. In all that time I never had any complaints from the Squadron Officer Commanding. I felt I had already earned that commission without having to do six months of bastardry to gain it. All these facts were weighed up and tossed over but the decision was never in doubt.

- 7** I reported to the Adjutant and told him I could not accept the "OCTU". He told me he realised how I must feel at not being promoted in the field as I certainly deserved it, but not many commissions were given this way.
- 8** I sent a telegram to Win to let her know I would arrive on the 12th and to inform Elsie at Burwood if she was coming to Melbourne. I realised she might not get my letter in time to wire me here so I suggested she leave word with Elsie and I would ring her when I arrive in Melbourne.
- 9-12** Left Murgon by train in the afternoon for Brisbane. It was a slow old trip. Changed trains there. Eventually reached Melbourne about 1000 hours on the 12th November. When I eventually got clear of Royal Park Leave and Transit Camp it was well past midday. I rang my sister Elsie at Burwood for news of Win. It was great news! Win was arriving on the evening train from Lake Boga. Elsie insisted we come out to Burwood and stay the night with them. I met Win at Spencer Street Station at about 2200 hours. It was wonderful to be with her again. We went straight out to Burwood. Win told me she had ten days leave from when she reached Mansfield, so this meant fourteen days in all, until she had to report back at Lake Boga. This was the best piece of news a man could ask for. I told Win about not accepting OCTU and she agreed I had done the right thing. Elsie was very happy to see us, and of course we did a lot of talking before going to bed.
- 13** Up early in the morning to catch the train at Flinders Street for Lilydale which connected with the coach to Mansfield. On the previous day I had sent a telegram to Mum and Dad notifying them of our time of arrival. How wonderful it was to see them again. Of course we had seen them only a few months before at Ruth's wedding but did not get much time to talk to them. We drove out in the old T Model Ford to Blue Range Creek ten miles north of Mansfield. It was so good to get back to the old home, especially this time with my wonderful loving wife by my side.
- 14** First thing today I went with my father and inspected the ten acres of grass hay he had nearly ready for cutting. I was amazed at the length and density of it. It was the heaviest crop of grass hay I have ever

seen. It was very wet underneath so we decided it would be better to leave it for a few more days in the hope it would dry out a bit and make it easier to cut. It was all pure clover and rye, with the rye standing nearly three feet high. This was bush country from which my father had cleared the trees with much hard work. It was beautiful soil and would grow anything. The average rainfall would be about 28 inches. As we wouldn't be cutting grass for a few days Win and I took the opportunity to visit friends around Bridge Creek and on Dueran Station. This time I had a loan of Dad's car as he had plenty of petrol ration tickets. The first place we went was Dueran and met our old boss Mr Lester. He was very pleased to see us and heartily congratulated us on our marriage. He told us that on my discharge we could have the cottage to live in. The cottage had been the old homestead before Mr Lester built a two storey brick home ten years before. The cottage had about eight rooms in it, and was a very comfortable home. We also met Bill and Queenie Stewart. Bill was the overseer on Dueran. They used to live in the cottage before the War when I worked there. They now lived in the dairy home in which the Stephens family lived before shifting to Shepparton. We had a great old yarn with them. We also visited the Dales and the Perrins. It was good to see these old friends again.

17-18 Mr Lester was a wonderfully generous man. I learnt lots of things he had done for my parents in the four years I had been away. He was going to send a man with two horses and a mower to cut the grass hay if I hadn't received leave. Of course I was still to get the mower and horses. They were still using them but would be finished their cutting in a few days. There were plenty of other jobs to do on the farm. It was good to get stuck into some work such as fence repairs, and some axe work. There would always be plenty of axe work on this farm.

19 Edgar Knight and family had a bush block adjoining my parents farm. He was shearing and asked me if I could spare a couple of days to help in the shed. Well the mower was still not available, so I was able to help him with some shed hand work.

20-21 It was great doing some shed hand work again. I asked Edgar if he knew of anyone likely to be going to Benalla on the 25th. That was the day Win had to start back to Lake Boga. There was no bus service from Mansfield to Benalla but there was one from Benalla to Shepparton. If I could get her to Benalla she could stay the night with her parents, then catch the bus next day to Lake Boga. I didn't think the old Ford was reliable enough to make the trip, but it would save Win a very long train journey if she could go this way. Edgar said that was no problem, the shearing would be finished so he could take her. He had a Chev which was getting on a bit but still in good order. I thanked him profusely and I knew Win would be very pleased to hear this.

22 Started the mowing in the afternoon after going and getting the mower and horses from Dueran. Was it a job! It was terribly hard going. I would only go a few yards and the mower would block, it was that heavy. It was a McCormick Deering mower, four foot six inches cut, and in fairly good order. However I decided to have a go resetting the fingers and knife to see if that would help. Well it did help and I did make some progress, but there were still plenty of blocks and stops.

22-24 Mowing away, plenty of swearing, but have nearly finished it. Another half day with a bit of luck will finish it, then I will have to rake it.

25 Edgar Knight came early for Win, about 8 o'clock. I decided to go to say goodbye at Benalla. Edgar's Chev had been a car, converted into a utility. It was a tight squeeze for three in the front seat. The road to Benalla was only gravel and plenty-of pot holes so it was after nine before we reached Benalla with still plenty of time for the bus. Edgar had some things to get so he said he would pick me up later.

So it was goodbye time for Win and I. I guess we were lucky to get this leave only three months after our marriage. We had a truly wonderful twelve days together. We were very much in love. This had been a second honeymoon. We were very thankful. Goodbyes for servicemen and women in wartime is always sad and hard. There is no way one can tell when we would see each other again. We could only live in hope and trust in God.

Edgar came and picked me up not long after the bus left. Then we set off for home. He did all the talking, I was very quiet, I was thankful for his company.

In the afternoon it was back to the mowing and that was sure good for me. I managed at last to finish the job.

26 The raking didn't take long with one horse in the dump rake.

27-30 What had been cut first was now ready to cart in. My Dad had a big spring cart, with a frame on. It held a fair load of hay. With pitch forks it was slow hard work but we stuck at it day after day. It was good for me but very hard on my Dad, he was now 69.

December

1-10 Over this period we got all the hay carted in, making three stacks. It was beautiful hay. The cows would lap it up in the winter time. There was nearly 40 tons of it by our estimation. During this time I had received two letters from Win. She said the trip back to Lake Boga was the longest she had ever had. Poor Win. I knew the feeling. Once back to her mates and work she was good again.

11-15 I did a few more jobs on the farm and managed one more day visiting around Bridge Creek and Mansfield. On the 15th my Mum and Dad drove me into Mansfield to catch the bus for Melbourne. Every time I said goodbye to my parents I could feel their despair and worry, probably even more now because I had a wife to be responsible for. They Loved Win very much and their despair and worry was as much for her as it was for me. Went out to Elsie's and stayed the night there.

16 Back to Royal Park for roll call at 0900 hours. My leave is over. Left on the night train for Sydney. On the way up started talking to a chap from the 6th Division 2/2 Field Regiment (Artillery). His name was Wally Laycock. He came from the Western District of Victoria. His parents had a property there. He didn't give me any details of it except to say it was a grazing property. He also was just returning to his unit after a month's seasonal leave. We had a lot in common to talk about. He also had not long been married.

17 Arrived in Sydney around 1030 hours. Out to the Show Grounds which was a transit camp. Given leave until midnight as we were not on draft for that day. Wally and I headed for the city and went to a show in the afternoon, a few beers when the Pub opened at 5, then back to the Shows Ground.

18 Wally and I were both on draft for the troop train leaving that evening.

19 Arrived Brisbane. Same thing. Out to the Showgrounds transit camp. Not on draft so given a leave pass for the day. The pubs everywhere are on a small ration of beer. They didn't open until 5 pm, then sold out their ration in less than one hour. Of course the bars were crowded with troops and workers. It was hard to get more than a couple of beers. In the evening Wally and I went to a picture show.

20-24 Each day was the same. We were stuck here, and it wasn't very pleasant. The reason was, there were thousands of troops going north. Complete units received priority. We learnt that the whole of the

6th Division was moving up to the Atherton Tablelands, so our two units would probably be already up there. On the 24th we learnt that we were at last on the draft to go that evening, so Christmas Day would be spent on the train. We pulled out of Brisbane late in the evening for the long trip up the coast to Cairns.

25 Christmas Day (My memory won't tell me what we had for Christmas dinner, nor at which station. We probably had sausages and mash and it could have been at Maryborough or Bundaberg.) The Queensland trains on their narrow gauge do not break any speed limits.

25-28 It was a long slow trip but we eventually reached Cairns on the morning of the 28th. We changed trains again on to the little train that went up the mountain and to the Tablelands. (With my good friend Clive in 1985 on the trip around Australia, we also went on this train to Karandra then a coach tour around the Atherton Tablelands. It brought back a lot of memories.) The train went through seventeen tunnels on its winding trip up the mountain, with two engines pulling. We passed the Barron Falls, a beautiful sight, then on to Karandra, where the station platform was a mass of beautiful flowers set in gardens and tubs. Not far on from here was the tiny town of Wongabel. This is where I left the train. I said goodbye to Wally. He was going on further to his unit.

(In the spring of 1949, at an off shears sale at Mortlake, I was leaning on the rails watching a pen of sheep being sold. On the other side of the pen was a tall bloke doing the same. Of course I recognised him at once. It was Wally Laycock who I had not seen since that day on the train at Wongabel. We had a good old yarn. It was later I learnt all about him and the big property and woollen mills they owned.)

The 6th Division Cavalry camp was only a short way from Wongabel. I reported in to Regimental Head Quarters. It was seven weeks since I had left at Mungon. A lot of changes had happened to the Regiment in that time. On the 17th December they had handed over all the carriers and equipment to the 20th Motor Regiment, a Militia Regiment, which was my old 20th Light Horse Regiment. I would have liked to have been there. Quite likely there could have been a few I would have known. Our Regiment now had a new name. It was called 6th Australian Cavalry Commando Regiment. They had only arrived here a week ago. At least they did not have Christmas on the train.

I reported in to Squadron Head Quarters. I was told there, that everything was topsy turvey yet, and it would be a few weeks before things were sorted out as regards the new formation of the Regiment. I was told by Max Ramsay that I would be sharing a tent with three other Serjeants. He told me where the tent was, but not the names of the Serjeants.

It was a wonderful surprise when I poked my head inside that tent and found my tent mates were Harold Waugh, Eddie Clugston and Guy Baxter. It was a great reunion. There was much talk and they filled me in on a lot of news.

Guy's wife Muriel was expecting a baby about the middle of May. The Regiment was down to less than half strength. A lot more had applied for transfers and discharges. We still had the name of Cavalry but that didn't fool anybody. It would be foot slogging from now on. There weren't many of us 39ers left, possibly around forty to fifty. The morale was still low but we would have to make the most of it. I went along the tent lines looking for what was left of my No 5 troop. I eventually found Nelson Webster and Harry Beckett and Bob Shegog. I had a good old talk to them.

28-31 Of course as soon as I arrived I received some mail. Two letters were waiting for me from Win. It was wonderful to get them. It cheered me up no end. I had written to Win at Brisbane and told her about

the holdup there, and, of course, there was no way I could get any mail until arriving back at the Regiment.

During the last few days we have been doing some drill and going on route marches to keep fit. It was during this time that we learnt what the formation of our new Regiment would be. It would still be made up of three Squadrons, but the Squadrons would be very different from the old ones. Each Squadron would consist of a Squadron Head Quarters and three fighting troops. Each troop would have a Captain in command and comprise of three sections each of twenty five to thirty men and a lieutenant in command of each section. There would be a Troop Serjeant and three Corporals in each section. Each Squadron would be able to operate independent of each other.

Each Squadron would have at Squadron Head Quarters, a Pioneer Troop with a Serjeant in command with ten to twelve other ranks. It was this troop that I was given and I was pleased about that.

At this stage I did not know who my men would be. They would probably be mainly reinforcements that were yet to come. The Troop was to have a Troop Corporal as well. The reason I was given this Troop was because of the engineers course I had done at Winnellie in Northern Territory. Our job would be helping to build camp roads bridges etc. Also in action we could be called upon to fight with the other troops. We would be trained in the laying of booby traps and trip wires around defensive positions. I had heaps of notes on all these things from Winnellie.

1944

January

1 Another year has commenced and I am into my fifth year in the Australian Imperial Forces. It is just another day as far as the Army is concerned.

8-14 Well at last I have made a start with my new Troop. I have "Buck" Holder Rodgers and Jimmy Monk, both 39ers, Nelson Webster, Ted Decker and Bluey Stevens. Buck Rodgers is to be my Troop Corporal. This is a great start with Jim Monk once again in my troop - we have always got along well.

(In later years, we have attended many re-unions together.)

In the second week of the new year I received Win's fourth letter since returning and it had some wonderful news, Win was pregnant!! She was sure pleased about it, so that was great. So was I. When I announced the great news to my tent mates there were cheers all around, especially from Guy. Win said in her letter she would have to be discharged from the W.A.A.F. in late March or early April. The baby would be due around the 20th August. It was a wonderful feeling that Win and I were to be parents.

14-28 We are to move to a new camp near Ravenshoe. So my little Troop have been kept busy helping to build that. Two more men have been added to my Troop. They were Keith Johnson and Norm Robbins. Norm joined the Regiment in the Middle East. Keith joined us in the Northern Territory. He was in HQ Squadron as a dispatch rider. These two young men fitted into the troop well. They were two fine chaps and terrific workers.

(Since the end of the war, Keith has become a very active member on the committee of our Unit Association. I meet him at re-unions and he has become a good friend of mine.)

We had no sooner settled into our new camp when we got the order to move again. Such is the army! Ours is not to reason why.

My Troop is certainly getting experience in building camps. This time the camp is not far from the tiny village of Wondecla. A bitumen road runs past the camp. The new camp was in the bush, (no jungle in this area) so a lot of clearing had to be done first. Then we set to, building a mess, huts, hot showers, latrines etc, all the things that are necessary to make the Regiment comfortable in a permanent camp.

The camp is on the fringe of good dairying country which stretches across the Atherton Tablelands interspersed with areas of jungle rain forest. We will be doing a lot of our training in this jungle in the near future to learn jungle fighting methods.

First we need lots of reinforcements to bring the Regiment up to full strength. The two new Squadrons that have been formed are now called 2nd/9th and 2nd/10th which were the old A and B Squadrons of the 6th Division Cavalry.

C Squadron personnel have been added to 2nd/9th and 2nd/10th. At a later date a new Squadron will join the Regiment. It is the 2nd/7th. It has been in existence for nearly two years and was called the 2nd/7th Independent Coy. It has seen a lot of action in New Guinea and is well experienced in jungle warfare.

28-31 We have now settled into our new camp. Lets hope there are no more moves for awhile. I have received more letters from Win. In her last one she was complaining about the climate at Lake Boga. Very hot and some terrible dust storms. She said she will be pleased to get away from the place.

The climate here is very good. Lots of rain of course, but it is the rainy season. The temperature and humidity are not as high as on the coast because of our height above sea level.

We have been issued with big American tents. They are much roomier than the Australian type. They are sixteen feet by sixteen feet with five feet high sides which can be rolled up in the day time. There are only five of us in one tent at present. The new one is Frank Harley who is Signals Serjeant for the Squadron. Frank also is an original of the Regiment and came from Dungog in New South Wales.

We are now starting to get some reinforcements. These are all young men only eighteen to twenty who enlisted only five to six months ago. They had come from the jungle training school at Canungra which was a very tough course indeed. They were very fit. They were also very hungry! They had enormous appetites so were soon christened "Canungra Cannibals". However the majority of them were fine young men who soon fitted into their new Regiment.

It was at this time that the last two chaps arrived to join our Section. They were Ned Crowe and Ken McKay. Ken was a brother of Harry McKay, our Q Store Serjeant, and was a big cheerful young man who got on well with everyone. They are only eighteen but have fitted into the group well and always pull their weight. They are fine young men.

(Ken McKay I met for the first time since the War at our 50th anniversary reunion at Canberra in November 1989. It was great to see him again. He reminded me that I had ordered him to climb a coconut palm in New Guinea when we were scouting along the coast one day, to see if he could spot any Japs about. I certainly had forgotten all about that. It was great to see him again after 45 years).

February

- 1** There are still applications going for transfers and discharge on compassionate grounds by the older members of the Regiment. Others have been found unfit for a Regiment such as this, and have been transferred to non combatant units such as work shops, transport, medical etc. The numbers of the older members are slowly declining.

There was a Sergeant in 2nd/10th Squadron who came from New South Wales by the name of "Wink" Kennedy. Wink was a lawyer in civilian life before joining up. Anyone who was applying for a discharge on compassionate grounds would pay "Wink" a visit. He was willing to assist in the wording of the application. I thought I may as well have a try. I went along to Wink and gave him all the facts of my father's farm, his age and the hardships he was suffering in trying to carry on. Wink considered I had a good case and thought it was well worth me applying for discharge. Next day he handed me the application he had composed. He has certainly made a good job of it. It sounded very good. I handed it into Squadron Head Quarters. It would have to go to Army Head Quarters in Melbourne and from there be investigated. I knew the main thing against my application would be the productivity of my father's farm. So I wasn't getting too carried away with my chances. It would be a least two months before I heard the results of my application.

- 2-14** The reinforcements are coming in fast now. We have been doing lots of route marches to get ourselves fit. Very soon now we will be starting our jungle training. The camp is very comfortable now. We also have a very good Serjeants' Mess operating. Mail comes in fairly often. I receive a letter from Win

every week and likewise I write her one. Letters from family and friends keep coming along, so I always have letters to answer. Camp duties go on as usual. I get my share of Squadron and Regiment Orderly Serjeant, also Serjeant of the Guard duties.

A picture theatre has started up just down the road. It is in an enormous Nissan hut. Around this are several units of the 6th Division, so that the hut is always full on nights when a show is on.

(That big hut was still there beside the road forty one years later in 1985).

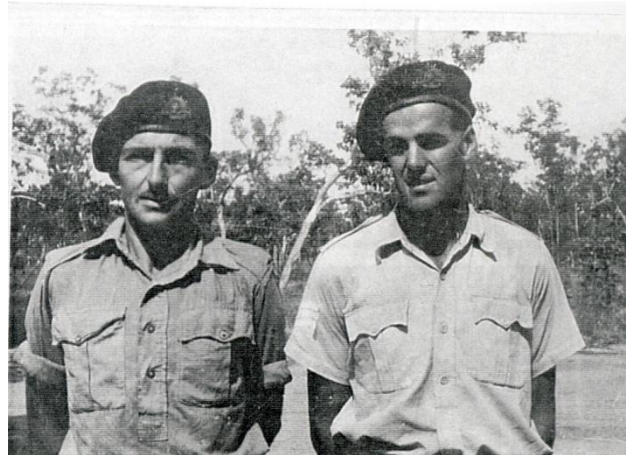
15-28 We have started some exercises in the jungle, out for two or three days at a time, living on hard rations and carrying everything we require on our backs, which include our weapons and a small one-man tent to put up at night to keep the rain off. We still have the Bren machine gun, but have been issued with the new Owens sub machine gun in place of the Tommy gun. The Owens is a beautiful light gun and very reliable.

The jungle is not a very pleasant place to be roaming about in. The jungle floor is always wet and damp and a home for leaches. At times they will go through the eyes of ones boots, then through the sock, and start sucking blood. The wait-a-while vine is another nuisance. It is covered with lots of little hooks which really pull you up. The worst of all is the Gympie bush. It has cabbage like leaves and the under side which are covered with fine hairs which contain a poison. If one crunches against a leaf, it really stings, and will go on stinging for up to a week or more. One chap fell on a bush and was stung right across the face. He had to be taken to hospital.

March

1 I have been informed I am to attend another school with the 2nd/2nd Engineers, the same unit as at Winnellie, Northern Territory on the 7th March. Most of this school will be done in the jungle. It should be interesting. Guy had a letter from his wife informing him it is possible that twins could be on the way. She should know definitely in the near future. In Win's last letter to me, she said she would be discharged in two weeks' time. Of course she will be going home to live with her mum and dad at Shepparton.

Another exercise out in the jungle, the going was very tough.



Guy Baxter and Osie, Wondecla Camp

7-21 Started engineers school. Received Win's weekly letter before leaving the unit. She has a week to go in the WAAAF. Her letters always give me a kick along. She is a wonderful letter writer. I now call her "Winsome Winnie the War Winner". She says she can't do much winning with a baby inside her, but I tell her that by writing wonderful letters to me and keeping my morale up she is sure helping to win my War!

22-25 The school is going well. We have been building a swing foot bridge over a deep gully. It is made out of lawyer vine, nothing else. It is marvellous stuff and much stronger than rope. It runs up the trees for one hundred feet or more, the same thickness all the way.

We finished the bridge, hand rails and all. It will carry up to ten troops at once. We are now going to build a bridge wide enough and strong enough to carry a jeep. This will be built with lawyer vine only. Wrote a letter to Win for her birthday on the 31st. She will be twenty four.

26-31 Finished the jeep bridge. Now we are learning all about booby traps and trip wires in front of defensive positions.

April

1 Did more work with mines and explosives. In all it has been a very interesting three weeks.

4 Back to the unit. While at the school, the unit kept sending my mail over, so I didn't miss out on my weekly letter from Win.

10 Squadron has done plenty of route marches and exercises in the jungle while I have been away. Guy's wife Muriel has sent some good news - a telegram that reads- "Jack and Jill are on the way, won't it be a lovely day when Jack and Jill come out to play". The twins are due in the middle of next month. Guy is hoping he can get some leave for that event. He will need some luck.

I received the report on my application for discharge. It was as I expected, it was knocked back on the grounds that the farm was not productive enough to warrant my discharge. Well that was that, I would just have to soldier on. I have some great mates in this tent who will help me to do just that, along with a wonderful wife on the home front whose letters keep me going.

We did not do any exams at the engineering course but a report did go back to Squadron Head Quarters about me. The Squadron Officer Commanding Major Wray informed me it was very good, I was glad to hear that.

6 It's out on more exercises in the jungle for three days. Our clothing now is jungle greens. Our khaki shorts and short sleeved shirts have long since been handed in. Of course long trousers and long sleeved shirts are good protection from the hazards of the jungle, especially the Gympie bush. Also some protection from the mozzies.

On most of these exercises my small Troop was given the job of guarding Squadron Head Quarters from a surprise attack from the enemy. The enemy in this case was the new 2nd/7th Squadron who had recently joined the Regiment and were very experienced in jungle warfare. A patrol of theirs did manage to sneak past our forward troops and attack Squadron Head Quarters. However we were ready for them and gave them a hot reception. Plenty of blanks were fired and in the finish the umpire decided we held our position and the enemy had to retire. To us of Squadron Head Quarters this was a great victory to have beaten off the famous 2nd/7th Squadron.

On another occasion my troop was in a defensive position a few hundred yards away from Squadron Head Quarters. A call came from Squadron Head Quarters over the wireless for me to report for a conference. In this particular part of the jungle it wasn't very dense. There was also a well defined track leading back to Squadron Head Quarters. I was walking along this track when I heard a crashing in the scrub. I thought it was a surprise attack from the enemy, instead it was a large black bird the size of an emu dashing across the track not far in front of me. I sure got a surprise, I thought I was seeing things. The bird had a red crest and red wattles on the side of its head. I had never heard of such a bird before. When I got back to my troop I told them about it. There were all sorts of comments from them, but mainly that I was going "troppo" (a word frequently used in the Army in the war years. It

meant the tropics were getting to you and you were going around the bend). Of course at a later date I made enquires from a local about the bird and found out it was fairly common in parts of the rainforest. It was called a cassowary.

- 10 A few months before this the Africa Star Medal had been approved by King George VI to be awarded to all Service Personnel who had served in the Middle East. We were allowed to wear the ribbon of this medal now on our uniform or, in this part of the country, on our shirt. Also around this time it was announced that any one who had twelve years continuous service, (war service counting double) could apply for the Australia Efficiency Medal. This medal had been struck in 1925 by King George V to be awarded to all British Empire Servicemen for long and efficient service. I applied for this award and, with eight years in Light Horse, I was well past the necessary time. The ribbon of this medal I was also allowed to wear.

Win was now discharged and back at 68 Clive Street, Shepparton with her parents. She said she was feeling fine. As well as her weekly letter she was also sending me fruit cake in a round tin. I would return the tin full of peanuts. There are lots of peanuts grown around here and can be bought very cheaply. Win said it is impossible to get them down south. They are beautiful peanuts. I shell them and fill the cake tin right up.

- 11 Some great news! Twenty eight days leave has already started. Troops will go in batches over the next two months. Guy is in the first lot. He sure is happy about that. He left today. He will be home in plenty of time for the birth of the twins. When I first heard about this leave I didn't think I would be eligible because of the leave I had had in November. I made enquires at Squadron Head Quarters and to my joy was informed I was in the next draft going the following week. This is being classed as pre-embarkation leave, so everybody will get leave.

Older members of the Regiment are going first, ahead of the young chaps who have not long joined up. There was great excitement in our tent. Eddie, Hal, and myself being all Victorians will be in the same draft. Frank Harley being from New South Wales will be in the draft going a few days later.

- 18 We entrain at Wondecla for the long trip home. It took nearly all day to reach Cairns. Everyone is very happy. Card games are on to pass the time. Cairns to Brisbane took four days and three nights. It will only take another two days to reach Melbourne. My leave pass had already been made out before leaving Wondecla as I was to leave the train at Benalla and catch the bus for Shepparton.

- 24 The train arrived at Benalla at 0930 hours and I was soon on the bus to Shepparton. I had sent a telegram to Win from Wondecla to say I was on my way home, so she would be expecting me. It was sure a wonderful welcome I got from my loving wife when I arrived. Also from Pop and Ma Stephens, Win's parents. That evening we had a special celebration dinner. It was terrific.

May

- 2 The days are flying by. In the mornings I would often go with Pop on his mail run. In the afternoons I would go shopping with Win or on short walks. Win was now nearly six months pregnant.
- 3 Win and I decided it would be nice to spend time with my parents at Mansfield. I got in touch with them and they were delighted we were coming.

- 8** We went by train to Tallarook and changed trains there for Mansfield. My Mum and Dad were waiting at the station with the old T Model Ford. It was good to get back to the old farm again even though it was only a bit over five months since I was here. Mum and Dad were very happy to have us staying with them. They thought so much of Win.
- 9-16** We went for lots of short walks together through the beautiful bush. I went for further long ones on my own. It was such a pleasant feeling to be alone with my own thoughts and feelings after army life where it is very difficult to find a moment to yourself. My Dad at this stage was getting plenty of petrol ration tickets being a Primary Producer, so he let us use the car to go visiting. We visited all our friends around Bridge Creek, Mrs Perrin and Mrs Dale who had written many letters to me since joining the Australian Imperial Forces, the Comerfords, the Pollards, the Hemsleys, and, of course, the Lesters at Dueran Station.
- 17** Our stay with Mum and Dad was now up. It had been wonderful for us both. Dad drove us to the Mansfield Station and we arrived back at Shepparton in the evening. I have only one week of my leave left. The time sure has flown.
- 19** Win's sister Joan is home on leave for a few days. She has been stationed in Sydney over the past twelve months. She is a Corporal and a drill instructor for new recruits.
- 20-23** The days are flying by. The last one came and it was sure a tough one. This time it would only be a few months before going somewhere overseas. I was catching the evening train to go to Melbourne to report into Royal Park in the morning. Saying goodbye to Win was terribly hard. Joan's leave was up too, so we travelled back on the same train together. That made it a bit easier. But my thoughts kept going back to that wonderful wife of mine. Love is a wonderful thing, but at a time like this, at the parting of two people who are so deeply in love as we were, it is a terrific strain on one's emotions. I knew how Win would be feeling at this very moment - probably worse than me. Her husband would be thousands of miles away when her baby was born, and she would have no idea when she would see him again. The thought of this gave me strength, it made me realise she would be the one who would suffer the most. I was the one who must support her with letters full of love, hope and courage for the long days that lay ahead.
- War is a terrible thing, it is full of hate and suffering. It is the direct opposite of love. One thing I am very sure of, the greater force in the world is love. In time it will prevail over the forces of hate.
- We are certainly beginning to win this war. On our own front, the Japs are gradually being forced back. In Burma, General Slim with his great Allied Army has the Japs in retreat. In Europe, the Russians are forcing the Germans back, and in England an enormous armada and army is assembled to land in France.
- One has a lot to be thankful for, but when one has just left the most wonderful girl in the world, it is a bit hard to look on the bright side. So this train trip back to Melbourne was really a tough assignment. One I would never forget!
- When we reached Melbourne I said goodbye to Joan and thanked her for her company. I am sure she would have found my company very poor. After leaving her I headed for the Y.M.C.A. to find a bed for the night.
- 24** First thing after rising I spotted Hal Waugh in the dormitory. I was back with a great mate. After some breakfast we headed out to Royal Park to check in. Our leave was now officially over. Of course there

were plenty more Cavalry chaps who were doing the same thing. Eddie Clugston was one of them but Guy Baxter was not. I heard later that Guy had obtained some more leave on compassionate grounds because of the arrival of the twins.

We were informed we would be on the evening troop train for the long trip back to Wondecla.

We managed to get a few beers in the afternoon before reporting back to the Royal Park.

Sent Win a telegram to cheer her up. The train pulled out of Spencer Street at 1830 hour on the long haul to Queensland.

25 Passed through Sydney about mid morning.

26-30 Arrived Brisbane in the early morning. Changed trains, then began the long trip up the Queensland coast. Managed to get a letter written and posted to Win. Arrived Wondecla late in the day of the 30th.

31 Back to duties, parades and route marches to get fit again after being away for six weeks.

June

1 Received two letters from Win. She had written one the day after I had left her. They were two wonderful letters, really cheered me up. She was very pleased to get my telegram, and the letter I had written on the train.

We now have a new tent mate, "Shady" O'Shea. He is of course an original member of the Regiment and I have known him for a long time. He is from New South Wales and is a Sergeant in the 2/9 Squadron.

One piece of news from Harold, he got married while on leave. He sure kept it very quiet. It was a real surprise to all of us.

2-9 Now the route marches are being extended to get us fully fit again. The 6th June was D Day. The mighty Allied Army landed on the beaches of Normandy and have successfully established a firm foothold in France. A big battle is at present being waged against the Germans.

10-17 Exercises in the jungle have recommenced. It is the dry season and it is not so bad in the jungle. Win and I are keeping the letters going to one another very regularly. When we are not on manoeuvres we are doing route marches, hours at a time, pounding along the roads. We are sure getting fit.

18-30 The Allied Armies are gradually gaining ground in France. We are following this battle with much interest. We realise if they can knock out the Germans quickly then the Forces in the Pacific can be reinforced and the Japs defeated much sooner.

Win is still sending me a cake every now and then and I return the tin full of peanuts. The cake is very welcome in the tent at night when we have supper.

We still have a primus to boil the billy, a legacy of Carrier days. We sure miss it when out on manoeuvres but we make good use of it when in camp.

Letter writing still takes up a lot of my spare time. "The Powers That Be" don't let us have too much of that now, but I do manage to keep up replying to all my family and friends, Win's weekly letter is naturally No 1.

July

- 1-3 We have just been informed of a really big route march. Our Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hennessy had a wager with one of the Commanding Officers of an infantry Battalion that our Regiment could now do a force march of thirty six miles in eighteen hours, carrying full equipment. The troops didn't think much of this idea, but, of course, they had no choice. The orders came out on what we were to carry. Full pack, water bottle, rations for two meals, twenty five rounds of ammunition, rifle, one Owen Sub Machine Gun per unit, one Bren Gun per section. This of course was a fair sort of a load. The orders however did not state what the pack was to contain. Normally it would contain a one man tent, change of clothes, toilet gear etc. All we put in the pack was a change of socks and some powder in case of aching feet. We did put in some scuffed up paper to make out the pack was full.
- 4 Reveille was 0500 hours. Start time for 2/10 Squadron was 0600 hours, so away we went to the start of the big march. We were following the main road so the going was not too bad. We would march for fifty minutes and rest for ten minutes every hour. At midday we had one hour rest and ate our bully beef and biscuits. The going was sure tough. So far no one has dropped out. My troop was going well. The Bren gun is the heaviest weapon to carry. We take turns to carry that. We trudge along all afternoon, the legs getting weary, the feet sore, but I am standing up to it fairly well. I am sure I will finish it. There are now quite a few who have fallen out with blisters and exhaustion.



*Pioneer Section, 2/10 Australian Commando Squadron, Wondecla Camp, Atherton Tablelands, Queensland.
Rear: Nelson Webster, Garth Stevens, Ken Mackay Centre: Os Stafford, Ned Crowe, Jim Monk, Norm Robbins
Kneeling: Keith Johnston, Holder Rogers, Ted Decker*

At 1730 hours in the evening a halt was called, we were to have a one and half hour rest. The cookhouse brought out a hot meal for us, which was appreciated by all. We have marched twenty seven miles, but still have nine to go before midnight.

As of this moment our Commanding Officer is not very popular! Two of my troop have had to pull out with very bad blisters. They have done a good job to stick it as long as they did. At 1900 hours we set off again on the last leg of the march. At least it is much cooler now being night time. It was just a matter of picking up one foot after the other and putting them down on the long stretch back to camp. Every joint and muscle in my body was aching, but I knew everyone else would be feeling the same. We made it back with half an hour to spare. The bunk was sure a welcome sight.

5 We thought we would get at least one hours sleep in, but no, we still had to get up at the usual time of 0600 hours. But then we were training for a war!

There were certainly plenty of stiff and sore bodies about. However, once we got going it wasn't too bad. We heard that about 60% finished the march. We hoped the Colonel enjoyed winning his wager. We certainly didn't enjoy winning it for him! At least we are to have a few days in camp taking it easy to recover from the ordeal.

The usual duties of camp life must go on of course. I got my share of Orderly Serjeant and Serjeant of the Guard duties. These jobs were just a breeze to me now. I had done so many of them over the last few years.

My small troop was going along very well with its training. We would get out of the route marches when we had a job to do like building a new hut to house something or extend the Q Store. The troop loved doing these building jobs. They were a happy lot when working about the camp. Buck Rodgers was a great help to me as Troop Corporal, Nelson Webster was a qualified carpenter and the two Robin brothers were very handy with tools, as was Jim Monk. I had a very good team. On the odd occasion I was able to get the troop out of a route march by suggesting to our Squadron Officer Commanding Major Wray that the troops needed lots of training with booby traps, trip wires and explosives. These stores were now coming into the Q Store, so I was able to draw on them and instruct the troop in their use.

As yet we have no idea when we will be going overseas. We knew we had to do some training on barge landings from the sea. That could be in the near future.

19-31 And so the days and weeks are slipping by. The training is very tough at times, but I don't mind that as I have such a fine troop. I have some great mates amongst my fellow Serjeants. On the home front I have a very wonderful wife who keeps the letters rolling in to keep up my morale. I have also had a letter from Guy Baxter. He now has a Base job at Army Head Quarters in Melbourne. Good luck to you Guy! It's home every night to his wife and twins who are doing very well.

August

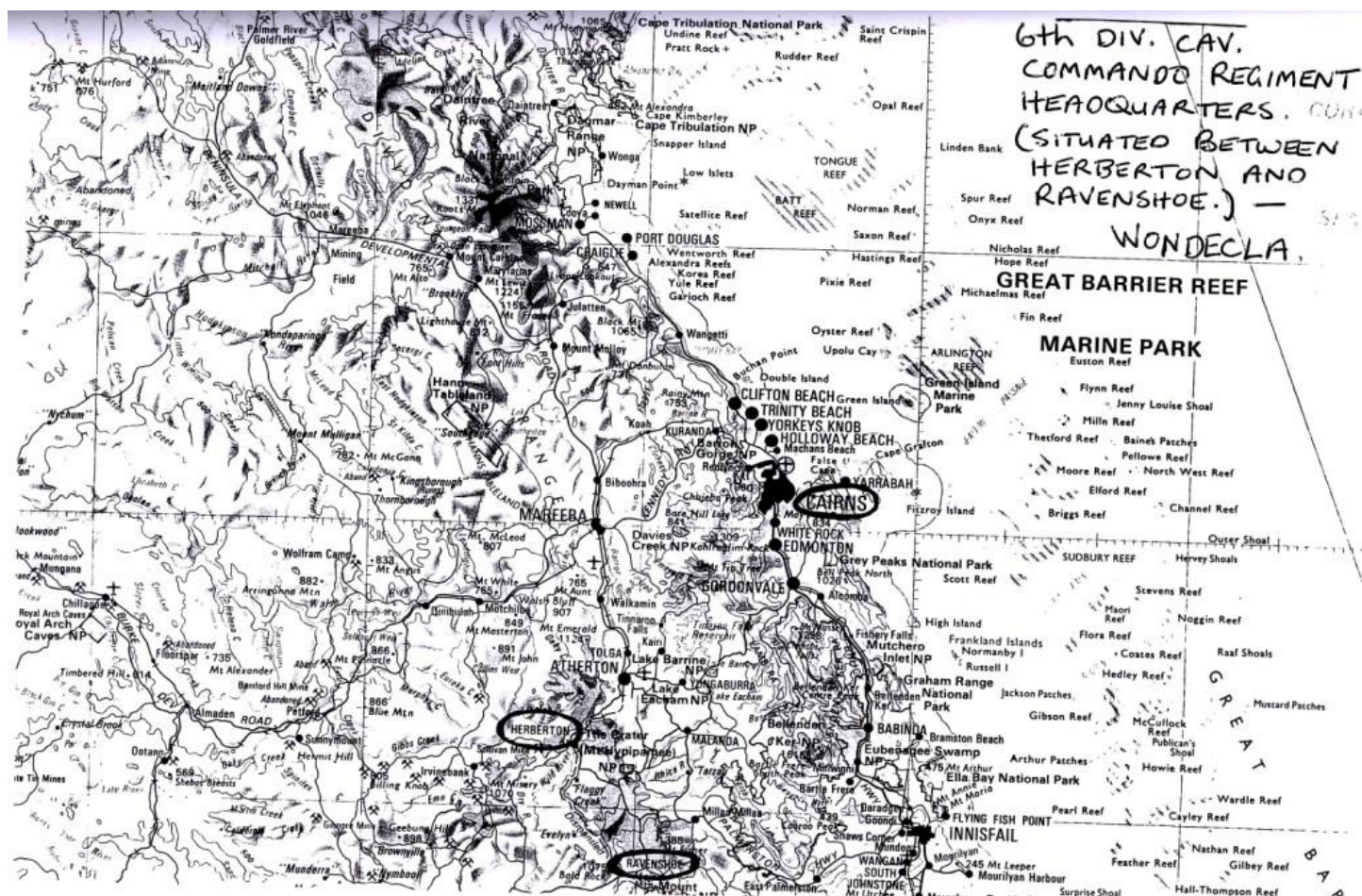
1 We are off tomorrow to Trinity Bay near Cairns to do our training on barge landings.

2-16 Arrived at Trinity Beach and set up a temporary camp site. We are going to be here for a fortnight. A Yank Amphibious Unit is in charge of the barges and will be instructing us on the landings. With full kits on, weapons and ammunition we would be standing in the front of the barge, jammed in like sardines. The barge would come in under full power to the beach, let the front down, and we would go charging

out. Sometimes the water would only be up to our knees, other times to the armpits, then it was a real struggle to get up to the beach. (We would have been in real trouble if the water had been over our head with all the gear we were carrying).

On reaching the beach we would spread out and charge on inland a few hundred yards. Doing this three or four times daily was very exhausting work. The days were warm and sunny and the water warm so the wet clothes did not bother us. It was a different story when we started night landings with a nip in the air and wet clothes - it wasn't any fun. We were glad to get back to our camp and some dry clothes.

We also did some cliff climbing at another part of the beach. It was all tough hard work. We were glad when after two weeks of this strenuous training we returned to our camp at Wondecla.



In this time at Trinity Beach we did get one lot of mail. I received a great letter from Win. Her time is drawing near and I have been thinking a lot of her. She is quite well but will be glad when it is all over.

How I wish I could be with her for the birth of our baby. That, of course, is impossible. When I was with her in May, I really expected to be out of Australia in the islands somewhere. That of course would have made it much harder to contact one another. Now at least I can get a telegram from her parents as soon as the baby is born.

20 This is the day our baby is due. Since returning from Trinity Beach I have received another letter from Win. She tells me in this one not to worry if the days go by and I get no news. It could be another week after the due date before the baby arrives.

21-26 The days crawl by, but no news from Win. My tent mates are doing their best to keep up my morale. At last, late in the afternoon of the 26th the long awaited telegram arrived "A boy 10 lbs, Robert John. Both well. Frank Stephens". This was terrific news, I was very much relieved. There was congratulations all around from my tent mates. I then went down to my troop tent to tell them and, of course, more congratulations. I mentioned the weight of the baby as 10 lbs, Nelson Webster piped up "That's nothing, I was 14 lbs when born". Nelson was now about 6'5". (Robert also grew to this height).

It was too late in the day to send a telegram back to Win. This would have to wait until the morning.

I had managed to get a few bottles of beer from the Serjeant's Mess to shout for my troop and wet the baby's head. Then I had to shout my tent mates, Eddie, Hal, Frank and Shady. There was no shouting for the Mess this time, I had a family to keep.

27 Our first wedding anniversary. I included that in my telegram to Win with congratulations on the arrival of our son. Later that day I also wrote her a long letter. I was a very proud man. I was also a sad one at times at the thought of not seeing our son until some unknown time in the future. However, I never dwelt too long on that, but looked on the bright side.

There had been a great victory in France. The allies have liberated Paris and have the Germans in retreat. General Macarthur and his Yanks are island hopping towards the Philippines. He had promised them he would return.

28-31 Nothing much doing except for daily route marches. We are sure very fit now.

September

1 Mail in, and a letter from Win, written from hospital. She had a very tough time of it, being such a big baby. She is just fine now, and very proud and happy with her wonderful son who, she says, will one day be a look alike of me. Later when she gets back home she will get a snap shot of him to send to me.

2-10 Now we know it won't be long before we go overseas. We have been having injections against cholera and typhoid. We have been issued with a new type of leather jungle boot, they have been especially treated to keep out the wet, and have brass studs on the sole to assist in climbing steep hills.

The Q Store has started packing stores. We have been told to pack all surplus gear in a kit bag such as our winter uniforms and great coats and anything that is no use in the tropics. I have included all Win's letters which I had been keeping. I didn't like doing this because kit bags that go into Kit Stores have a habit of completely disappearing. This is what happened to them when we handed them in at Ingleburn before going to the Northern Territory. Anyway, I will have to take the risk as they would soon go mouldy in the tropics.

11 The events from today will be hard to erase from one's mind.

It was a day that began like most others, but ended with much sadness. I was Squadron Orderly Serjeant and went to Head Quarters for duties.

Two instructors were going the rounds of the many units on the Tableland lecturing and showing Japanese equipment in the way of weapons grenades, mines etc. On this morning it was 10 Squadron's turn for them. They set up long trestle tables on the parade ground with the equipment spread out on these tables. They explained all the characteristics of these weapons and explosives to the one hundred

or more troops present. At the end of their lecture they invited the troops to wander around and handle these weapons for themselves. The grenades, mines etc, were supposed to have been defused i.e. made safe by having detonators, fuses and firing pins removed. There was one rifle grenade that apparently had been missed. In being handled this grenade fell to the ground and exploded. This caused many casualties. One man, Trooper McLean was killed instantly. Fifty five others were wounded. One of the wounded, Trooper Gibbs, died of wounds two days later. Several were seriously wounded including Lieutenant Reg Edwards whom I knew so well from Northern Territory days. I was at Head Quarters most of the morning. At about 1130 hours Dick Lowne, who was now Squadron Serjeant Major, told me there was nothing else I could do so I returned to my tent. I had just reached the tent when I heard the explosion, then lots of yelling and moaning. I rushed down to the Parade Ground and it looked like a battle field. It was a terrible sight. People rushed from other Squadron areas and we did all we could to help. It wasn't long before ambulances and doctors came from other Units in the vicinity. They soon had them all away to hospital. Two of my tent mates were among those wounded, Eddie Clugston and Shady O'Shea but they were not too badly wounded, thank God. They returned to the Unit in two weeks time. Others that I knew well from the old Regiment who were injured were my Wireless Operator from No 5 Troop, Bob Shegog, Arnold Holdsworth, a 39er of B Squadron and Russell Purbrich, a Lieutenant, also from B Squadron. It was certainly a black day for 2/10 Squadron and a tragedy for the two young men who died. The majority of those wounded were soon back with the Squadron. There were a few who never returned and Reg Edwards was one of those who was badly wounded, and sent home.

12-26 We have been doing lots of route marches to fill in time before we leave. I have received two more great letters from Win over the last two weeks. Young Robert is 'doing well. In my letters to Win I cannot give so much as a hint that we are leaving soon. Censorship is very strict. Of course, she will soon know. It won't be long now before we go. I have also written lots of letters to friends and relations. The days are starting to drag a bit waiting to get going - wherever that may be.

26-30 Still no word of moving. Plenty of rumours of course, to just about every island in the Pacific. Even Burma has been mentioned to join General Slim's Great Army which is pushing the Japs back towards Mandalay.

October

1 We have been informed that we will be moving to Townsville in three days time. Received more mail. A great letter from Win. I answered this letter. It could be the last I can write before reaching our destination. Of course, I couldn't mention anything about our movements.

4 Boarded train at Wondecla. Arrived at Townsville next morning. Went to a camp a few miles out of the town. Strictly no leave for anybody into the town. Lying about in camp waiting to embark.

6-7 On the 7th we were to have embarked on our ship the "Katoomba". A fire broke out in one of the holds in which a lot of our equipment and stores had been loaded. The fire was put out but most of our equipment was ruined.

This meant a delay of a week to repair the hold and for new equipment to arrive. In this time we went for a route march every day.

← OSSIE



*Entraining
to go to
Townsville
prior to
embarking
for New
Guinea,
Wondecla
Camp*

Group of 2/10 Squadron awaiting the order "to mount train" at Wondecla prior to departure for Aitape. Some well known faces in the group are - from the rear, left to right. Harold Waugh, ? , Brian Mole, Mick Reid, Ossie Stafford Scotty Sexton, ? , ? ,
Second Row Front:- Hockey Way, Frank Harley, Roy Appleby (partly obscured) Eddie Clugston, Harry McKay, Eric Lowe, Ernie Burke.
Front Row:- Looking up with pipe in mouth) Earle Pickering Jim Martin, Dick Lowne, Claude Stuart, Stan Robinson, Frank Lea, ? , ..

7-13 More mail came in. Another from Win, everything going well with her and young Robert. I was able to answer this letter.

14 Today we embarked on the "Katoomba", and set sail at night. We still did not know where we were going. The "Katoomba" was not a big ship. She had been built for interstate service. At one time she had been on the Melbourne to Launceston run. However we weren't too crowded, but it was very hot and humid in the cabins at night.

It wasn't until two days later that we were informed that we would be landing at Aitape on the northern coast of New Guinea. Of course we guessed before this where we were going by the direction the ship was heading.

We called in at Milne Bay on the south east tip of New Guinea. Next morning we headed up the northern coast. Now of course there was no risk of attack from enemy planes or ships. These had been driven way back by the Island hopping Yanks. There was still some small risk from submarines but even these would be a long way from their base for refuelling. However we did have a destroyer escort.

We were given some lectures on Aitape and the surrounding country by an Intelligence Section that was on board. We were put in the picture of what was happening there and what we would be doing after our arrival.

The Yanks had landed and captured Aitape last April and driven the Japs well back. They still occupied Wewak, but were completely cut off, by sea, land and air, from any reinforcements or vital supplies. However they were not throwing in the towel by any means. They firmly believed that it was only a matter of time before forces from Japan would come marching back to assist them. Such was their blind faith. We knew of course that there was no way that could happen.

The might of America was fast building up. The might of Japan was fast diminishing. However there was still plenty of fight left in them. We will take over from the Yanks at Aitape and would be expected to start patrolling soon after our arrival.

17-21 We kept sailing up the coast of New Guinea until the morning of the 21st October when we arrived off-shore by Aitape. The Yanks came out in barges to take us off. With all our gear we clambered down into a barge, then landed on the beach as we had trained to do so at Trinity Beach some two months ago. We did not go racing up the beach though. Instead we marched sedately into our new camp!

21-27 During this week we had plenty to do settling in. My troop were kept busy building huts, store sheds and offices. We did however find plenty of time for swimming in the beautiful warm Pacific Ocean with big breakers rolling in.

2nd/10th Squadron were informed that at the end of this week we would be moving some way down the coast to begin patrolling.

The mail has come in. Two wonderful letters from Win. They sure gave me a lift. In my reply I still could not say where I was. My address now was Number, Rank, Name, Unit, Overseas. We could mention the climate and the type of country, but then that could be any island in the Pacific. We were one hundred and fifty miles south of the Equator. It was very hot and humid, with lots of rain. So there was not much I could tell Win as to where I was, but that didn't matter, there were plenty of other things to write about when one is very much in love.

28 Today we were to move down the coast to Babiang on the mouth of the Dandiwad River. The Yanks had a defensive outpost here. Our job was to relieve them and to commence patrolling with Babiang as our Base Camp. We climbed aboard some "Ducks", (amphibious trucks), and set off. It was a very rough trip. The road, such as it was, was terrible. When we came to a creek which looked too boggy to cross, the driver would get around it by going out to sea a little way. Lucky for us it was fairly calm. I am sure these "Ducks" wouldn't have handled waves of any size. As it was, we did lose one in the surf, and it had to be abandoned. Another one was badly bogged crossing a Creek, it also had to be left behind. Eventually we reached Babiang in the late afternoon and made camp.

29 Patrols went out. My Pioneer Troop set to making a base camp for Squadron Head Quarters. Major Wray, our Squadron Leader gave me instructions on just what he wanted. There were some New Guinea natives around and they came and assisted us. They taught us how to make a water proof hut with palm leaves and tying material from the ribs of the palm leaves. With their help, we quickly had several huts up - one for Major Wray for an office and sleeping quarters, one for the Signal Section with their wireless gear and two big huts for the Quarter Master for his stores and equipment. Having done that, we then built one for ourselves.

We knew we would be going out some of the time on patrol attached to one of the fighting Troops, but most of the time would be here with Squadron Head Quarters.

The country along this narrow coastal strip, had been mostly coconut plantations and gardens. Now it was one big mess. There were still plenty of coconut palms standing, but only a few had nuts on them. Many had been cut down and some blown down by explosives. There was nothing left to eat in the gardens. Such is war!

The patrols came back in the evening with not much to report. They found places where the Japs had been living off the land. Cutting into sago palms to get at the pithy centre to eat. They also found a few skeletons of dead Japs. The patrols continued for the next few days, keeping close to the coast.

November

- 3 The patrols had reached the Danmap River. The Yank Company we had taken over from, had given us little information of Jap strength to the east. They had done little patrolling. As far as they were concerned the Japs in New Guinea were finished. Well, it certainly appeared that way as far as the Danmap.

We soon learned that the Japs along the coast in this area were only labour force, not Japanese fighting troops. Japanese Headquarters at Wewak had pushed their second rate troops out along the coast here, where nearly all the food from gardens, trees etc. had been stripped bare. These troops were starving. They had sent a lot of good troops into the hills where there were still good native gardens. They were living off the land and doing very well. Already our patrols down the coast had killed several of the starving Japs looking for food.

- 4 My 30th birthday. Among all the young chaps in the Squadron now, 30 is getting old. No mail has come in since arriving here. We are to be supplied from Aitape by the Ducks that brought us here. They may not be very reliable. Our rations are already beginning to get low.

Today I was sent out on patrol with a section from one of the troops to try and reach Danmap via the Old German Road which was a little inland. The section leader was a very young Lieutenant who had joined us on the Atherton Tablelands. We headed off in the early morning a bit away from the coconut plantations which had become well and truly overgrown. When we reached this new growth I knew this was the old road marked on the map. The section leader couldn't agree with me. He said it was impossible for this to be the road with the height of the trees on it. I tried to explain to him the rapid growth of trees in this climate and big rainfall. I couldn't change his opinion. He gave us the order to push on. This was going to be a long patrol in the wrong direction. Well he was the boss. We pushed on for over two hours and, of course, never came to any old road. I soon realised we were going in a big circle to the right and would soon be back to the old road again. Our Section Leader was becoming a worried young man. He asked me where I thought we were. I told him we were not more than two or three miles from Squadron Head Quarters. He thought I was joking. I assured him I was not. We set off again and within twenty minutes we came out of the scrub into the plantation area with the Old German Road right before us. Not far away was 10 Squadron Head Quarters! I felt very sorry for the young Section Leader. He would now have to hand in his report to the Officer Commanding Major Wray.

Later in the evening I was told to report to Squadron Head Quarters. Major Wray questioned me about the patrol. I told him exactly what had happened. He never mentioned anything about the Lieutenant's report, but he was sure not pleased how the patrol had gone. He said he would send another Section on the same job tomorrow and this time I would act as guide. I could also take along my Pioneer Troop as support.

6 A patrol of twenty seven men set off this morning. Eighteen of the troop section and eight of my boys. This time the Section Leader assured me I would be the guide. He had been briefed by the Officer Commanding. We had no trouble this time about where we were going. We were heading into possible enemy territory so we had to take care and be alert at all times.

Before reaching the Danmap our leading scouts fired and killed two Japs running away from some huts. We examined the huts and it wasn't a pleasant sight what we found. In a bag hanging from a tree beside one hut was the remains of a Japanese soldier. Flesh had been cut from his buttock and legs. It was as we had suspected. The Japs in the area were cannibals. They were starving of course, but it still was an unpleasant shock to us. In the huts we found a few very rusty rifles and some ammunition. I am sure the rifles wouldn't have worked.

We continued the patrol until we reached the Danmap River. On the other side we saw some movement of Japs so we opened fire. They very quickly returned our fire. Well, the Japs over there are certainly aggressive and are looking after their rifles. We had completed our patrol as ordered, gathered good information and so, set off back to base camp. I am sure when this Section Leader handed in his report on reaching Squadron Head Quarters, Major "Barley" Wray would have been very pleased.

7 A day of rest today. Some mail has at last come in. A wonderful letter from Win. She has enclosed a snap shot of Robert. He sure looks like a fine boy.

Our day of rest was soon cut short. We were ordered to join Lieutenant Harry Bavin's Section and go down the coast to an outpost that had been set up there not far from the mouth of the Danmap. We had to relieve the troop that was there. We would be out for three days.

Away we went loaded up with rations, ammunition etc. We were certainly getting plenty of patrolling now.

(It would have been on one of these patrols that I ordered Ken McKay up a tree to see if there were any Japs about, as he assured me I did at our re-union at Canberra, 1989.)

We reached a place called Suain and it was a little beyond this that a defence outpost had been set up. The troops we relieved set off back to base camp. We cooked an evening meal, worked out a sentry roster and settled in for the night.

In the early hours of the morning we were rudely wakened by shell fire. Of course, we all got out and quickly manned the slit trenches expecting an attack. There were not more than eight or ten shells fired. They didn't land within one hundred yards of us. They sounded like the French 75 that had fired at us so often in Syria. There was no attack, but of course there was no more sleep for us that night in case they did. Morning came and everything was peaceful. A patrol went down as far as the river but saw nothing. It was a real mystery why they fired those few shells and at that time of the night.

8-9 These two days and nights were also quiet. We sent out patrols and saw nothing.

10 The relief troop came in so it was back to Squadron Head Quarters for us. This time we did have a spell for a few days.

11-13 Enjoying the spell. Also it gave me a chance to catch up on my letter writing. Still no mail or supplies have come in. We are fast running out of rations.

14 Today, we were informed we were to be supplied by air-drop. The first one to be next day.

15 We had marked out the dropping zone and had some smoke candles set, all ready to light as soon as the plane came in. It came in about mid morning - a Douglas DC3. We soon named them the "Biscuit Bombers". From now on this is how we would be supplied. The Ducks are not reliable enough. Everything went off fine. Certain things that would suffer no damage were "free dropped". Breakables were dropped by parachute. Best of all, there were several bags of mail.

I received two letters from Win and also a cake in a tin. This was terrific! I also received several other letters from my Mum and Dad, Elsie, Marj and Ruth and also friends at Bridge Creek. This was a great day all round.

Later in the day, however, it would not prove to be so great for one of 2/10 Squadron Troops that had gone out on patrol. This patrol had crossed the Danimul River then followed the Danmap up stream. They ran into a Jap force who opened fire on them. They quickly returned the fire and killed several of the Japs. In the process of this, Trooper Norm LeBrun was killed. He was the first battle fatality of the 6th Division in New Guinea. Norm LeBrun played league football with Fitzroy before the war. He was the first of many young men who paid with their lives in this part of the war that should not have been. The Japs were completely cut off by land, sea and air. They could have been left to rot until the War was over. The 6th Division could have been fighting where it could have done some good. Of course, it was General Macarthur who was responsible for this. He wanted only his Yanks with him when he returned to the Philippines. He did not want to share that honour with any Australians. The Australian Government bowed to his wishes. Thus the famous 6th Division was pushed into this unnecessary action - WHAT A TERRIBLE WASTE!

16-23 The vigorous patrolling goes on. On many of these patrols my Pioneer Section were attached to one or more of the three fighting Troops of the 2/10 Squadron. We were pushing out further up the Danmap and Danimul Rivers and coming in contact with more of the Jap fighting troops. They were only in small groups and living off the land and themselves!! Only occasionally did they offer much resistance. We were informed at this time that the Jap Marines who were their top fighting troops were up in the hills where the best native gardens were. They would be entirely a different proposition. From the first day we arrived in New Guinea we have been taking our compulsory atabrin tablet every day. While taking this tablet malaria will not develop. It will not cure it, it will only suppress it. We are all varying shades of yellow from taking the tablet.

23 The "Biscuit Bombers" came in again today, with more mail. Another lovely letter from that wonderful wife of mine. She sure keeps the letters up to me. The parachutes that come down with some of our supplies have to be gathered up. The good ones are to be returned for re-use when transport is available.

Harold Waugh came up with a beaut idea, on what we would do with the damaged ones. We kept them safely until we returned to Aitape and then cut the best out of them to send home to our wives. They are made of beautiful silk. I am going to see how much I can push into a cake tin to return to Win.

24-30 Still going out on patrols. The going is very tough at times trudging along in this sticky heat, carrying a rifle, a heap of ammunition and a turn on the Bren Gun. It sure saps the energy out of one. I am sure I have lost quite a lot of weight. Well the good news is, we are going back to Aitape about the end of the month. 2/7 Squadron is taking over from us.

December

- 1** On the way back to Aitape we walked about halfway, then we were met by trucks. The engineers are working on the road and gradually pushing it further out. As well as building bridges over the creeks and rivers.
- 2-9** Well it's good to get back to a permanent camp with all its comforts such as a Serjeant's mess, showers, etc, even though it means parades, duties, regimentation and all that goes with that. Its good to have a well earned rest. Regular mail is great too. Receiving Win's weekly letter is really something to look forward to. The rest of 6th Division have arrived in the Aitape area. Of course one, Brigade arrived about the same time as we did. They too had been out chasing Japs. More Battalions are moving out to join or relieve those that are out at the front.

An open picture show is now operating here. The screen is strung up between coconut palms. As in the Northern Territory, it is bring your own seat or sit on the ground. One also has to take along a waterproof ground sheet to use as protection against the rain that often pelts down. This of course makes it hard to see the screen. Never the less, most of the time we see it out as most showers are heavy but of short duration.

- 9-16** My Pioneer Section has come in for more building jobs. In this period we built a very big Mess Hut for the men. It has a high pitched gable roof with the eaves coming down to about three feet off the ground. This keeps the rain out but leaves plenty of space for air circulation. The gable ends were only closed to about eight feet of the ground. All materials were local. The palm leaf roof was very waterproof and cool. The boys liked these jobs as it gets them out of other camp duties such as cook-house, guard and latrine duties (a most unpleasant duty). The latrines here remind me of the one at Berry Springs where Dick Lynch blew up the dyke. Every morning the latrines are closed, a certain amount of fuel put in and then fired. This controlled burn destroys all the matter as well as flies, and so prevents disease. Dick was on the right track after all - he just used too much fuel.

Captain Woodhouse is our Commanding Officer now and Major Wray is Second in Command of the Regiment. In fact, he is in command of the Regiment at present as Colonel Hennessy is away at a staff school.

- 17-24** There are now thousands of troops in Aitape Base area. An enormous number of administrative troops are needed to service a Division. Then, of course, a few units like ourselves back here resting. There is now a big field hospital operating here. That in itself is a very big unit. Many doctors, sisters, nursing orderlies and a big staff of workers. Canteens are operating, but beer is in very short supply. So are a lot of other things including tobacco. Even comfort parcels for Christmas are very slow coming in. We are told not enough transport from Australia is available so luxury goods have last priority.

Could be a lean Christmas this year. However, one thing is for sure, the troops up at the front will be having a much leaner Christmas. We are grateful for whatever we get.

A few days before Christmas, a ship came in and it had lots of mail and parcels for the troops. I received a heap of letters from family and friends, also about five parcels. There were two parcels from Win as well as her wonderful letter. A cake and a hamper in another. A parcel from my sister Ruth contained a carton of cigarettes. Well this tent is having a good Christmas whatever the cooks might or might not be able to serve up. Of course, my fellow Sergeants (the same old crew, Eddie, Harold and Frank) also

received plenty of parcels. There was much joy on this day. I went down the tent lines to my Pioneer boys to see how they had fared with mail. They too had done very well and were happy as sand boys!

25 Christmas Day. Last year at this time I was on a troop train heading up the Queensland coast. Next year I hope I will be home with my family for Christmas which will be the first since 1938.

Most of us are optimistic enough to think this War will be over by then. The Germans are well on the way to being defeated. Within a few months this should come about. By next Christmas or before, the Japs also should be well and truly beaten.

According to our Quarter Master we should have turkey for Christmas dinner. They were coming from the Australian Comforts fund. Well they didn't arrive. Perhaps Base 'Walla' troops or the wharfies have them. The Quarter Master managed to get some ham. With tinned plum pudding and custard we did very well. As usual in a permanent camp, Officers and N.C.O.'s did all duties. This time I was on mess orderly duty. It was a fairly easy job. Beer was in very short supply but we did manage a few drinks.

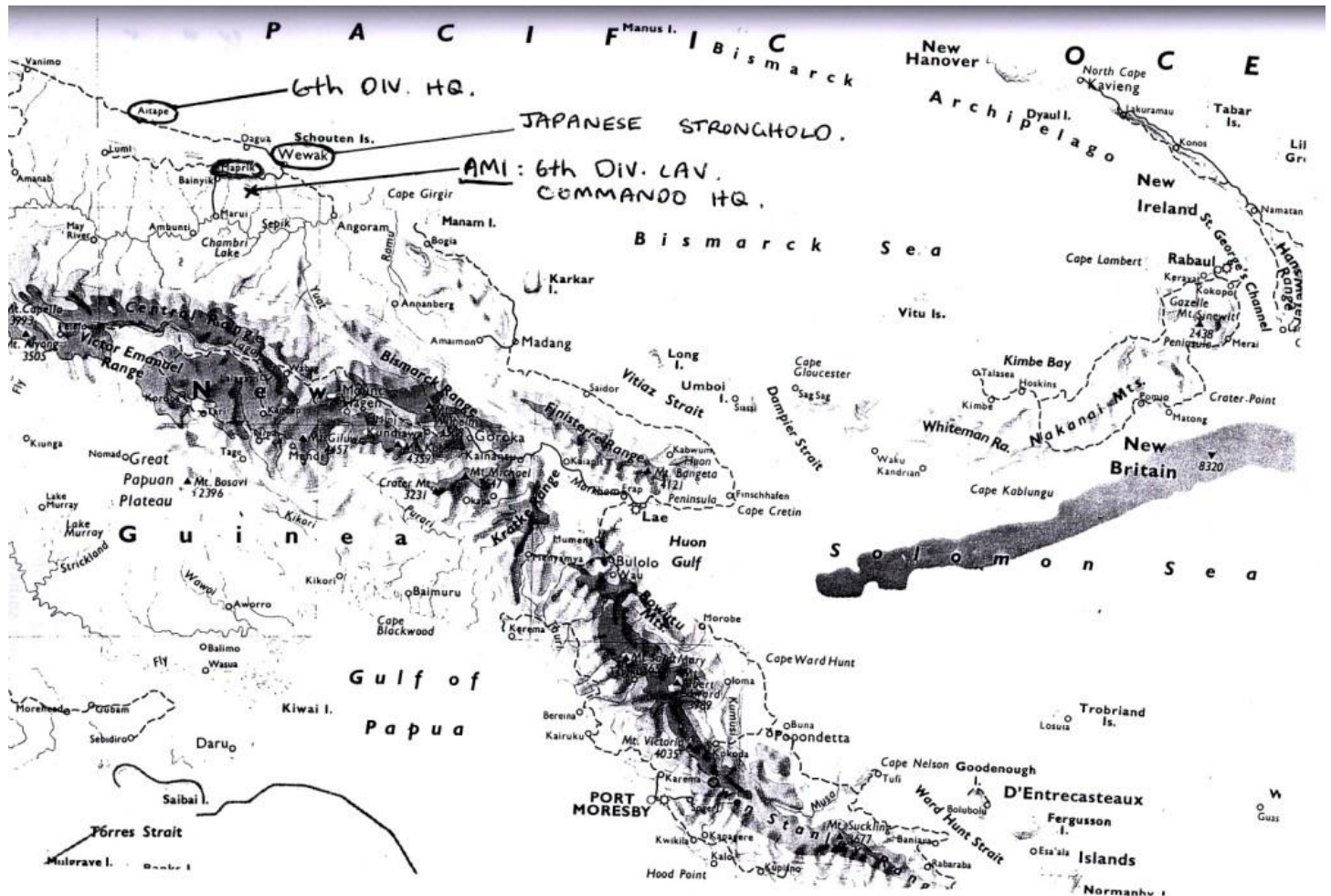
26-31 Our rest period is coming to an end. We have been informed that we will be moving out early in the New Year. Any spare time I had was busy writing 'thank you' letters to everyone who had sent me parcels for Christmas. Especially, of course, to my wonderful wife whose letters are an inspiration to me to keep going.

1945

January

- 1** The start of another year. It means nothing really, except for the fact we are into the sixth year of this war. It has been a long time. We are busy packing and getting ready for our move out tomorrow.
- 2** We move out in trucks. 2nd/9th Squadron have been gone several days now. We move down to Suain which is not too far from Babiang where our Base was last time. Again we set up Squadron Head Quarters as a base from which to operate from. The three Troops A, B, and C, moved out into defensive positions nearer the Danmap. This was now clear of Japs. It was on the other side of the Danmap that patrolling would take place.
- 3-18** During this period a lot of patrolling has taken place on the east side of the Danmap. C Troop was sent up to a place called Wadum, a long way up the Danmap on the west side. We are attached to the 2nd/3rd Machine Gun Battalion. A good road had now been made from Aitape to the Danmap with bridges over all creeks and rivers by the 2nd/2nd Engineers. They were now starting to build a bridge over the Danmap. This would be a real big job. Because of the good road supplies and mail coming in regularly now, Win's weekly letter never missed, and I always managed to reply.
- 19-27** During this time the Squadron moved up the Danmap River and made a base camp in the fork of where the Danimal joins the Danmap. A and B Troops were sent a little further up the Danmap to take up defensive positions. Our base camp at Squadron Head Quarters was only to be temporary as we had been informed we would soon be moving up into the Torricelli Mountains to the Maprik area. Little did we know how temporary it would be! Leading up to 28th January more patrolling went on but nothing exciting happened.
- 28** There has been a fair amount of rain today, but not much more than the usual. We noticed that the rivers are in flood so there must have been a lot of rain up in the mountains in the last few days. The water is still well within the banks so we are not worried about the possibility of flooding. The sea is not far away and the rivers will soon empty. At 2200 hours, water moved into our camp area. It was then only a few inches deep. The decision was made to move out to higher ground. As we started to pack up our gear, the water rose quickly. A small creek behind our camp site was now a roaring torrent of water. We had to cross this to get to higher ground. A strong swimmer threw a line across and it was secured to a tree each side. The order was to leave all equipment except fire arms. Men pulled themselves quickly across this line. Frank Harley was one of the first to cross with a lantern to guide the 50 or so men from Squadron Headquarters as they came across to higher ground. Some also had torches. The water at our camp site was soon waist deep. My section included Buck Ropers. Nelson Webster and myself. The rest of the section had been allocated to three Troops. When there were about thirty across it was our turn to go. Nelson said he could not swim and that he would prefer to climb a tree, (there were many big trees in the area). I said this was okay and Buck said he would stop with him. I said goodbye to them and went across the line. It was hard work going against the current. Two more were just behind me. They just made it before the line broke. The men left at the camp site yelled out they would be all right, and that they would climb the trees. The water on the other side of the creek was now up to our armpits and I guess it would have been the same at the campsite. We saw a light twinkling through the trees. We pushed towards that, then we set off to what we hoped would

be higher ground. The water was still up to our armpits, but did not seem to be rising any higher. After two hours or more of wading through the water it was now only knee deep. What a great relief! After about another hour we reached dry land. At 0200 hours it was decided that we stay where we were until day light. We were very cold and wet.



29 With daylight we could see back through the trees that the water had all gone. We set off back to the Camp Site. When we reached the camp site we were struck dumb by the devastation that lay before us. All the big trees had been torn out by the roots or broken off. Amazingly some of the smaller trees had survived. It was as if a giant hand had hit this particular area. Our thoughts went out to the nineteen men who were up those trees. We could not see how anyone could have survived. We were all in a state of shock when we realised this disaster. For something to do we searched for our equipment but, of course, it had all been washed away. We tried to work out why this particular spot had been hit so hard. We learnt later that there had been a cloud burst in the head waters of the Danmap causing a wall of water to come charging down the Danmap, cutting across the corner of the fork where our camp was, into the Danimul. Later in the morning some of our men from A and B Troops arrived to help us. They were on high grounds so missed the floods. They had a wireless with them. They made contact with troops on the west side of the two rivers. From this we learnt that many who had been up the trees had been saved. This was terrific news! It cheered us up no end. We found out later that when the trees fell most of the men were able to hang on to those trees as they were swept away. Most of these trees finished up on the west side of the Danmap in shallow water. They were all of course in a very exhausted state. At this stage, we did not know who or how many had been saved. We also learnt

that other Units from further up the Danmap had suffered losses from the floods. We managed to get some food from other troops to keep us going for the day. An air drop was promised for the next day. The half completed bridge the Engineers were building over the Danmap had been completely washed away.

- 30** Today we learnt the sad news that four of our nineteen men who had been washed away had been drowned. Three of them I did not know. The fourth one was a very good friend and member of my section, Nelson Webster. This news hit me hard. The other three who drowned were, trooper Noonan, Sims and Warrant Officer H. Dickson, who was a caterer. What he was doing with us I don't know. Apparently checking out the Troops rations and what could be done to improve them. An Infantry Battalion further up the river had seven of its members drowned. One man rode a tree which went out into the sea. Luckily this man was seen and rescued. The fifteen men of Squadron Head Quarters who were saved had a very rough time. Several of them were taken back to Hospital at Aitape. Among these was our Sergeant Major Dick Lowne. Dick never returned to the Squadron, he was sent back to Australia. My Corporal, Buck Rogers did not go to hospital, he returned to Squadron Headquarters and carried on and joined one of the fighting troops after arriving at Ami. Our Regimental Aid Post Sergeant, Brian Mole, who was also a good friend of mine, was one of the fifteen rescued. He returned to the Squadron and carried on. It was certainly a very hard and unhappy time for Squadron Head Quarters.

February

- 3** It has taken me quite a few days to get over the loss of my very good friend Nelson Webster. The war will never harden us in times of such disasters.
- 7** In this week we were just sitting around waiting to be re-equipped. Many weapons were lost in the floods. These had to be replaced before we could move. Brian Mole's Regimental Aid Post had to be fully fitted out and also Frank Harley's Signal Section. The Q store which was run by Staff Serjeant Harry McKay had to be restocked. Harry was a brother to Ken in my Section. While we were waiting for our supplies the other three Troops had set off into the mountains on the long haul to Ami which was to be our Base.

- 7-8** Of great personal loss to me in the flood was my map case which was in my pack. In the map, case I always carried writing materials so I could write to Win. Since the flood I have not been able to write to Win. Also in the pack were many of Win's letters, along with the snap shot of Robert.

At last we have all our supplies that we have been waiting for. A big 'Boong Train' (native carriers) has been organised to carry these supplies. More supplies will be dropped by air when we get there.

- 9-13** We set off into the hills. The going is very tough. We walked up the middle of the small streams on our first day. This is easier than trying to walk on the slippery tracks or break new tracks through the jungle. The second day was much tougher. We were now into the high country. We had to stick to the tracks now. They were very steep in places and, when it rained, very slippery.

On the very steep parts it meant only going thirty or forty yards and having to stop to get one's breath. The going was very slow. I was glad when we stopped to camp for the night.

As well as the 'Boong Train', we had a Section of A.N.G.A.U. with us. This was the Australian and New Guinea Auxiliary Unit. They were native Police boys with an Australian Officer in charge. They were

very well trained and keen as mustard. They were acting as our scouts. While on the march, there was no danger of running into a Jap ambush while we had them out in front.

On this march, I was informed by the Officer Commanding Captain Woodhouse that I was to take over the Serjeant Major's job, as Dick Lowne would not be returning to the Unit. As to whether I would get the promotion to Warrant Officer 2 would depend on the 'powers that be' higher up. Well, that didn't matter anyway. At least I would be doing a job helping with the administrative part of Squadron Head Quarters and I was very pleased about this.

My Pioneer Section had been broken up and I was wondering what they would do with me. On this night I was terribly tired. The torturous hill climb had really knocked me up.

The third day was a little easier. We were now over the high Torricelli mountains and heading into lower hill country. This country, especially in the valleys had very rich soil. With the high rainfall that fell here it would grow anything and there were lots of native gardens. This particular area the Japs had not found yet. They were further out in the Maprik area where we were heading for. There were lots of natives in this area as a lot had been pushed out of the Maprik area by the Japanese. They were very friendly to us, and very bitter against the Japs. They were also a wonderful help.

Without the 'Boong Train' and the scouts I am sure we would never have made it on this long march. After a short march on the fourth day we arrived in Ami, around midday. Regiment Head Quarters had already set up its base camp here. They had a cookhouse operating. The cooks had a hot meal ready for us when we arrived. It was very welcome indeed, after the hard rations of the last couple of weeks. Another piece of welcome news was that there was mail for us. The 'Biscuit Bombers' were on the job dropping our supplies. I haven't received any mail for over two weeks, neither had I been able to write any. There were two great letters from Win, besides other letters from the family. The letters from Win really gave me a lift. As soon as possible I would write to her.

The three Troops of 10 Squadron were out from Ami a few miles, all in different areas, patrolling to find the enemy's strength. The 2/5 Battalion was also in the area. Our 2/9 Squadron was at this time actively engaged against the Japs nearer the coast attached to the 16th Brigade. We of 2/10 Squadron Head Quarters now had to set up our base camp at Ami. Much work had to be done in building a Camp.

Our numbers were down because of the flood and because of my section re-enforcing the Troops.

That evening I did find time to write a letter to Win and was able to tell her a little about the flood and the reason for the delay. I also mentioned that now my letters would take a lot longer to reach her, due to the distance the 'Postman' would have to travel. If only she knew!

14-18 We first had to build a Squadron Head Quarters Office and sleeping hut for the Officer Commanding.

Then a hut beside this for Frank Harley's wireless equipment so we could keep in touch with the outlying troops. Another hut was built for Q Store, for Harry McKay and Serjeant Harold Waugh, who was now Harry's assistant. We had a lot of assistance in this work from the natives. They were great. Another most important job we had to do was dig slit trenches around our area in case of attack from the Japs.

Ami was very well suited for defence. It was on top of a fairly steep hill. The top of the hill was fairly flat and just large enough for our Head Quarters and a dropping area for our supplies by the DC3's.

Also within the area, at the present being built, was an advanced Dressing Station of the 2/2 Field Ambulance. Brian Mole and Captain DeGaris, our Regimental Medical Officer, were working in conjunction with this unit to treat the wounded and sick. A large hut was being built which would be the

hospital. With what spare time I had, I assisted in the building of this hut. When all these buildings were erected, as they were within three days, Brian, Harold and I built a small hut for ourselves to sleep in. It was no more than ten yards away from Squadron Head Quarters where I would spend all my time.

While this activity was going on at Ami, activity of a different kind was going on with our forward troops. Several sharp actions had already taken place. The Japs in this area were the top-line soldiers of the Jap Army, and the Marines. They were sent out to this area from their base at Wewak, because this was where there were the best gardens. They had brought their weapons and plenty of ammunition. They weren't going to be pushed out of these gardens easily. They were very fit and aggressive and were determined to push the Australians out.

Already our troops had suffered casualties. In the first three days of our being here, two men from the one troop were killed and three wounded. The little hospital was occupied even before we finished it.

Not far from here a small landing strip had been constructed. Only a small plane could land. These small planes were used as ambulances to convey badly wounded back to Aitape. In the case of these first three wounded, two were sent out by plane.

18 Corporal Ray Bradshaw was killed. He was an original member of the Regiment and I knew him well. His body was brought back to Ami. I assisted with his burial.

20 Another sad day for the 10 Squadron. In another troop two young officers were killed within minutes of one another. They were Lieutenant Cater and Lieutenant Liles. These two also were brought back to Ami and I assisted with their burial.

Other jobs I had to do, in conjunction with Frank Harley and the Wireless, was to get a report every evening from the three troops on their ammunition expenditure and their ration supplies. This was to know how much to send out to each Troop on the Boong Train.

Guards had to be supplied for these trains. I had to find some men out of Squadron Head Quarters to go on these trains. Harold Waugh was often one of them. Regiment Head Quarters had a lot more men than we did, so they supplied most of the escort.

I had to work out a roster for sentries at night around our camp area. Men were so scarce I had to do a shift myself every night. Harold also had to be on every night. Brian was excused from this duty as he had to take his turn on night-duty at the hospital.

21-28 The days pass slowly. For us here, we have it pretty good. For our three Troops out in the forward areas, they are having it very tough indeed. They have no comforts. The Japs are continually attacking them. They have now dug in a fixed defensive position so, at present, are not suffering the casualties. The Japs are the ones that are now receiving plenty of casualties when they attack these fixed positions. The strain on our troops must be very great. Here at Ami we were able to have a shower every afternoon just by stripping outside the hut. The rain would pour down about 1500 hours, one could almost set one's watch to it. The high humidity causes a big buildup of cloud every afternoon, then thunder storms let the rain down.

The natives are very good to us here, they bring us paw paws quite often. The only thing we can pay them with is old razor blades. We would give them cigarettes if we had them, but they are in very short supply. They seem happy with the old blades.

Mail comes in fairly regular with the 'Biscuit Bombers'. Win's letters never miss. They are a real ray of sunshine here.

March

1 Another job I did, not long after arriving here, was rigging up some trip wires and booby traps in front of our defence positions, to give us some warning if the Japs decided to attack at night.

The cookhouse is still doing a good job with what rations are available. This is nearly all tinned stuff and some dried vegetables, such as potatoes and onions. Officers and all, line up with their dixies when the call goes out at meal time. Then we take it back to our hut to eat it.

8-13 A, B, and C Troops are holding out well in their defensive positions. They are doing a wonderful job. Peter Perkin's B Troop has had the toughest job against very determined attacks from the Japs. The defence of Milak by this Troop was an epic of courage, determination and strength. The Troop Leader Peter Perkins was later awarded the Military Cross for his great leadership. Never was a decoration more deserved than this one

On 12th March, the Troop Sergeant of this Troop, Sergeant Bill Brown was killed. The next day Corporal "Hobo" Hobson was killed. Both these fine men were original members of the Regiment. They were brought into Ami and buried there. The number in our little cemetery is growing. There is relief on the way, the 2/5 Battalion is starting to move in.

14-24 On the 14th of March I had to go on sick parade. I had a fever and a very bad headache. Captain DeGaris said it was probably Dengue Fever. This is caused by a mosquito different to the malaria one. He put me on no duties, and to just lie on my bunk and it might clear up. Well I stuck it out for three days but it was only getting worse. I now have a fairly high temperature and have been put into the camp hospital. I lay there for five days just sweating it out, not being able to eat anything. Brian Mole did a great job looking after me. My temperature was around 101 to 102 all the time. On the 21st March the fever left me and the temperature came back to normal. Captain DeGaris said I would not have any more trouble with it. I was allowed back to my hut. I had lost a lot of weight and was very weak. I was to report to the Regimental Aid Post each day.

On the 23rd we were informed we would be going out to the coast, and back to Aitape. The 2/5 had taken over all three Troop positions and also Ami.

By this time I was eating well and getting some of my strength back. Captain DeGaris said if I took my own time and had plenty of spells I would make it back. He would detail Serjeants Brian Mole and Harold Waugh to look after me. He said to be sure and report to him when I got back to Aitape. He was a terrific chap, he had a soft spot for us 39ers.

24-28 Set off on the long haul back to the coast. A lot of it would be downhill so that would help me. When we did have to go up a hill. Brian and Harold gave me a hand. They were terrific mates.

On the second day when we were walking along we passed a Section with a young Lieutenant in charge who were having their ten minutes in the hour spell. He wanted to know why we were disobeying the march orders. Half an hour later, we were sitting down having a spell when the Section passed us. The Lieutenant said we were breaching orders again and that he could put us on charge sheet. I thought this had gone far enough, so I told him that he had better check with Captain DeGaris first as we were

not breaking orders just for the fun of it. I guess he saw the light. We had no more trouble from him after that.

After three days hard slogging we reached the coast not far from the Danmap River. There were trucks waiting to take us to Aitape. I was sure glad to see those trucks. I had really had it. I couldn't have gone much further. Late in the day we reached Aitape. We had been out just on three months. It seemed a lot longer than that. I was very tired.

28-31 There was a lot of mail waiting for us. I had not received a letter from Win for over two weeks. Well, I sat down and replied to her letter right away. It wouldn't make it for her birthday but she would understand that. Her letters really picked me up.

So far we haven't had any parades. They are really letting us rest.

There is one piece of news that has really rocked every Sergeant in this Squadron. A young reinforcement chap has just joined us, and is our new Squadron Sergeant Major. How this has come about nobody knows. Its unbelievable! In the past, if the Sergeant Major moves out or is promoted, a Sergeant within the Squadron has always taken his place.

We Sergeants had a meeting and decided to ask to be paraded before Major Wray, the Second in Command of the Regiment to see if he could give us a reason for this. Most likely this promotion would have been mine and, ordinarily, I would have been annoyed with missing out on it, but at this time I had other things on my mind.

I had been along to see Captain DeGaris the medical officer as previously requested. He advised me to go before the Medical Board to determine my present state of health.

He felt that my condition and years of service would automatically give me a B2 and an immediate return to Australia and, most likely, a discharge. I told him I would go along with that. He said he would arrange a board meeting within the next few weeks. With this knowledge, of course the Serjeant Major business did not matter to me. But I would certainly back up my fellow Serjeants to see Major Wray.

April

1 Major Wray agreed to see us. There were about seven of us. Even Staff Serjeant Harry McKay came along to back us up. Of course, we got nowhere. Major Wray informed us that this promotion had come from higher up - some strings had been pulled somewhere. He sympathised with us but there was nothing he could do. We would just have to go along with it. So that was that.

We were still not having any parades. The troops were having a well-earned rest after the three gruelling months they had been through. Some men had to report for duties each day. The new Serjeant Major would send each Troop Sergeant a note each day with the number of men required for duty each day. This was a very queer way of doing things. It was obvious that he did not want to make personal contact with us. Well that was okay with us too.

4 I had to report to the Regimental Aid Post so Captain DeGaris could fill in my particulars for the Medical Board. To my surprise Hal Waugh and Brian Mole also attended. They are having a Medical Board too. Well I am pleased about that, I won't be on my own. Captain DeGaris said the Board would sit in about ten days time. He would be in attendance along with one senior Medical Officer from 6th Division Head Quarters.

5-14 In this period I was enjoying a good rest, eating well and starting to put on some weight. By the Regimental Aid Post scales I had lost about eighteen pounds, so I was well under weight.

Mail was coming in regularly. It was great getting Win's beautiful letters. She sent me a recent snapshot of Robert, now over 7 months old. He sure looked a fine boy. In my letter to her at this stage I did not mention to her the chance of coming home soon. I did not want to get her hopes up or create disappointments for either of us. I would wait until I heard the results of my Medical Board. I did tell her I had been sick and was now back having a good rest. My thoughts were with her a lot at this time.

On the 14th April the whole Regiment had a big parade and were inspected by the Commanding Officer of the 6 Division, General Stevens. He addressed the Regiment and congratulated us on the great job we had done over the years. There was still more to be done but hopefully it would not be too long before we had the Japs defeated. (This was the last parade I was on with the 6 Division Cavalry Regiment).

15 On the 15th April Hal, Brian and I had our Medical Board. There were only two medical officers in attendance. Our own Medical Officer Captain DeGaris and Major Smith from 6 Division Medical Department. We were examined separately and thoroughly. Later in the day Captain DeGaris advised us that we had been reclassified B1, which means returning to Australia in the near future and reallocated to a Base job or possible discharge. He informed me that my Board papers had a recommendation for "Discharge, return to farming". This was great news, I did not want a "Base Wallas" job. Brian and Hal might have to have one, they would have to wait and see.

Now I could write to Win and tell her this pleasant news without breaking censorship.

16-22 We were now informed we would be flying back to Australia but it could be up to two weeks before our turn came to go.

The Regiment was again preparing to go out again after the Japs. 2/7 Squadron had already gone, 2/9 and 2/10 Squadrons left on the 20th. In one way it was real sad for us to see the Squadron go. However, at this time there were only four hundred and three men left who had completed five or six years service in 6 Division.

We were the "oldies" in an army of twenty thousand men who joined up in 1939. In 9th and 10th Squadrons there may have been about thirty.

Eddie Clugston, we heard later, received his commission in the field. It was well earned. I was pleased to hear he had received it. Frank Harley was sent back to Australia to attend an Officer Cadet Training Unit. The war would be over before he completed the course. Others I know who saw it out included Jim Monk, Stan Robinson, Gordon McKay, Keith Johnston, and Buck Rodgers.

The 6th Division was now about to attack the Japs at their base at Wewak.

(In the next three months the Regiment suffered more casualties. They were well assisted this time by the Navy and Artillery which pounded the Jap defences. The Airforce also heavily bombed them).

It was a shame that this action had to be. The Japs at Wewak and the surrounding country were virtually prisoners. They could have left them alone until the war had ended without them doing any harm. When 9 and 10 Squadrons left on the 20th Brian, Hal and I had to shift into a 6th Division Head Quarters Camp awaiting transport.

One other piece of news we received at a later date was that the new Serjeant Major of 10 Squadron only lasted a couple of weeks when he developed a skin disease and had to be sent back to Australia. A Serjeant from within the Squadron took his place. So be it.

23 We have been informed that we will be moving out tomorrow at 1300 hours.

24 Arrived at the Aitape Aerodrome at 1330 hours and went aboard a DC3 Douglas. There were fifteen of us. There were no seats in the plane. It would have been one of the planes that supplied us in the Ami area most probably. There were plenty of cargo ropes hanging on the sides. We were told to hang on to these on landing and take off. During the flight we sat on our packs. We took off at 1400 hours only going as far as Finschhafen about 500 miles down the coast, then camping the night there. We landed at Finschhafen a little after 1700 hours. It was a big Yank Air Base. There were plenty of Yank cigarettes here, and they were cheap. We all stocked up with them. They were in cartoons of five hundred. No doubt somebody back home would enjoy these. We were given comfortable quarters for the night and a very good meal. The Yanks sure do things in style.

25 Left Finschhafen at 0800 hours for the long trip to Townsville, which was expected to take about eight hours. There were now three extra Yanks on board making eighteen passengers and two pilots. We went across the Owen Stanley Range so it was a bumpy ride at times when we hit air pockets. We had to hang on to the ropes. Once over the range it was smooth again. We passed over Port Moresby then it was sea for the rest of the trip.

It was a wonderful feeling heading for home, knowing I would soon be with my loved ones. I had served my country for over five and a half long years. I had no regrets. It was now time to think about me, my beautiful wife and son and the future we would carve out for ourselves. It was nearly all over. I thanked God I had come safely through it, and took a moment to remember some wonderful mates who were not so lucky as I.

We landed at Townsville at about 1630 hours. The plane was refuelled. We had a meal, then it was off again to Brisbane. Half this trip was in darkness. We landed at Brisbane at 2200 hours. We thanked and said goodbye to the two pilots who had brought us safely home and to that wonderful aircraft the Douglas DC3 which had served the troops so well throughout the war. We were driven by trucks to the Showgrounds LTD for the night. It was a terrific feeling to be back in Australia again.

26 The first thing I did was to send Win a telegram saying I was in Brisbane and a letter would follow. During the morning we were taken by truck to Brisbane General Details Depot at the outer suburb of Indooroopilly. It was here we would find out what was to become of us. How long this would take we had no idea. We were hoping of course it would not be longer than a week. We soon found out it would be several weeks. Hundreds of troops like ourselves were passing through the Depot. There was not enough staff to handle the numbers that were coming in for re-assessment. We would just have to wait our turn. I wrote to Win right away explaining this and giving her my new address.

27-30 In this camp we were very comfortable. We were in Barracks (big huts) with a Serjeants' Mess operating, so in that respect we had no complaints. There was one parade of a morning to answer roll call and names read out for those who were wanted for interviews or tests. If you were not wanted then you could get a leave pass for the day up to midnight. Hal, Brian and I stuck together. We were three good mates and, because of this, the time did not drag so much. We did not go into Brisbane very often, there was not much to do there.

May

1-31 We would play cards, read books or write letters Win's wonderful letters were coming in regularly again. They were a great help.

Though I was still a long way from home and though waiting, at times, became frustrating and monotonous, just knowing we were back on the sweet shores of Australia helped to ease the loneliness and heartache of being away from my wonderful family and friends.

It was during this month we did go into Brisbane one night. That great English singer and comedienne, Gracie Fields, was giving a concert in the Town Hall. She was later going up north to entertain the Troops. We decided if we got there early enough we might be lucky enough to get a seat. When we got there the full house sign was already up. We hung about in the foyer for a long time. An attendant at last took pity on us. Then again it may have been the Africa Star ribbon we wore on our uniforms and, in my case, the long service ribbons as well. We also had on our sleeve six chevrons for years of service. Anyway, he came to us and told us to hang on awhile and he would see what he could do. He soon came back saying he had permission for us to sit on the steps of the aisle in the gallery, if this would do us. It certainly would. We had a perfect view and the sound effects were perfect also. Gracie sang all the favourite songs and told many jokes. She was terrific. We had a very enjoyable evening.

The days and weeks were gradually going. Still our names weren't called out except for roll call. It was getting more and more monotonous. We were eager to get away on some leave to see our families. There was nothing we could do about it. The Army moves very slowly indeed.

I had Guy Baxter's address from when he wrote to me at Aitape. I wrote to Guy as soon as I arrived here, and told him I would be probably discharged in the near future. Guy had been discharged for quite a while now. He was working on David Knox's property, "Greystones" at Bacchus Marsh. David had also been discharged for some time. Greystones had been left to him by his father Sir Robert Knox. Guy wrote back to me to tell me that David had informed him there was a job waiting for me on Greystones if I wanted it. This was nice to know, but I was pretty sure it would be Dueran I would be returning to. Guy also said in his letter to give him a ring as soon as I was discharged and spend a day or two with them. Well I would consider that, but it would depend on me getting some leave before discharge to spend with Win.

In Europe the War is over. The Germans have surrendered. Hitler has committed suicide. This is wonderful news. Now for sure the War with the Japs will be over before Christmas. The lights of London shine again. There was great rejoicing in England.

June

1-9 At last our names have been called up to attend tests. These are mainly I.Q. tests. They were all very simple really. I am sure I would have passed them easily. The next day I had an interview with two senior officers. They asked me a few questions then informed me I would be sent to Melbourne General Details Depot for a final Medical Board and discharge. I was to report to Royal Park for the Medical Board on the 18th June. Some leave would be granted before hand to spend with my family.

I walked out of that office a very happy man. It was wonderful news! When I walked outside there was a chap waiting for his turn to be interviewed. He looked older than me, and of course he was a 39er. He wanted to know how I had got on in the interview. He said, "When you walked through that

door I couldn't tell, yours was a real poker face." I assured him that inside I felt like jumping the moon. I told him he had nothing to worry about, "the powers that be" are now giving all 39ers a very good go. I wished him the best of luck.

7 I caught up with Hal and Brian later in the day, after they had their interview. They were not being discharged, and they were a little disappointed with that. They were both getting twenty-eight days home leave right away. After their leave, Brian had to report to duty at a Military Hospital in Melbourne. He was very pleased about this because he would be able to spend a lot of time with his wife. Hal wasn't so lucky. After his leave he had to report back to duty at the big Supply Depot and Q Store here in Brisbane. They said they were both leaving here on the 10th for the trip to Melbourne to commence their leave. I had been not told at this stage what day I would be leaving. I went along to the Company Office, to the Officer Commanding there and asked if he could tell me. I told him about my two mates leaving on the 10th and if possible I would like to be on that draft. I also told him about leaving the Troop Train at Benalla instead of going on to Melbourne. He assured me he would do his best to fix this up.

8 I was informed I was on the draft leaving the 10th. I was given a leave pass starting on the 12th and ending at 0800 hours of the 18th at Royal Park. This was terrific. I immediately sent a telegram to Win telling her when to expect me.

10 We packed our few belongings. When we arrived here over six weeks ago we asked for our kit bags with our winter uniforms and other effects which we had handed in to the kit store before leaving for New Guinea. Of course they never turned up. There must have been a big racket going on in these stores.

We were issued with new uniforms and clothing. We would need warm clothing heading for Victoria in June after so long in the Tropics. We entrained at Brisbane in the evening. We were a happy bunch of Serjeants. We were really heading for home at last.

It was just about evening the following day when we passed through Sydney. The Railways served up their usual delicacy of sausages and mash - it sure tasted good, but then it should have been because they had been serving it to the boys on the train for a long time now. It was a real home coming feed! The troop trains were still rolling through every day.

12 Albury for early breakfast and a change of trains to the Victorian gauge. Won't be long now. Benalla was coming up fast, I said my goodbyes to my two great mates. We had been together for a long time. Especially Harold when he became one of my No 5 Troop in Syria in 1941. Brian was an original member of the Regiment, but I had only got to know him well over the last twelve months. He was a very fine chap.

I said to them, "I'll see you at the first reunion", and they heartily agreed with that.

(Well, I did see Hal at the first reunion and many reunions since, but not Brian. After he was discharged, several months later, Brian found a job with the Forestry Commission. In 1947 he was killed in a logging accident. This was a great tragedy, and a seemingly unfair blow for such a great mate.)

I caught the bus at Benalla and arrived at Shepparton an hour later. With the passage of years one's memory fades on many things, but this wonderful event, the reunion with my beautiful, loving wife and my son, who was now nearly 10 months old and who I had never seen, was something I would never forget. Win and I just held each other for awhile, words would not come. Our emotions were too deep

for that! This was the moment we had been longing for, praying for, the anxiety and the long waiting was over. My young son was crawling about the floor. It was a very special moment in our lives. Win's parents had gone down the street shopping, I am sure they planned it that way. Young Don Stephens was at school, and the day belonged to only Win and I. It was certainly a day to remember.

That evening Pop and Mother Stephens put on a wonderful "welcome home" dinner. It was a very merry and happy occasion. Linda Stephens, Jack's wife was there. Jack was still somewhere up in the Islands. I wished my own Mum and Dad could have been there. Well I will be seeing them in the next week or two. It was a wonderful feeling for me to be home for good with my family. For me anyway, THE WAR WAS OVER.

13-17 My five days leave went quickly. It was a very happy five days. Robert was a very good baby and gave little trouble - I was very proud of him. Win and I spent a lot of our time talking, mostly of the future. We decided definitely we would go back to Dueran. On discharge I would visit Guy and Murial Baxter at Bacchus Marsh and inform them of this decision. I would go up to Mansfield to visit my Mum and Dad and inform Mr Lester of my discharge and make arrangements with him of my time of return to work at Dueran.

We also went window shopping for furniture. Mr Lester, on my last leave, had informed me that Win and I could have the cottage to live in on my return. We would need some furniture for that. There was not much in the furniture stores to look at. It would be the barest necessities we would be buying. That would be when I returned from Mansfield and knew exactly what we required.

17 I was to catch the evening train to Melbourne. This time it was not a sad goodbye, like in May of last year. I would be back in a fortnight. Again I stayed the night at the Y.M.C.A.

18 I reported to Royal Park Leave and Transit Depot and handed in my leave pass at 0800 hours. Then reported to General Duties Depot which was also in the Royal Park area. I was instructed to attend a Medical Board at 1000 hours. The first part of this in the morning was X-rays, eye tests and teeth examination. In the afternoon, I went before the Medical Board who checked me out thoroughly and asked lots of questions on how I felt. I told them I wasn't sleeping very well and, at times, was having nightmares. They assured me this would soon clear, once I settled down to civilian life.

(My sleeping soon settled down, but those nightmares have kept recurring occasionally, to this present day).

The doctors aim was to make me A1 again before discharge so I wouldn't have a claim on Repatriation for a pension. Well that was okay with me. I just wanted that discharge to get on with farming again with my family. I was re-classified by the Medical Board to A1.

Now I just had to wait for the final piece of paper, my discharge certificate. Well of course, the Army moves very slowly. The days dragged by. I received day leave, I visited my sister Elsie at Burwood and my sister Marj at Brighton and also Ruth.

23 My last day. I was first called up to the Pay Office. I was handed a statement of my deferred pay which would be paged into my bank account at Mansfield. This was just over 200 pounds. I was paid what money was owed to me in my pay book up to this day. In addition, I was paid for an extra thirty days, being for leave still due to me. I then reported to the Main Office where I was issued with clothing coupons, food coupons for tea, sugar, butter and meat. All these things were now rationed. I was also given a voucher for a new suit, hat and shoes. A pamphlet on malaria, with instructions on what to do

when a malaria attack came on. And last of all, my discharge certificate. On this is stated I served a total of two thousand and sixty days. Of this, one thousand and five days were served outside Australia. I was also informed I could wear my uniform for a further month if I so wished.

I was now a civilian, a free man. My long association with the Militia and the Australian Imperial Forces of nearly fourteen years had ended. I had no regrets. I had served my King and Country well. I was very proud of this fact. The last six months in New Guinea had been the toughest part of my War. It had taken a lot out of me, but time would soon heal that. I knew this terrible war would soon be over, and a bright future lay ahead. A future with my loving wife and son, doing what I liked best of all, farming.

Already there was talk in the papers of soldier settlement giving a much better deal to returned men this time. I would certainly be part of that. I walked down through Royal Park to catch a tram.

The green fields of Kastina lay ahead.

1945 – after discharge

After catching that tram at Royal Park on the 23rd June 1945 and reaching the city, the first thing I did was ring Win and tell her the news of my discharge.

I then rang the Baxters to see if it was okay to come that evening to see them. Of course it was. I was given a great welcome by Guy and Muriel Baxter. Guy and I had lots to talk about and Muriel was a good listener.

Just before going to bed that night I was hit by my first attack of malaria. (As soon as we arrived back in Australia on the 26th April, we were instructed to cease taking the Atebrin tablets). It wasn't very pleasant, but it only lasted about two hours and then I was fine. It was the first of many. I had already told Guy about not accepting David Knox's offer of a job. David was away so I told Guy I would write to him and thank him.

Next day I headed up to Mansfield in the coach. I had plenty of time to think about things. It was hard to realise I was out of the army and a new way of life lay ahead. The thought of sharing it with Win, was a wonderful feeling. It was also great to see my parents again after nearly fourteen months away.

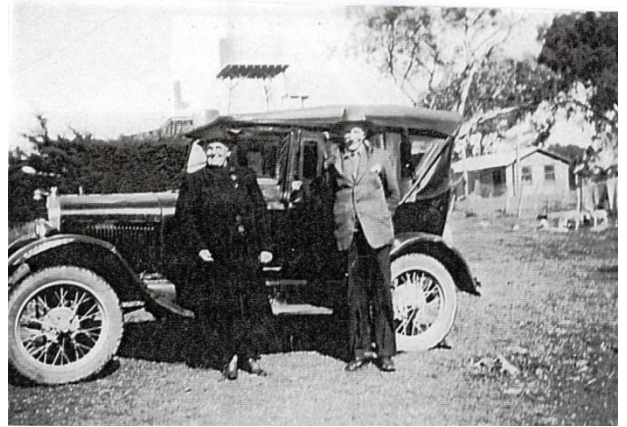
The following day I went to see Mr Lester. He took me into his study and treated me as if I was one of his family. He was very pleased I was coming back to work for him again. There and then he wrote me a cheque for 50 pounds. A bonus for my War efforts was his way of putting it. I was really amazed at this gift. (Compared to today's buying power it would be worth \$3,000).

He suggested I needed a good rest and the 15th August was soon enough to start work. He was sorry to have to tell me that Win and I couldn't move into the cottage until 15th September as he would have to give Bert Hollaway and his wife two months notice. I told him this was no trouble as Win and I could stay with Mum and Dad for a month.

Later in the evening I had a talk with Bert Rollaway. He was a fine chap. I had met him before on one of my leaves. He was past retiring age and was quite happy about giving up the job for me. Of course, he had taken it in the first place on that understanding. He had a son in the army. He was also president of the Mansfield branch of the Dad's Association. This Association was formed to help Servicemen if they needed it after discharge. They were doing a great job:

I spent a few days with my parents then headed back to Shepparton to my loving wife and son. For the next few weeks I had a wonderful lazy time doing nothing, being spoilt by Win.

Came the last week in July and we had to make our move to Mansfield. We bought a bedroom suite, three small armchairs and a few other things and that was it. All kitchen things would be supplied in the cottage. Win would have to cook for any extra men on the place. At present this was only one, the boy who milked the cows and did the gardening at the boss's home.



My mother and father and the old T model Ford at Dueran Station

Maples, who we bought the furniture off, arranged a carrier to take all our possessions and the three of us to Dueran. There we would store most of it in a spare room in the cottage.

The van was to pick us up at 68 Clive Street, after loading the furniture at Maples at around 1 pm. Three o'clock came and no carrier. I rang Maples and they said he had been held up and would be along about four. It was five o'clock when he eventually arrived. It was a very old van with a charcoal gas producer for power. I knew it would be a slow trip to Mansfield.

To Dueran from Shepparton was about seventy five miles. The country between Shepparton and Benalla was mainly flat, except the Dookie hills about half-way. These were the only hills. The gas producer couldn't handle the smallest of hills, it was pathetic. The driver would have it in the lowest gear and still couldn't get over a small hill. When it nearly stalled he would switch over to petrol and away we would go.

It took two hours to reach Benalla. We managed an average speed of twenty miles an hour. There were a lot more low hills between Benalla and Mansfield. It was a terrible trip. Poor Win had the job of comforting Robert. He did sleep a fair bit of the way though.

We eventually arrived at the cottage at 10 pm. It had taken five hours. Of course there had been many stops when he cleaned out the charcoal burner and refuelled it.

Pop Stephens had rung the Hollaways to say we would be late, so they were still up waiting for us. They gave us all a meal, including the driver. Then we unloaded the van and the driver set off for Shepparton.

We still had to get to my parents farm - a distance of about four miles away. We loaded what things we wanted, including Robert's cot, on the Dueran 30 cwt Ford truck and away we went. We didn't have to worry about charcoal - the truck only used petrol. However our troubles still weren't over. Within a quarter of a mile from my parents home was a fairly steep hill. It was only a dirt track and, at this time of the year, wet and slippery. The wheels wouldn't grip, so we had to leave the truck and walk the last bit. I carried a few things, Win carried Robert. It was nearly midnight when we arrived.

Mum and Dad were in bed. They were glad to see us and had almost given up hope on us. It was a day to remember! It was a tough one too.

I was up early next day to see if I could get the Ford up the hill. I had to return it as soon as possible in case it was needed. Well I did manage it by backing down a little and coming up on a slightly different track.

I unloaded our things, put a bike on the truck to ride home on and returned the truck to Dueran.

On the 15th August I started work on Dueran station. It was a great feeling to be back on the job again after nearly six years. It was also wonderful to be in the saddle again mustering sheep. The first week was mainly spent lamb marking.

Dueran at this time was lambing about four thousand ewes. We were using portable yards, so it was a matter of just shifting these yards from paddock to paddock. I was getting very tired at the end of the day. My body was generally war weary, still recuperating itself from the "D" fever and, of course, this malaria didn't help. It was a job to push the old bike home. However I was gradually coming good, it was just a matter of sticking to it. It would just take time and patience.

I was starting to sleep better now, getting used to a soft bed wasn't easy. I had been so long on a hard bed with no mattress at all.



Three generations of Staffords. My Dad, myself and Robert at Blue Range Creek, September 1945

Win was doing all she could to help me settle down to civilian life. She was wonderful.

On August 6th an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima Japan with devastating effect. This will certainly bring the War to an end quickly.

On the 9th another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The Japs are seeking surrender terms already.

On the 14th of August Japan capitulates. The War is over, THANK GOD! I think of my mates still around Wewak and how happy they will be. The 39ers, what is left of them will be home in a few weeks.

In the cities of Melbourne and Sydney there have been enormous crowds in the streets rejoicing. The paper is full of it. It is a very wonderful time. Peace at last. It will take a few years to get things back to normal. But great times lay ahead.

It was about this time I had another malaria attack. It hit me when riding the bike home from work. It was worse than the first time. I had severe shivers and shakes. I was okay again the next day .

On the 15th September Win and I shifted into the cottage at Dueran. It was a large house, so after putting our small amount of furniture in, there were still several empty rooms.

Win was very happy now. She was in full control of her own home. Of course, for me, it was much better too. When I knocked off work I was home. I started a vegetable garden. The soil here was beautiful, pure river silt. The Broken River was only one hundred yards away from the front door. I grew lots of vegetables. Win cooked them and I have never tasted anything quite as good.

Life was going on very well, we were very happy. Robert was now walking. The only hiccup was my malaria. It was recurring about every three weeks. I would soon have to do something about it.

In November, Frank Stephens arrived home from England with his English bride Gwen and their baby daughter, Ann. They were going to live in the dairy cottage on Dueran. Bill Stewart and his family had been living there. Bill was overseer on Dueran for many years. He had now left to take up farming on his own. Frank planned to take on an insurance job.

In early December the people of Bridge Creek decided to give Frank and I, and our families, a welcome home from the War. It was to be in our cottage as it had two big rooms which would hold the number expected. It was a great evening, meeting all our good friends from around Bridge Creek. It was spoilt for me a bit because the malaria came on before the finish of the evening.

My sister Marj was at the evening, she was helping out at the big house attending to Mrs Lester, who was now an invalid with a rare disease. Marj must have told Mrs Lester about my malaria because next day I received an order from her to go and see the doctor.

The doctor told me when the next attack came on that I was to report immediately to the hospital so he could get a positive blood test proving I had malaria. He would send this proof to Repatriation. Then I would be put on a course for six months of the new drug Paludrine which would cure the malaria. A few days before Christmas another attack came on, so it was straight to hospital. It was the worst attack I had. I was very sick. The doctor took my blood sample. He was only a young chap but full of enthusiasm. I remember him coming back into the ward very excited because he had found a tiny little wriggler in my blood which proved I had malaria. I couldn't care less at the time. I had three attacks within 48 hours. I was very sick. Then the fever left me.

The next day was Christmas day, and it looked like I was going to be in hospital for Christmas. I pleaded with them to let me go home as the last Christmas at home was in 1938. The doctor said to wait and see how I was on Christmas morning and if there were no more attacks I could go home then. Well I was still okay next morning. Mum and Dad came and took me home to the cottage and we all had Christmas together there. I can't begin to tell you what a feeling it was to be surrounded by such wonderful family on such a joyful occasion. It was a Christmas I would remember for a long, long time. Most servicemen and women would be home now, having Christmas with their families. There were some Australian Troops in Japan with the Occupation Force and they would be there for some time yet.

The Post War Years

1946 - 1950

1946

A new year and things are going along happily. I have started my course on Paludrine tablets for the malaria, I have to take one tablet a day for six months. So far I have had no more attacks of malaria. I sure don't want any either. That last one was very bad. I am really enjoying life now with my wonderful wife and son. The work at the station is good, and my vegetable garden is going extra well.

Mr Lester has now engaged a manager to take Bill Stewart's place. He is Mr Bob Hanna. He comes from the Western District of Victoria where he had been managing a property there for the Mersers.

Mr Hanna is not a working manager as Bill Stewart was. I am head stockman. My pay is now 4 pound 10 shillings a week. In addition to this we get free meat, milk, butter, wood, rent, electric light and telephone.

Jack Harris has just returned from the Army so that makes two extra. Jack will be in charge of all maintenance work and there is plenty of that, built up over the War years. The trouble will be getting materials. These are practically unprocurable at present. It will be a matter of patching things up for a while to make do.

Sadly, in the autumn of this year Mrs Lester died after a long illness. It was very sad for everyone who knew her. She was a wonderful lady. I attended her funeral in Mansfield. A couple of months later, Mr Lester went off to England for a holiday. He had relations over there. Before leaving he gave me his dog Monty, named after that great British General Montgomery. Monty was a cross between a border collie and an English collie, and nearly twelve months old.

Mr Lester only rode around the paddocks. He never helped with any mustering. Monty of course was untrained. I had one good dog to do the mustering and badly needed another. I took Monty along each day but he wasn't a bit interested in sheep. I thought he would be too old to learn now. However a day or two later he did start working the sheep. Within a couple of weeks he was doing every thing right. He knew exactly how to handle a flock of sheep. He was the best paddock dog I ever had.

Around this time, I joined the Mansfield branch of the R.S.L. We new members were given a wonderful welcome by the old diggers of the first War.

For Win and I, our only means of transport was the 30 Cwt Ford Dueran truck. We were allowed to take this to do our shopping at Mansfield every Friday afternoon. We could not take it for anything else. I had asked Pop Stephens to look out for a second hand car for me. They were in great demand. No new car was yet on the market and would not be for nearly two years. Just before Easter, Dad rang to say he had one he thought would suit me. It was a 1928 National Chev Tourer in good order. The price was 160 pounds. I told him to buy it. He said he would come over to Dueran at Easter and take Win and I back to Shepparton for a few days then we could drive our Chev home.

We were very pleased with our car even though it was eighteen years old. It went very well, had a good hood and side curtains and was quite comfortable. It also had good tyres which was important as tyres were just about unprocurable. I now had to apply for petrol ration tickets. As a private owner I could only get two

gallons a week which wouldn't take us far. Still we would be able to go into Mansfield once a week and do some visiting of our friends around the district. It was great to be a little more independent.

April 24 was the first reunion of our Regiment. I went down to Melbourne by coach. It was wonderful to see my mates again. Some I hardly knew, dressed in their civvies. It was a wonderful night. There must have been over two hundred there. Next day was Anzac Day and we would have had one hundred and fifty of our unit in the march. We continued the reunion after the march, but for me not too long because I had to catch the afternoon coach back to Mansfield to start work again the next day.

In May and June of this year we had a long run of heavy frost, nearly three weeks in one stretch. It was lambing time. Going around the ewes and lambs of an early morning was a very cold job. I would get off the horse and walk a lot just to keep warm.

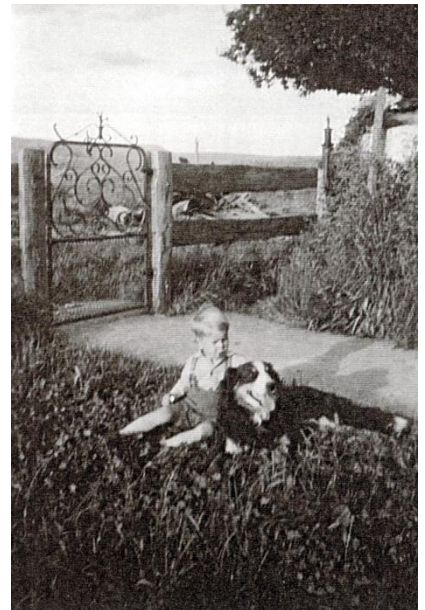
On the south side of the building the frost wouldn't melt, it just kept building up. Many water pipes would burst by freezing up. Cold as it was, there was no way I would want to swap with that terrible climate of New Guinea.

Win and I were very happy living and working on Dueran. Robert was growing up fast to be a fine young boy.

At the end of June I finished my course on the Paludrine tablets. They had done a great job. I never had another attack of malaria.

In the winter of this year the Mansfield Tennis Association had decided to re-start playing competition tennis again after being closed down for most of the War years. The Bridge Creek club had a team in this competition, and I played some games, before the War, when they were short. The Light Horse, of course, was my first love in those days. A meeting was called, at the Club, which I attended and it was decided we could manage to field a team. The court was in a bad way so we had a working bee to re-sheet it and repair the fencing.

In the spring, the tennis started up. I wasn't a good player, but I helped make up the numbers and I really enjoyed it. Win also played a few games and always came along with Robert if it was a fine day.



Robert and Monty at the cottage

On the 17th June 1946 the Shire of Mansfield invited all Service Men and Women to a welcome home on the Show Grounds. We were all presented with a Certificate of Appreciation from the Shire for our service during the War.

At the end of September, I received a letter from Mr Lester who was still in England. Actually it was addressed to Monty the Dog, c/- me. It was in reply to a letter I had written to him. I had mentioned a lot about Monty in this letter and what a great sheep dog he had become. I also enclosed a poem about Monty which Win had written. Mr Lester returned to Dueran just before Christmas. I was pleased to see him back again.

Another Christmas had arrived. Again my Mum and Dad shared it with us. It was certainly a very happy time. And the best Christmas present of all was - Win was pregnant again! It was to be another August baby. We were all delighted about this, and there were celebration drinks all around.

1947

In this year our happy life rolled on much the same. In the autumn, we received two weeks holidays. We spent this time over at Shepparton with Win's parents. It was a most enjoyable and restful two weeks. The old Chev car was going extra well. Petrol rationing had eased a little bit, so I had enough petrol for this Shepparton trip and some visiting as well.

Jack Stephens was on the shares with a dairy farm at Toolamba, so we paid him and his wife Linda a visit. It was great to see him again.

After two pleasant weeks it was back to work at Dueran. We were now getting some super phosphate to spread on the paddocks. It was the first since before the War. It was rationed so it was not a big amount that we put out. Still it would help. I did the spreading with the 30 cwt Ford truck. Some of the paddocks were very rough so the old truck got knocked about a bit.

Another job in the autumn was cutting up a year's supply of firewood. An enormous amount of wood was burnt at Dueran throughout the year. The big homestead had seven open fire places, then there was the cottage and the men's huts. This job took a few weeks. Jack Harris helped with this.

The months rolled by.

On the 6th August our second son arrived, in the Mansfield Hospital. Win had a much easier time than with Robert. We named him Geoffrey Erwin. He was a beautiful healthy boy and he weighed 8 lbs 8 oz. We were hoping for a girl, but still very happy having such two fine boys. My sister Elsie was helping out with the cooking at the cottage and looking after Robert. She had parted from her husband and now, with her daughter Jeannie, was working at the homestead. Jeannie was going to high school in Mansfield.

Around this time my Mum and Dad sold their farm. It was getting too much for them. Mr Lester urged them to sell and told them they could live at Dueran. Dad could do the house cows and help with the garden at the homestead, and Mum also could help with some house work in the homestead. The Staffords were now in numbers at Dueran. Win had plenty of help when she came out of hospital.

Mr Hanna was still the manager. He now used to help me with the stock, especially at shearing time with the mustering and the returning of shorn sheep to their paddocks. As well as sheep, Dueran ran a lot of cattle. The river flats were ideal for fattening up bullocks. These fat bullocks would be sent to Newmarket for sale. This was a job Bob Hanna and I did together cutting out the "fats" that were to go. A drover from Mansfield would come and drive them to the rail trucks at Mansfield.

And so life went happily on at Dueran. Geoff was a very good baby and gave no trouble.

Another tennis season started. Ann Harris was our star lady player. I was still getting a game and enjoying it.

In the late spring of this year Jack Harris bought a new Fordson Major Kero Tractor, a new Holland Pick-up Baler, (the first one seen in the district) and a side delivery rake, also a first. With this outfit he was going out contract baling. The only baling done up to now in the district was from a stationary press out of a stack of loose hay. Jack got plenty of orders, too many, he couldn't keep up with them. What made it harder for him, he had a few breakdowns with the new baler.

Over the last couple of years I was always on the lookout in the papers for any news of the subdivision of blocks for Soldier Settlement. Things at last were starting to happen. Earlier in the year, a Soldier Settlement Commission had been formed with power to buy up suitable land and allocate it to suitable returned servicemen. They had already bought up a fair amount of land.

Dairying land around Camperdown, fruit blocks in the Mildura area and grazing country in the Western District of Victoria.

It was in December that the first blocks were advertised in the papers for selection. They were dairying and fruit blocks. I was not interested in these. But I certainly would be when grazing blocks came up.

Everything was still in short supply so it would be a slow process getting going on a new farm. Rationing had ceased on meat and butter, but, of course, that had never worried us on Dueran anyway. Tea and sugar were still rationed, also some clothing and, of course, petrol.

The Soldier Settlement Commission would have a priority on building and fencing materials so that was good.

Christmas 1947 was another very happy time. My Mum and Dad were again with us. Memories of Christmas times during the war were slowly fading from my mind.

1948

I was still playing tennis with Bridge Creek. The four men in the team were John Comerford, Rick and Frank Stephens and myself. Our two top performing ladies were Ann Harris and Una Dale.

In early March, we again went on our two weeks' holiday to Shepparton. When we arrived back home, there was an advertisement in the paper of eighteen blocks for grazing on Bortkoi Estate in the Western District between Hexham and Caramut.

They ranged in size from four hundred acres to one thousand and twenty acres. The smaller blocks had some pasture improvements. The larger blocks were unimproved. I asked Mr Hanna if he knew Bortkoi. He said he knew of it, and it would be all sound country which could be greatly improved with sowing down and plenty of super phosphate. I decided to apply for the larger of these blocks. The Commission allocated the blocks on a points systems as there were a lot of Servicemen applying for them at this stage.

The highest number of points were for length of service including time spent overseas. Experience in farming was next, if married and the amount of money saved also earned points. I knew I would be well up in the points scale, so I was fairly confident of getting a block. I applied for ten of the larger blocks in order of preference. Number eighteen was my first preference because it fronted the Hamilton Highway which was a bitumen road, and it was close to the township of Hexham. Applications closed on the 29th of March.

On the 1st April I received a letter from the Soldier Settlement Commission instructing me to report to the State Public Offices on the 5th of April for an interview. My interview was in the morning so I went down the day before and stayed at my sister Ruth's place. They were now living in Parkville, not far up from Royal Park. My interview took less than half an hour. There were three men on the panel. They asked me quite a lot of questions about farming, mainly about sheep. They would have had all my army records before them so there were no questions about that. At the conclusion of the interview the chairman said to me, "Well you have certainly picked a good block for your first preference, number eighteen. You will be notified in the near future of the results of this interview". He also said they were a little worried about the fact I had not seen these blocks. I said I had a few days off and I could go right away and look them over. He said that was a good idea and he wanted me to drop into the main office on my way back and let the clerk know if I was still happy with the blocks.

I caught the evening train to Terang. There was a bus service to Mortlake. I arrived there about 10.30 pm and stayed the night at Macs Hotel. The next morning I saw the Post Office across the street. I decided to ring the Messers at Vite Vite. Mr Hanna had given me their telephone number and told me that if I did get

down to look at the blocks it was possible they might take me around. Well, I had no luck there. They were away and only the housekeeper was at home.

I was told Frank Seiver had a taxi service so I went and saw him. He was quite willing to drive me out to have a look at the blocks. I had my plan of Bortkoi Estate with me. The first one we came to was just out of Hexham, No 18. Frank didn't mind waiting while I went for a short walk around. Of course, the country was dry after a long and very dry summer. However, there was a good cover of dry grass over the paddock. It was only light native grass. I could see in the distance the plantation of trees as shown on the plan. They looked to be fairly big trees.

I returned to Frank and we continued down the road. I realised I could not keep holding him up. I told him to drive me down the road to where the smaller blocks started I could then walk through these to Caramut and stop the night and I paid him up and away he went.

I started off in the No 14 block (which was later purchased by George Dixon). Then I walked through the top end of No 13 (which later became Austin Howley's). The day was fairly hot, I had a drink from a bore, it was a bit salty but quenched my thirst. I could now see by these partly improved blocks what the potential of the country was capable of. I was quite pleased with what I saw. I came to the Chatsworth-Caramut road, where No 3 Lot was. On this block was a house which had been a boundary rider house but was now the home of the caretaker for the Soldier Settlement Commission. His name was Mr Hamilton, he worked on Boortkoi for many years. His wife made me a very welcome cup of tea. I had a good talk to him and gathered a wealth of information. He then drove me in his car to Caramut, which was very kind of him. I went to the Pub to get a bed for the night but the publican said he didn't take in boarders. He said the mail car was leaving within the half hour for Mortlake and on to Camperdown if I wanted to catch the evening train. I went right through and caught the train for Melbourne. Back to my sister Ruth's for the night.

Next morning I called in at the Soldier Settlement Commission Office and gave a message to be passed on to the Secretary that I had inspected some of the blocks on Boortkoi and was quite satisfied with them. When the clerk heard my name he said, "to hang on a minute". When he came back he informed me I was the successful applicant for Lot No 18. I was really up in the air about that. He said he wasn't supposed to let that sort of information out yet, but couldn't see how it would do any harm for me to know a bit before I received the official notification. It was back to Mansfield to tell the good news to Win, she would be very pleased about it. In the not too far distant future she would really have "her own home" - something she was really longing for, and something we had spoken of often.

There was great excitement that evening when I arrived back at Dueran and told Win the news. She wouldn't believe me for a start because I had told her I wouldn't know the result of my interview for two weeks. Mr Lester and Mr Hanna both congratulated me. A new era would soon be starting for Win and I. What great days lay ahead for us!

On the 22nd April the official letter came from the Soldier Settlement Commission to inform me that I was the successful applicant for Lot 18 Boortkoi. In the near future a meeting would be called for all successful applicants to discuss developmental work and other matters pertaining to this estate. I would be notified of time, date and place of this meeting.

In early May, a further letter came from the Soldier Settlement Commission to inform me to attend a meeting at Caramut in the Public Hall at 10 am on the 10th May.

I travelled by train and mail car to arrive at Hexham on the afternoon of the 9th May. I booked in at the Hexham Hotel for the night. Then went for a long walk around my block. Since I was here a month ago there

had been some good rains so the country had greened up. I fully realised that an enormous amount of work (in the way of miles of fencing and pasture improvement) would be needed to bring this farm into full production. Well, I wasn't afraid of hard work and I was confident I could do it. On returning to the pub, I found two more successful applicants had booked in for the night. They were Clive Franklin and Dave Goodes. They had Lots 8 and 10 at the back of the estate. Clive's block was one thousand and ten acres and Dave's nine hundred and seventy acres. They were similar to mine. There were no roads out to their blocks at this stage, they had to travel through paddocks. In fact, it was to be nearly three years before they got a good road.

John and Emily Collins had the pub. They put on a good meal that evening. Clive, Dave and I did a lot of talking. Dave had his old car so we were right for a ride to Caramut in the morning.

Next day the meeting went off well at Caramut. We were told exactly how the scheme would work and what was expected of us. We were issued with a temporary lease. The more we could contribute in the way of labour the better off we would be in the long run. The Soldier Settlement Commission would assist us with a living allowance until our first wool cheque. An interim lease would be granted after about two years when it was clear the settler was going to make a go of it. There would be a delay before anyone could start fencing because each block had to be surveyed. The surveyors had only surveyed, up to this time, the boundaries between what the Soldier Settlement Commission had purchased and what Boortkoi Station had retained. From this I knew my block was surveyed. I would have to fence the north boundary. My block was separate to any other block. On the east and west boundaries were private farms and on the south the Hamilton Highway. After the meeting I pointed this fact out to one of the officers of the Commission and asked him if there was any chance I could start fencing. I told him I could supply all the posts and droppers for the boundary. He said the fact that I could supply the posts and droppers would certainly give me a chance of starting. He advised me to call in at the Soldier Settlement Commission office in Melbourne on my way back and talk it over with one of the Commissioners.

I did this the next day and I received a very good hearing. They wanted to know where I was going to get the posts and at what price. I told them I would split the posts and droppers myself out of the bush adjoining Dueran Station at a very small royalty to the Crown Lands Department. I had plenty of experience in splitting posts and droppers before the War. I was informed I would be paid for the materials supplied. I said I would deliver to Mansfield Railway, posts at 6 pound a hundred, droppers 15 shillings a hundred, strainer posts 10 shillings each, stays 3 shillings each. They agreed to this price and said it was cheaper than what they could get anywhere else. It would be to my advantage in the final settlement. They gave me their full approval to go ahead. When I was ready to start fencing I was to contact the supervisor at Camperdown and draw my fencing wire requirements.

I headed back to Dueran very happy and satisfied with what I had accomplished.

On arriving back I talked it over with Mr Lester and we agreed I would work on Dueran until the end of May, then start splitting the posts. Win and I could have the cottage until such time as I had somewhere to put the family down at Hexham. This was very generous of him.

On the last weekend in May, Jack Harris helped me fell a lot of trees ready for splitting. He was repaying me for some time I had given him back in the early summer with hay pressing.

It took all of June and July to split five hundred posts and one thousand five hundred droppers, thirty gate and strainer posts and thirty stays. The posts were all stringy bark and I split them very big. (They are still in that boundary fence today, only a few had to be replaced.) The droppers were split from very straight and free

splitting peppermint trees. (They also have stood the test of time). I hired a chap named Charlie Selwood with a three ton truck to cart the posts to the Mansfield Railway. I helped him with this job. Charlie had lost his left hand in an accident several years before. He now had a hook on it. It did not hinder him in his work at all. We were about a week or more before we had everything loaded on rail trucks at Mansfield and consigned to Mortlake. We were lucky it was a dry winter getting the posts out of the bush.

Now I had to get some gear together and get down to Mortlake before the posts arrived. The station master at Mansfield said it would be about a week so I had plenty of time. I bought a trailer to put on behind the old Chev. Camping gear, 15 pound worth of fencing tools and other tools with a voucher from the Government to ex-servicemen for tools of trade. Jack Harris made me a real beaut wire spinner out of parts from an old reaper binder. That spinner did all the many miles of fencing on Kastina without any trouble.

Now the time of departure came, I wished I could have been taking my loving wife and sons with me, but that was impossible. Hopefully it would be only for a few months. I said all my goodbyes. Mr Lester said he was very sorry to be losing me, but wished me the best of luck in my new venture.

There was some sorrow on my part at leaving Dueran. I had spent many happy years there , before and after the War

I went as far as Parkville the first day and stayed over night with my sister Ruth. Ruth was always pleased to see me. She was a great girl. Next morning I got away early. I had seen an advertisement in the papers for ex-army second hand tents for sale at Disposals. I bought one. It was an American army tent the same as we had in the Atherton Tablelands. It was sixteen feet by sixteen feet and in good condition. I was pretty sure I would have to camp in this on the block while I fenced the boundary.

I arrived at Hexham in the early afternoon. I decided I had better inform Boortkoi Station of my intention of fencing the boundary. It was a one thousand, four hundred acre paddock and they were still running sheep on it. I met the manager, Lew Holdsworth, and made myself known. We had a good talk. I mentioned I was going to camp in a tent. He said that wouldn't be very comfortable, he would see Mr Manifold who, he was sure, would let me camp in the shearers' hut. Mr Manifold gave me the okay and I moved into the hut right away. I was pretty pleased about this and thanked Lew. Lew and I became very good friends over the years.

I had to cook on the open fire that was beside the brick oven, I wasn't going to light that up. The electric light was on, so I was in clover.

That night I wrote to Win and gave her all the news and my luck at being in the shearers' hut at Boortkoi.

Next day I went into Mortlake to see if the posts had arrived. They had not. I went along to Elders Smith & Co. who had just opened an office in Mortlake to see if a post boring machine I had ordered at their head office in Melbourne had arrived. It was not there either. Well, there was no hurry for that. I went along to Jim Wilson the butcher to have meat sent out twice a week in the mail car, "Leave it all to me, I know what you will want" he said. He did too, he was great and the meat was the best.

Back at Hexham I made myself known to Mr Harding the store keeper. He was very helpful. Paper, bread and groceries would be delivered out to the huts for me. I could run a monthly account and I could also get my petrol at this store. I was now getting plenty of ration tickets being a primary producer.

I went out to 'Denholm Green' to visit my nearest neighbours, George and Edie Wood. They made me very welcome. Things were going along very well, far better than I expected. I had been informed that Jim Slattery of Caramut was the man to see about carting my posts. I made contact with him and he said he

would get the Mortlake Railway to ring him when the posts arrived and would deliver the posts right out to the boundary for me. This was terrific.

It was now into the last week of August and it was Robert's fourth birthday and also our 5th wedding anniversary. I sent a birthday card to Robert and an anniversary card to Win. The time sure flies.

I got the message from Jim Slattery to say the posts had arrived and a time and place to meet him with the first load. I had already found a peg in the ground where our new house was to be built.

I cut the road fence opposite this spot and made a "Cocky's Gate" (This was a temporary makeshift opening within the fence). I met Jim here with the first load of posts and away we went across the paddock to the boundary.

I had been out to the boundary prior to this and put in some sight pegs. There was a survey trench every ten chains.

Jim had with him a chap named Ernie Giles, who was later to get a block on Union Estate south of Hexham. The posts were to be spaced twenty five feet apart. Jim tied a post on with a piece of wire twenty five feet behind the truck and the loose end tied to the truck. Away we went up the line. We soon had that load of posts off evenly spaced along the line of the proposed new fence, it certainly saved me a lot of work when I started fencing. The boundary I had to fence was one hundred and sixty eight chains, this required about four hundred posts. The remainder and all the droppers Jim dumped near the house site at the road. I bored holes in all the droppers there with my power boring machine.

On the 15th September, I started fencing, at the boundary on the western side. The farm joining there belongs to Rob Cooper. There were no post hole diggers about in those days. It was crowbar and shovel to dig the holes. Being the start of spring it was good going. I soon had a line of posts up.

Jim Slattery brought me a load of wire from the Soldier Settlement Commission depot at Camperdown. I bored enough droppers for the number of posts I had erected so I started wiring up. The weeks went by and I was making good progress. The winds that swept across the plains took a bit of getting used to. When showers came too, it was worse. I always had the Chevy close by to shelter in from them when they became too bad. At the end of September shearing commenced on Boortkoi. It was done by contract. I still had my room for sleeping but not the kitchen. I had to join the shearers mess and pay for my meals. This worked out well. The cook was very good. He cut me a hearty lunch to take with me for a midday meal. The shearing lasted three weeks then I was on my own again.

By the end of October I had completed one hundred and forty chains, only twenty-eight chains to go. Mr Manifold told me I could bring the family down to live in the huts. This was great news, so I sent a wire to Win with the news to pack up, I was on my way to pick them up. I left very early next morning about five o'clock and arrived at Dueran about four in the afternoon. Thirty five to forty miles an hour was good going in the old Chev.

It was a great reunion I had with my family. Over the next couple of days I had our furniture and other effects transported to Mansfield Railway and consigned to Mortlake. I had brought the trailer back with me so this was loaded up with all the necessary things we would want for the trip and for perhaps several days after we arrived at Hexham.

I decided it would be too long a trip in a day for Win and the boys. So I rang Ruth to see if she could put us up for a night and of course she was happy to have us. It was 9th November. We said our goodbyes, this time for good. I made arrangements with Jack Harris to send my dog Monty by train in about a weeks time.

Another young dog I had, a son of Monty, I gave to Jack Harris. This dog "Laddie", was nearly as good as Monty. Jack had been using them both while I had been away. He knew just how good he was. He wanted to pay me for him, but I wouldn't have that. Jack had helped me out quite a bit over the last few months..

We stayed overnight at Ruth's in Parkville, then set off next morning for Hexham. We arrived at Boortkoi in the afternoon and called in at Lew Holdsworth's house and had a cup of tea with him and his wife. They were a friendly couple who helped us a lot. Then it was down to the huts to get settled in. Win was quite pleased with the lay out and said she could certainly manage here all right. It would be a hard shearers bed for her for a few nights until our furniture arrived. We decided to buy a small electric stove as soon as possible to help with the cooking of meals.

Next day I had to get back to that fencing of the last 28 chains. There was an off shears sale coming up at the end of the month. I hoped to buy some wethers to put on the block so I wanted the fencing finished before then. A couple of days later, Jim Slattery arrived with our furniture from the rail at Mortlake. Now we would be much more comfortable.

There was a small cottage of four rooms in conjunction with the huts. It was for the classer and the boss of the board. We moved into this one as our sleeping quarters and a small sitting room with a fire place. We were quite comfortable.

I took one day off from the fencing to take Win shopping to Warrnambool. Among other things we bought a plug in small electric stove. It worked well, Win could now bake a dinner, cook scones and cakes.

On 26th November I finished the boundary fence. It was now a farm with one paddock of nine hundred and seventy five acres. I was very satisfied with my effort. I would take things a bit easier for a while.

Once a settler had fenced the boundary of his property he could purchase stock with his own personal funds.

On the 29th November I attended the off shears sheep sale at Mortlake and purchased six hundred and sixty five one-year-old merino wethers at 2 pound 10 shillings each. These were Boortkoi wethers so they were going back to where they came from. In hindsight, I would have done better with a bigger frame of wether. Nevertheless, I did reasonably well out of them.

Tom Hickey, who was a stockman on Boortkoi, drove them home for me. There was one dam on the farm so they would have plenty of water. I was told by Lew that there were plenty of eels in it.

At this stage the house was being built. It had reached the lock up stage. Work on it had now stopped. The plaster board lining was in short supply. I had taken Win over to have a look at the house the next day after arriving at Hexham. The doors weren't locked so she was able to check out the plans of the rooms. She was very pleased with it. We were hoping that the house would be finished by next winter, or the spring at least when we would have to move out of the huts for the shearing.

A bit before this, I collected my dog Monty at Terang Railway Station. He was a bewildered and unhappy dog. For a moment he did not know me, then, when he did, he went really wild with excitement.

When we got back to Boortkoi, Win let him come into the kitchen just until he got used to the place. He sat or lay beside my chair. If I got up and moved to the fireplace, or wherever, he would be right at my heels. He wasn't going to let me out of his sight ever again.

Christmas came, with only the four of us. It was a quiet but, nevertheless, happy one.

1949

In January I started on my sub division. Prior to this, I had made a plan of my complete sub division and sent a copy to the Soldier Settlement Commission for their approval, which they duly gave. The other settlers were now starting to arrive to fence their blocks.

The Soldier Settlement Commission had now made a Depot, at one of the blocks nearer Caramut, where posts and wire could be obtained. The posts they had there were only messmate and I didn't think much of them. However, I decided I would have to take some of them to make some small paddocks around the house and two big ones.

The rest of the subdivision I would leave until such time as I could afford to buy box or ironbark posts. I still had nearly one hundred of the posts from Mansfield. Some of these had been used in a seven acre paddock around the house. I intended to plant lots of trees in the fenced in area in the winter.

In the summer and early winter I continued on with the fencing. Besides the house paddock, I had a woolshed paddock of twenty eight acres, a forty acre paddock on the east side of the house and one large paddock of two hundred acres, later called the combine paddock.

In the autumn I purchased a second hand Mitchell Combine in very good order. With this Combine I sowed 2 lb of clover seed, 3 lb of rye seed and 140 lb of super per acre on the two hundred acre paddock. The country was very tough and rough. However the Combine did manage to scratch it and make a seed bed. This paddock I named the Combine.

George Wood lent me his tractor to pull the combine and some of his time as well to do the job. He was a great chap and neighbour. I did spend a lot of time on his place over the next six years, helping him sow down his pastures.

During this time Win must have had a lonely time in the huts, but she never complained once. She was a wonderful wife and friend. Of course, once a week I would take her shopping. Then, on Sunday, we would visit some of the people around Hexham who were all very friendly.

Mrs Edie Wood was a wonderful kind lady and helped Win a lot. Our two boys were growing fast. Robert now nearly five did a great job looking after Geoff when Win was busy.

In June, my Mum and Dad came to stay with us. They had left Dueran and had purchased a small place at Bulla, north of Essendon. They were to take possession of it in a month's time.

My Dad was going to build my garage for me. It looked certain that Win and I would want this garage to live in for awhile. There had been nothing done on our house. Supplies were still in very short supply. So were certain tradesmen, like plasterers and painters. Settlers had to build their own garages and also get the materials as best they could. However, the Soldier Settlement Commission would pay for these. At a later date the Soldier Settlement Commission had prefab garages made and delivered onto the site and the settlers had to erect them. I managed to get all the materials from Goldsworthy's at Mortlake and they delivered them.

It was a twelve feet by twenty feet garage. My father, of course, was a very good carpenter and with his capable skills he soon had that garage up. He was seventy four years old but was still very fit and active. In the two weeks I was with him as his offsider I learnt quite a bit about carpentering. It was great having them with us for two weeks.

In September I had a loan of George Wood's tractor and plough and, in the house paddock, ploughed a chain wide strip on the road, west and north sides of the house. On the road side I planted fifty cypress trees. On the west side I planted sugar gum seed which I had gathered earlier from plantations on Boortkoi. It was around this time we named the farm 'Kastina', after the Army camp, Qastina, in the Middle East.

It was clear now that we would have to shift out of the huts by the end of September. Back in the winter I had erected a one thousand gallon tank on the garage. It was now full.

I removed one of the double doors my father had made and in its place. I erected a tin chimney which the Soldier Settlement Commission supplied. I managed to get a second hand I.X.L. stove and fitted this into the chimney also.

I made a temporary wooden floor with six inch by one inch undressed hardwood. These boards would later go towards the sheep yards I had to build. I also erected the army tent I had bought at Disposals. In this I could store our surplus gear. Robert would also have to sleep here.

At the end of the month we moved in. Now we were really roughing it. But we were still happy, in spite of the cramped quarters and having to take a bath in a tub. We were now living on our own farm and also living in hope that our own house would soon be finished for us to move into.

It was around this time also, that our first shearing took place at Wood's woolshed. We had sixteen bales of wool. A bore was put down at the bottom of the woolshed paddock. It was where four paddocks would join. Joe Grant from Goldsworthy's equipped it with a mill, tank and troughs to four paddocks.

Earlier this year, I met and got to know more of the settlers on Boortkoi. The nearest ones to us were Jack Cook, Ian Wesley and Ellis Bickley. For these three, I bored the posts of their boundary fences with my boring machine.

In October I helped in the shed for George Woods shearing. Ian Wesley also shored his sheep there.

1949 was a year of great activity throughout the country. It was now four years since the War ended.

The manufacturing industries were at last starting to catch up in most things. Australia produced the Holden car but they had a long way to go, to catch up with demand. Those last on the list would have to wait at least a year.

Hundreds of soldier settlers were now getting blocks. Hopkins Hill, Chatsworth House, North Station, Mount Fyans and Woodhouse Nereeb all now had settlers. Mortlake was booming. Goldsworthy's were doing a roaring trade.

Twelve months ago I had joined the Mortlake R.S.L. Now with so many settlers around the Caramut area, it was decided to form a R.S.L. branch at Caramut. I became a foundation member of this branch. Buster Tope, my old army mate, now had a block on Chatsworth House. He was also one of the first members. By going along to the meetings I got to know all the settlers on Boortkoi and the surrounding estates.

Another old friend from Light Horse days and Mansfield was Gilbert Anderson. He had a block on Lara Estate near Derrinallum. Win and I and the kids would visit them occasionally. Gilbert and Jean and their three girls would return the visits to us.

Our first wool clip was sold in November of this year. It averaged 124 pound a bale and made 105 pence for the top price. It was a start! We were on our way as farmers.

In this month with the loan of George's tractor and plough, I ploughed the forty acre paddock on the east side of the house. I later named this the Rape Paddock.

There were quite a few stony banks on the farm, but this paddock was nearly free of stone, so it was ploughed up well. It was to be left in fallow until the autumn when I would break it down and sow pasture and a cover crop of oats.

In November, the builders returned to our house. It was sure good to see them. By Christmas they had completed it except for the tanks and the painting. Hopefully we would be in before the next winter. There was only one painter and his off-sider was working on the Boortkoi houses.

After Christmas he started on Ian Wesley's house. Ian informed me he was coming to ours next. This turned out to be correct.

Ellis Bickley was to wait for over two years after his house was completed for the painter to arrive. They weren't allowed to move in until all the painting had been completed.

Christmas 1949 was a very happy one. We were invited to the Woods for a Christmas Eve party. The boys received lots of toys including a new twenty inch bike for Robert.

Martha and Mick Jubb were there as well as several other friends of the Woods. Martha was a very good piano player. We had a real good sing song.

1950

In January I attended an off shears sale at Mortlake and purchased one hundred and fifty nine, five year old merino ewes. At this sale I met Wally Laycock who I had spent ten days or more with getting back to our units in the Atherton Tableland after seasonal leave in 1943.

Ian Wesley very kindly lent us a small cabin on wheels. There was room for the two boys to sleep in it, giving us a little more room in our garage.

In February, young Don Stephens (Win's youngest brother) paid us a visit. His boss from Toolamba was a keen polo player. Hexham Polo Club was putting on a big tournament. Don looked after his boss' ponies on the trip down to Warrnambool by rail. Don was about sixteen years old. He had the honour of being the first person to sleep in our new home for the week he was with us. After Don left, Win and Geoff went for a holiday to Shepparton to visit her parents. They went by train and were away for two weeks.

Robert had started school at Hexham. I drove him to school and home again for the first few weeks. He was now riding his bike very well so he started riding it to school. There was not much traffic on the roads in those days. Most of the old cars that went along the road then belonged to settlers and I would know who they were. The odd truck that went along belonged to either Bob Yates, Cathcarts or Goldsworthy's.

Win informed me she was pregnant. This was a pleasant surprise. The baby was due in October.

In March I started breaking down the Rape Paddock. The Soldier Settlement Commission now had some machinery to lend out to the settlers. I was able to get a tractor and disc harrows to do the job. The first time over the paddock was a very rough one. The clods had dried out over the summer, but after going over it about four times with the discs I had a good seed bed prepared.

The painter finally arrived. We were sure glad to see him. We knew now that we would be in our new house within two months. It was a wonderful feeling especially for Win. She had been doing a terrific job with this roughing it.

In the middle of April, I sowed the Rape Paddock with 4 lbs of clover seed, 7 lbs of rye and 180 lbs of super per acre. Also 60 lbs of oats per acre as a cover crop.

I heard from Guy Baxter. He and his family were living in Mortlake. Guy had a job on South Boorook with Jim Allen's Hereford Stud. I don't know why he left David Knox's.

In early May the builders arrived with the new tanks and connected them up. They informed us that everything was now complete. As soon as the painting was completed we could move in. This was finished on the 25th May and next day we moved our things in.

We celebrated that evening with a bottle of champagne before a nice fire in our sitting room. It was a very happy occasion even though we did not have any power. The house was all wired for when we would get it. We had a good tilly pressure lamp which we bought when we moved into the garage. We also had some other small kerosene lamps. We had some good rains since the tanks had been connected so we now had plenty of water to the bathroom, washhouse and sink. There was a chip heater in the bathroom for a hot bath. So after the garage we were now living in real luxury.

The next day we went shopping to Warrnambool for things we needed in the new house. We had a limited amount of money that we could spend. We bought linoleum for the kitchen and dining room floor, blinds and curtains, two single beds and a three quarter bed for the spare room. We bought two dressing tables and a few other necessary things. Carpets would have to wait until we had more money. Win was very happy, she would now be able to invite her parents down to stay with us for awhile. We knew they were very keen to come. Four weeks after this we had the phone connected.

The crop I had sown was looking good. There was a very good strike of the grass seed. The combine paddock that I had sown the year before in my opinion was a very poor strike of seed. Lew said in a year or two it would come good as long as I kept the super up to it every year.

In June I started work on my sheep yards. Wool prices were starting to rise, so were the prices of sheep. I decided to sell off the smallest, from the two year old wethers. These made 4 pound, 13 shilling. My small flock of ewes were lambing and doing well. When they finished lambing I was able to turn them on the crop occasionally.

Win's parents arrived for a visit, it was only for a few days. Pop had a mail run to get back to. We were sure pleased to see them. Pop was very taken with my farm. He said it had great potential. Win's mother was going to come back in October to do the cooking and look after the boys when the new baby arrives. This was great news. I will be very busy then.

A dam was sunk for us in the woolshed paddock by a contractor engaged by the Soldier Settlement Commission. This will supply water for a garden as well as stock water to small paddocks near the house.

In August I marked one hundred and fifteen lambs, so that is a start in eventually breeding my own flock.

September has come around and it is shearing time again at Woods. Ian Wesley and Jack Cook also had their sheep shorn there. Mick Jubb and Ted Hinchcliffe were the two shearers. I was the wool presser and I did this job right through for Woods' sheep as well. Again I only had sixteen bales of wool. The light country of native grass will not produce much wool.

At the end of September Win's mother arrived.

October 9th early in the afternoon of this day Win rang Woods to tell me to come and take her to hospital. This I did quick smart. We were keeping our fingers crossed for a girl. It was 7 o'clock that night when the

phone rang from the hospital to say we had a boy and another baby was on the way. This was a bit of a shock, but Win was alright so that was the main thing. Half an hour later the phone rang again to say we had twin sons, mother and babies all well. The twins weighed a little over 7 lbs each. This was a real surprise, Win's doctor was Dr. Ian McInnes, it was a surprise to him too.

Next day Ian Wesley took over my job of pressing so I could go over and visit Win. I thought she might have been disappointed with the birth of two boys instead of the girl we had been hoping for, but she was quite cheerful and happy about it. Well that made me very happy too. They were two fine babies but they looked exactly the same, how were we going to tell them apart?

We talked it over about names and we decided on William George for the first one born and Bruce Oswald for the second one. That evening I paid a visit to Guy and Murial Baxter and told them the great news. They were thrilled about it. I said to them "Anything you can do, we can do too." Their twins were now six and a half years old.

The next day I had to return to Denholm Green. There were great cheers when I walked into the shed. During the rest of Win's time in hospital I would visit her every evening. Win's mother stayed a further two weeks after Win arrived home from hospital to help her settle in.

Win had a big job on her hands now. But of course she handled it with her usual efficient manner.

Looking back through my cash book of those times which I still have, I noted that I paid Mick Jubb and Ted Hinchcliffe 18 pound, 3 shillings each for shearing my sheep. Mr Harding's (the storekeeper where we bought all our groceries) monthly account for this year was 12 pound. Jack Ritche spread super on the one hundred and eighty acre combine paddock and his bill was 27 pound. Jim Wilson (the butcher) was paid a monthly average of 4 pounds for meat. We weren't killing our own at this stage.

The shearing went on at Denholm Green until the end of October. It was a very happy shed. Nobody was overworked. George always believed in having plenty of men about. In the shed all the time were George and the classer, H. McCrae on the table, skirting, "Toot" Tholburn picking up and picking the pieces, and myself, doing the pressing. George had two men working permanently at this time. They were Jim Jubb and his nephew Lindsay Jubb. They did the mustering, shedding up and drafting and penning up. All these men for two shearers. When I started up in my own shed, three of us did the job. A classer, a shed hand and myself. I really had to work then.

Toot Tholburn was a great one for playing tricks and jokes on people. When anyone went out to the old tin toilet, he would sneak out the back with a big stick and give the dunny a whaling with the stick. The dunny wasn't very firm on its foundations so at times instead of the stick, he would fairly rock the place. There would be great yells from inside! He was very cunning he never went to that toilet himself until somebody gave him a big piece of doped chocolate! Toot got the trots so he was really trapped. He had a bad day that day. We gave him merry hell!

Another of his little jokes was on me. Sometimes, when I would be pressing a bale, he would tramp hell out of the pieces bin. When I came to press a bale of pieces, I would have to struggle getting the pieces out of the bin. Toot would pretend not to notice me and then, when we had all had a good laugh, he would end up giving me a hand. He was a great chap and a lot of fun to have around the shearing shed.

During this period all rationing had ended. The economy was booming. There were still some goods in short supply, new cars being one of them. The Holden still had a long waiting list. Wool was still rising in price.

The Korean War had started.

Our wool was sold in November. The top price was 181.5 pence a pound. It averaged just over 200 pound a bale. The same wool in the following autumn was making 300 pound a bale. That was the luck of the draw. However we were very happy with our wool cheque of over 3,200 pound clear. It was a lot of money in those days. We were really on our way. What great days they were.

In early December, I saw an advertisement in the paper by Stokoe Motors of Melbourne for a new Armstrong Siddelly utility for "immediate delivery". I gave them a ring for further particulars. They informed me they had a salesman in the Western District and they would advise him to call on me with a demo model. Within two days he came along. The model he had was a coupe utility. It had a narrow bench seat as well as a tray body. The tray part was a bit smaller than the normal utility. We went for a test drive down the road and it was certainly great to drive. Win was very taken by it. We told the salesman we would think about it for a couple of days and let the Head Office know. We ended up buying it at 1,145 pounds which was about 150 pounds dearer than the Holden, if you wanted to wait twelve months to get one. The bench seat was ideal for the twins in a basinet and one of the boys. The front seat had plenty of room for three. I still kept the old Chevy for the time being. I did sell it later for the same price as I paid for it five years before.

Christmas 1950 was again at George and Edie Woods. They put on a big Christmas Eve party. This time the Wesleys and Cooks, with their children, were there. They had a big Christmas tree with lots of presents for the children. It was a good evening but we felt it was taking something away from us on Christmas day with all the presents they gave the kids. The Woods were wonderful generous people. They had no children of their own so we didn't want to hurt their feelings.

This year I received my interim lease. It told me the value of the farm was 6,630 pounds.

From this time on, the value of future improvements would be added on to this figure to a limit of 7,000 pounds. A certain amount of the cost of these improvements were written off by the Soldier Settlement Commission. It was very cheap indeed.

This interim lease, for which I paid a small yearly rental of 132 pounds, would go on for no longer than five years. Then I would be eligible for my purchase lease.

Kastina

1951

In January I fenced part of the swamp section of the farm. This made a paddock of one hundred and forty acres. I called this paddock the Flat. I had been informed that Soldier Settlement Commission would plough this for me, with heavy equipment they now had.

In February a chap arrived with a Shearer Majestic and a Crawler tractor and commenced ploughing. The swamp soil was mainly a loose type of black clay. It was very easy to plough when dry. He opened the plough out to its maximum width and was only a week on the job. When he finished I got him to plough a small strip at the west end of the woolshed paddock. I intended to plant a plantation there. The Soldier Settlement Commission supplied me with a Fordson tractor and disc harrows to break down the Flat. After going over it three times it was a good seed bed. I sowed this paddock with clover and rye and a bag of super to the acre in April. Ian Wesley helped me with this job. In these early days we helped each other a lot with various jobs. We got on very well together and have always been the best of friends.

The woolshed was erected by George Woodhams, Ron Cooper and Lindsay Leishman working for the Soldier Settlement Commission. The place was beginning to look more and more like a farm now. I finished the sheep yards and connected them to the woolshed.

On the home front Win was coping in her usual efficient manner. It was hard on her though with a family of six. Lots of washing with only a copper to heat the water and two wash troughs.

The twins were doing fine. They were good babies but, of course, took a lot of Win's time. She didn't have any idle moments in those days. And of course neither did I, with a big farm to develop. We were a good team and life went happily on.

In July, the S.E.C. connected the power to our house. This was a great event. That first night we switched every light on. We were really lit up. We then had to do some shopping. First on our list was a fridge. Previously we had tried a kerosene fridge but to no avail. Win and I decided to wait for the power to be connected for the real thing. To keep our meat, milk and butter cool we used the good old 'Cool Gardie' safe. This was a square metal construction with perforated light metal sides. The cooling was achieved by filling a metal tray at the top of the safe with three to four gallons of water. Strips of towel were placed in the water and left hanging down the sides. The moisture in the towel would evaporate and create the desired cooling. In addition to the fridge we also bought an iron, toaster, wireless (we had a battery one previously) and a small heater for the kitchen. Washing machines were coming onto the market but we decided one of these would have to wait until the next wool clip.

It was only about a week after this that an electrical firm from Warrnambool arrived with a Thor Washing Machine, the top washing machine of those times, to install in our washhouse. Win informed him he must have the wrong house as we never ordered one. He told her to read the card attached. It read, "To Win with love Edie and George Wood". They were certainly very generous wonderful people. This machine was a great help to Win with the washing, it lasted for many years.

In September, I planted dwarf sugar gum seed in the area I had prepared in the woolshed paddock. I had a wonderful strike of seed. It came up as thick as it could grow. The Rape paddock that I had ploughed and sown down was a great success. Also on the Flat was a good strike of clover and rye, this would need a lot more super before it really came good, being very clayey soil.

The Combine Paddock which had been sown two years before was still very poor, there were odd patches of clover and rye starting to show up. This proved to me that the only way to get good pastures quickly was to plough the country. Hopefully I could do one paddock each year.

At this time I did not have the power connected to the woolshed. The poles were up, but Goodalls were not able to get the job done before I wanted to shear. So for the third time I would be shearing at Woods. Wool prices had come back a lot from the very high prices of the autumn. However, it was still a good price. Our price was 145 pence per pound and it averaged 150 pound a bale. This year we had twenty two bales.

Dipping the sheep also had to be carried out at Woods. It was to be a while yet before we got our own dip. We sure relied on our good neighbour for a lot.

The twins now were a year old, and crawling around everywhere. Win now really had her work cut out keeping an eye on them. I fenced off the small side verandah as a play pen for them and this helped.

Christmas this year was a quieter one. George and Edie Woods did not have the usual Christmas eve party. They had become increasingly aware of our needs as parents to be able to spoil our own children. We had a Christmas tree in the sitting room and Robert and Geoff took great delight in decorating their first Christmas tree.

1952

Into another year and things are going very well. I was now on the Hexham school committee and also on the committee of the Public Hall. This badly needed painting. We had working bees to get the job done as cheaply as possible. Norm Harding, John Cooper and myself put in a lot of time painting.

I had fenced off a three acre paddock from the Rape Paddock for our house cow which I had purchased some time back. I also built a fowl house for Win to run some hens. Mrs Holdsworth had given her a few to start off.

It was also in the summer of this year I did some work for Lew Holdsworth. He owned some land near Mortlake. He raised fat lambs from the Romney ewes. The ewes had foot rot. This was a dreadful disease of the feet. A germ penetrated the hoof, rendering it contaminated. A great heat was produced with much pain and often the outer shell of the foot would come completely off, making the sheep very lame.



Robert, Osie and Geoff

It was long, hard work out in the hot sun, paring the feet and putting each sheep through a foot bath of Formalin. Lew did not have a woolshed at this stage. It wasn't a very pleasant job, the stench was most unwelcome but a job that had to be done to save the flock.

Later in the winter I helped him plant cypress trees. He intended building a home and a woolshed for when he retired as manager of Boortkoi.

In the autumn the power was connected to the woolshed. I had purchased a two stand Moffet Virtue electric shearing plant. This was installed and wired up. We tried it out at crutching time. Everything went well.

A small dam was put in the Hexham paddock. Our dam in the woolshed was nearly full. Goldsworthy's had the job, from the Soldier Settlement Commission, of erecting a mill at the dam to pump water to a high tank at the house for our garden. It also supplied water to paddocks on the west side and east side of the house.

In May, I ploughed the forty two acres Old Dam Paddock with George Wood's tractor and sunder cut plough. After discing it up I sowed it down to clover and rye grass, and again with a cover crop of oats. '

The National Resources League had been in operation over the past two years. They had done a great job by supplying up to two hundred free tube trees to soldier settlers. I planted them on the north and west sides of the house among where the seed I had sown had missed coming up. We could also buy from them, tube trees at a very cheap rate. In the winter of this year I purchased several kinds of native trees and shrubs and planted them on the south side of the house to form a small park there.

I also planted more cypress trees on the west side adjoining the gum plantation.

These trees were a fair way back from the house and I now realised it would be several years before we got any protection from them against the horrible "westerlies" that blow here. I decided to plant boobialla trees close to the house until the other trees grew up. This was a good move as the boobiallas were quick growing. We could also give them water in the summer to make them grow quicker. Within three years we had a good hedge.

Many more of the larger station properties had been divided up for soldier settlement since 1950. Bolac Plains and Boonerah were now settled. Later on in 1953/54 Salt Creek and Pura Pura, in 1955/56 Barwidge, Caramut North, Geddes, Union and Grassmere also. There were many more close by in adjoining shires. In 1958 the last settlement took place in the Mortlake Shire. These were four blocks on Boonerah close to Hexham and six on Boortkoi, north and north west of our farm. These ten farms greatly assisted the school and the township.

October came and the twins were two years old and running around every where.

Shearing in October in our shed for the first time. Ted Hindcliffe and Mick Jubb were the shearers again. Toot Tholburn was the shed hand and I had Fred Mackelwaine as classer. Fred was a first War digger and was now in his 60's. Fred was a fine gentleman, as well as a top classer. He came and classed our clip for many years and taught me a lot about classing wool. The shearing went off very well. Toot didn't have much time to play his jokes. This year we had twenty four bales. The price we got later was 153 pence per pound, a very good price.

The Old Dam paddock I sowed down in May was now looking extra good, as was, of course, the Rape paddock, now in its second year. It was obvious that ploughing was the only way to go. The Combine paddock was still very poor. I decided I would have to buy a tractor, plough and disc harrows next year so I could sow down bigger areas.

1953

Geoff started school. The Woods had given Robert a twenty six inch bike so Geoff had the small one now. He was riding quite well and he had Robert to look after him.

In May I bought a new set of disc-harrows. I disced up the Middle-back Paddock of eighty five acres. I was able to get a Soldier Settlement Commission tractor to do the job. I was informed this would be the last time as I now had had my quota of assistance. I had a Shearer Royal six furrow plough on order and intended to buy a tractor in spring.

I sowed the Middle-back paddock to clover and rye. In May my new plough arrived, it cost 234 pounds.

Pat Pitts, a boring contractor put a bore down in the middle-back paddock. This gave us a good supply of water at ninety seven feet. The water rose to forty feet off the top. I paid for this bore myself. In fact, all

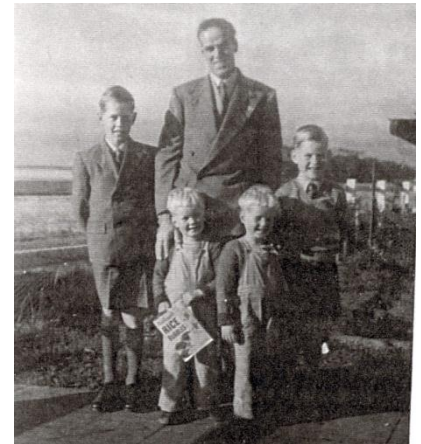
the improvements from this time forward I paid for. I now completed more fencing using iron bark posts. I fenced sixty chains between the Old Dam paddock and Middleback and Far-back paddocks. I also made another twenty eight acre paddock on the west side of the house. This was for an emptying out paddock (a paddock with little feed so sheep would empty out before being shorn) at shearing time. This paddock never had any super on it until well into the 60's. I named it the Show paddock - to show what the farm looked like in 1948. I completed fencing the Hexham paddock. I now had twelve paddocks including the House paddock. This was nearly six miles of fencing not including the boundary. For a few years I would have a spell from fencing. This lot of fencing I did in '53 I had Roy Patison dig the post holes with his tractor and post hole digger. It saved me a lot of time and hard work.

I had a dam put down in the Hexham paddock.

Bob Fry was the new teacher at Hexham School. There were now some twenty five pupils.

It was in this year that young Queen Elizabeth paid a visit to Australia and also paid a visit to Hamilton. As many school children as possible from the Western District were assembled there to welcome her. Bob Fry and I took our cars along with a few other parents loaded up with children from the Hexham School. The younger ones missed out, so it was only Robert from our family that went. We all lined up on the streets of Hamilton and, after a long wait, the Queen and her escort drove slowly through. For a few seconds look at the Queen it was a very long day!

In June, Golsworthy's equipped the new bore with a mill, tank and troughs. We now had two bores and three dams on the farm. It was starting to look like a farm now. The trees around the house were growing well. I had started a vegetable garden. Win created small garden areas and mass plantings of daffodils, jonquils, agapanthus and red hot pokers (Today, as spring approaches, these plants are a reminder of the early beginnings). The soil was very clayey and hard to dig. For the vegetable garden I carted some good red soil from down the road near Denholm Green, also put in lots of sheep manure from under the wool shed.



Osie and the boys

Spring came and with it shearing time again. This year I had Len Jolliffe (Fluff) and Mick Jubb. Our wool clip only rose to twenty six bales. As yet, I did not have nearly enough improved pastures to really give it a lift.

In November I got my new International A.O.S. 6 tractor (1,356 pounds). It had power take off and three point linkage which hadn't been long out.

I started ploughing the ninety acre Far Back paddock. There were a few stony patches, the worst of these I dodged around, the Shearer plough pulled out a lot of the big stones. I had been told my tractor might be under powered to pull the big plough, but this was not the case, it handled it easily. It took me about eight days to plough the whole paddock. It took me several weeks to pick up the stones, but that was later on in the autumn after I had worked it down with the discs harrows.

1954

Burning off was a big job in these times. I had joined the Hexham Fire Brigade in 1949. Only the big properties had trucks with fire fighting equipment. Burning fire breaks was a long job spread over four or five weeks. As well as the road burning there was a lot of private burning done around the stations. This took as long as the road burning. Now, in the mid fifties more of the bigger farms were getting trucks and fire equipment. We were split into three teams and could get the job done much quicker.

In this year, the last race meeting was held on the Hexham Race Course. It was then closed as a race course by the Victorian Racing Committee. It then became the Hexham Recreation Reserve.

I was now a member of the committee of management. Polo was still played on this ground. One year Toot Thorburn talked me into being a goal umpire for a big three day tournament that the Hexham Polo Club were holding. There were teams from all over the country. I know I had to be very careful not to be run down by galloping horses as they came charging through the goals.

Also in this year the Caramut R.S.L. held a race meeting and combined Sports Meeting on the Caramut Race Course. Only two race events were held. This was the minimum number of races that could be run to be eligible for book makers to be on the ground. (Nothing like the big race day and the excitement at Mt. Camp, Northern Territory, 1943).

Bill Jubb was one of the book makers, Keith Jubb his son, was his clerk. I was running a spinning wheel. It brought in the most money of anything we had ever held. Altogether it was a great success.

In a later year the Hexham Hall Committee held a sports meeting on the Hexham Reserve. We failed to get the numbers for this to be a great success, but we did make some money. Again I ran the spinning wheel, Mr Harding supplied the prizes at cost, and this brought in the most money. We certainly needed the money for the hall. It had to have trusses on each side to keep it from falling over. There were many working bees during these times.

On the home front, Win in her usual wonderful way was keeping things going smoothly. She never had much time for herself, but she never complained.

In April I sowed down the Far Back paddock with 4 lbs of sub clover, 1 lb of white clover, 7 lbs of rye grass and a cover crop of oats. I now had nearly two thirds of the farm sown down.

In May my brother Erwin arrived to install a shower dip for me. He had just finished building himself a new house near Tullamarine. He was very good at concrete work as well as carpentering. With the dip he did all the measuring up and getting the correct levels, I was just his offsider. When we finished this job, Erwin agreed to build an extension on the back of the house. This consisted of a nine foot veranda along the back of the house, with an eleven foot sleep out on one end and a shower, toilet room the other end. To do this job I had to borrow some money from the bank until the wool cheque came in. It was the one and only time I had an overdraft at the C.B.C. Bank. Erwin did a great job on this. He then went back to his water boring job. The extra bedroom was very handy when some of Win's family would pay us a visit. The shower room would have to wait another year to be equipped until we had a hot water system.

In August I received a letter from Norm Harris at Mansfield wanting to know what I thought of Salt Creek Estate which was advertised for Soldier Settlement. I wrote to him and advised him to come down and have a look over them. I invited him to stop with us and I would show him around. Norm duly arrived. I showed him around our farm for a start and the difference between the improved and the unimproved country. Then

we went and looked at the Salt Creek blocks and also some on Pura Pura which were up for Settlement at the same time. These blocks were all unimproved and ranged from about five hundred and fifty acres. Norm only put in for the Salt Creek Estate and was successful in getting a block. Over the years he developed it into a very good farm.

Shearing time came around again, it was the same team as last year. Our wool clip went up by six bales to thirty bales. At last we had doubled it in six years.

Kastina Layout Guide

Kastina is an excellent grazing property of almost one thousand acres of which three hundred acres are low lying flats of heavy black clay with the area being drained during the wet season by one major and many minor drains.

The property is divided into seventeen paddocks which are watered by two bores (numbered 1 and 2) and five dams (numbered 3 through to 7). Dam 7 has a windmill which pumps to a 20,000 gallon cement water tank from which a pressure unit waters the Show, Cow and Rape paddocks.

The layout sketch of Kastina and the additional information above were provided by Geoff Stafford.



1955

In my cash book I noted in January I paid the Shire rates on the farm, 78 pounds, 12 shillings and 6 pence.

In March, Goldsworthys installed a new Wellstood combustion stove and a hot water service. This was a big help to Win. The shower room was now fitted out with a hand basin and shower. The hot water through the stove was very efficient. Occasionally in the summer if Win was doing a lot of baking the water would boil.

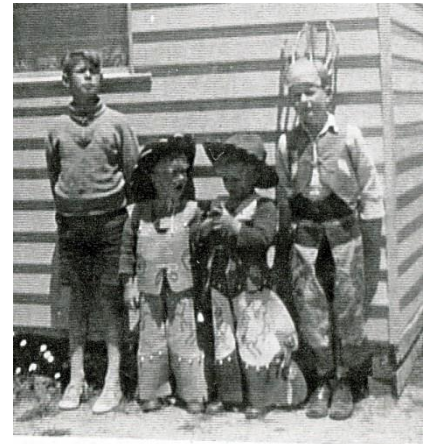
In March I also purchased a new McGrath three ton trailer and a manure spreader. I could now spread all my own super, which would be a big saving. Steadily we were getting the equipment and improvements. All our spare money went into these.

In the spring I ploughed a two acre strip for a second school plantation, I also disced it up to a fine seed bed. We had a working bee and planted a few hundred pine trees. It was at this time that I was chairman of the Hexham school committee.



Win and the boys

It was shearing time again. We still had Mick Jubb, but in place of Len Jolliffe we had Len Croft, a settler on Salt Creek Estate. He was a very good shearer but if he thought they had a sprinkle of rain on them he would declare them wet. This year our wool clip rose to forty four bales. We were really on our way now. Even the Combine paddock was starting to come good. The Far Back paddock was a great success. George Wood now had a hay press. We cut and pressed some beautiful hay from this paddock. George took some of the hay as payment.



The boys dressing up

At the end of September of this year George Wood took Robert and I in his Rolls Royce to the Grand Final at the M.C.G. between Melbourne and Collingwood. Melbourne thrashed Collingwood. One of the highlights of the game came late in the last quarter. When the game was well won by Melbourne, Bluey Adams, who was the 19th man for Melbourne, was given a run to say he actually played in the Grand Final. He raced out on the field and collided with a Collingwood player. They were both carried off on stretchers.

George had bought the Rolls Royce with the big wool cheque he had received in 1951. His wool was sold in March of that year when it was at its very top of 1 pound per pound average.

It was in the spring of this year that I received my purchase lease. The price was just over 7,000 pounds. I now legally owned the farm. This was terrific news. Win and I were very happy about it.

1956

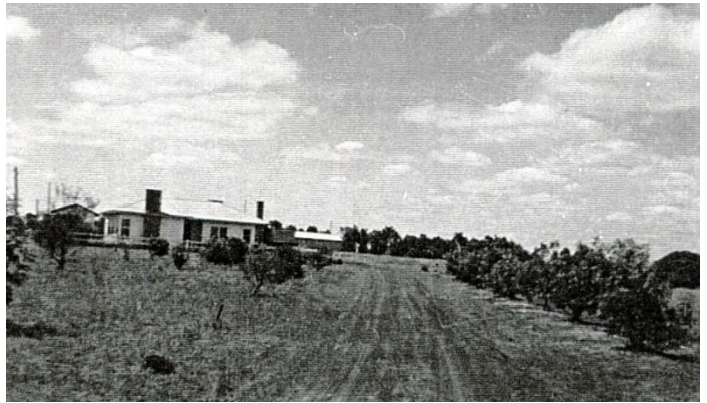
We decided that Robert would stay with Win's parents at Shepparton and do his first year of senior school there. There was no bus running to Terang High School from Hexham, it only went from Mortlake. Robert knew his Grandpa and Ma very well as over the last few years there had been many visits to and fro. Just the same it must have been a bit hard on a young boy of eleven to suddenly leave his own family. He did come home on term holidays. Pop Stephens and I would meet at Maryborough with Robert.

The twins started school this year.

During the autumn I spread forty eight tons of super on the improved pastures at a cost of 578 pounds. In March we had a big rain followed in April by more good rains. By the end of April there was a wonderful growth of grass on the improved pastures. It was like spring.

Goldsworthys installed a septic tank for us, and a toilet in the shower room was fitted.

In the winter I erected a pre-fab garage, cemented the floor and made it mouse proof to store oats in. This shed in later years was made into a work shop.



Early days, Kastina, about 1956

A few years after my Mum and Dad had moved to Bulla, Dad developed serious back trouble. He did recover from this for awhile. They sold their small farm at Bulla and retired to a house they bought in Ringwood. My sister Elsie was at this time living in Ringwood. I would always visit my parents at least once a year.

After they were there about two or three years my father's back became bad again and he was unable to walk. He was admitted to an Old Men's Home at Cheltenham. It was a long way for my mother to visit. She sold the house in Ringwood and bought one in Brighton. This is where she was living in the year of 1956. My sister Marj moved in with her. Over the next few years I was to visit them many times. Also my father at Cheltenham. It was very sad to see him bed ridden as he had always been so active.

It was a very wet spring. A great transformation had taken place over all the improved paddocks of Kastina. They were lush with pastures of clover and rye.

"The Green Fields of Kastina" had really arrived. It had happened it seemed, so quickly with this extra good year. We were, of course, now under stocked. At shearing time we had one thousand, five hundred and fifty sheep, including lambs, and thirty cattle. These included twenty two, 18 month old steers I had bought the year before. I managed to take on fifty head of dairy cattle on agistment. However, the country was so good that they didn't make much of an impression on the growth of grass.

This year we had two new shearers. Mick Jubb had given up shearing and now had a good job as a rep for the Australian Workers Union. He was supplied with a car and travelled around the country visiting shearing sheds. Len Croft was now too busy on his farm. George Wood managed to get two shearers from Koroit. They were Dan and Joe Gavin. Because of the wet spring we were late starting. A mob of about three hundred wethers I had running on the swamp for most of the winter were loaded with mud on the bellies and fore legs. These bellies were kept separate and were sold separately to the rest. The bale made 90 pence a pound. I am sure if the mud was removed this wool would have been higher than my top line which made 132 pence per pound. The buyer of that bale must have been a very poor judge of yield.

Our wool clip this year was sixty five bales, a rise of twenty one bales since last year. Average cut per head was 12.5 lbs.

In December we bought a new Morris Isis car. It was black with bright red seats! Winnie chose the colour not to my liking as I thought it would show up all the dust and dirt, but Win thought it looked quite regal. The Armstrong Ute had done a good job for what we wanted when the boys were small. It had one bad fault, it

was a terrible oil burner. I did not trade it in as it would be handy to use around the farm. The Morris was a beautiful car and plenty of room for our growing family.

1957

In January we sold the twenty two steers which were now over two and a half years and were prime fat. They were sent to Newmarket in Melbourne and made 48 pounds per head. I had paid 14 pounds for them, so this was a big profit.

Win had at last made up her mind to learn to drive. In February, when the boys had all gone back to school, I took her for lessons in the Rape Paddock, until she became efficient at gear changing. The Isis had the gear shift on the steering column. Then I took her out on the road. She was very nervous at first but soon gained confidence. In March I told her she was driving well enough to get her licence. Jim Hoy was the policeman. He was originally from Melbourne but I could see that the "city beat" had not wavered his sensitivity to small town matters, like sitting in the back seat of a car with a rather frightened driver. He could see that Win was very nervous. He talked to her very quietly, took her around the back streets and made things very easy for her. She passed with no trouble. I have never forgotten Jim for his kindness and Win went on to become a very confident, capable driver.

In the autumn I ploughed half of the Swamp paddock, about eighty five acres. This half was each side of the big drain that drained the swamp. I put up a temporary electric fence to keep the stock away and sowed it down with clover and rye and a cover crop of oats.

In the winter, Wally Aberline erected an implement shed, steel frame, forty eight feet by twenty feet.

In August, Alex Sparks from Penshurst, extended the woolshed by fifteen feet, this included the sheep holding area as well. I now have a lot more room for bins and I could now install a Ronaldson and Tippet double box wool press. I had put up with a single box press called a Marvellette, it was a horror.

In March we received our wool cheque for the 1956 clip. It was 6,800 pounds.

At the start of this year Robert started at Terang High School. A bus was now running from Hexham to Terang.

October - shearing again. Two new shearers - Tom Colly and Jack McInnes. I had Knox McKenzie as a shed hand. Knox was a new settler from Barwidgee Estate.

This year the season had been only fair. With two hundred more sheep we only got one more bale of wool, sixty six bales.

It was in this year Win and I formed a partnership with the farm. This was on the advice of my accountant Mr Eastwood who had been doing my taxation for several years now. Win now had a two fifths share in the sheep and plants and profits, I had three fifths. In this way we would reduce taxation.

In November I purchased a new eight foot header with power take off and power lift for the comb from the tractor. This cost 940 pounds. I hoped to do some heading around the district to help pay for it. Oats were the best feed for whethers in their first summer, so I intended to grow some oats each year for this purpose.

The crop I had put in on the swamp was only a light one but well worth heading. In late December I headed the crop and got a little over four hundred bags.

1958

In January I headed some oats for Knox McKenzie and Ian Wesley.

Win at this time, now that she could drive, was getting out more. She had been a member of the School Mothers Club for two years and was now helping to start up the Country Women Association branch in Hexham. She was also a member and actively engaged in the Red Cross. This was great for her.

In March my sister Elsie wrote to me to see if I could take on her son Bill for a few months work. He had a rough time of it with a nervous break down. I agreed to do this so we had Bill with us until the end of August, by which time he had improved considerably.

In April I employed Charlie Stapleton to plough the second half of the Swamp paddock. This was all high ground and good soil. I did put in some time on the tractor ploughing when Charlie knocked off in the evening.

By the end of April we had it all worked down and sown. Now there was only the Hexham paddock of one hundred and seventy acres to go.

In this year, six blocks on Boortkoi and four on Boonerah came up for settlement. The Boortkoi blocks started just north of our Far Back paddock. Ron Wills was the settler on this one.

The other five were Jim Edwards, Wally Bird, Harold Rees, Fred Collins and Stan Mitchell. On Boonerah were Con Delaney, Bob Bond, Bill Hill and Keith Pickering.

In August I sub divided the Combine paddock. So now I had the Upper and Lower Combine paddocks. Bill Smart helped me with this fencing, another thirty chains.

The season was a very bad one, but, of course, nowhere near a drought. The rain in the autumn did not come until May so there was very little growth until the spring. I used up all the oats I had on hand and had to buy a further three hundred bags. The spring rains were good so there was then plenty of feed.

Shearing time came around again. Once again I had a change of shearers. Brian Hardy had done some crutching for me and agreed to shear for me. He lived in Mortlake and travelled to and fro each day. Brian at this time was just a learner.

The other chap was Norm Fehring a very good shearer from Shepparton way. My shed hand was "Mac" McLean and, of course, my good friend and classer, Fred McIllwaine.

It was Win's job to keep the food up to the shearers. Morning smoko, always at 9.30 a.m., would see her arrive with the thermoses full and a variety of wholesome sandwiches. The midday meal was always a hot meal - usually a roast dinner or mixed grill with vegetables and a dessert. Afternoon smoko at 3.00 p.m. was an array of scones, pikelets, cakes and quite often a delicious jam roll. No sooner had she prepared one meal and cleaned up after that, then it was time for another.

It was a full time job and the shearers sure appreciated many of the culinary skills she had learnt as a cook's assistant at Dueran and from the cooking school she attended at Emily McPherson, Melbourne on joining the W.A.A.A.F.

We often accommodated the shearers and of course this meant another two meals to prepare each day, for Win.

The clip was down this year owing to the bad winter, fifty nine bales, only down seven bales.

In the winter of this near the Presbyterian Church had a major reconstruction. Over past years the floor was deteriorating badly and the roof was also in need of major repairs.

Over the last few years, we had been attending church fairly regularly and the boys attended Sunday School, at which Winnie was teaching. I was a member of the Church Council and Win a member of the Ladies Guild. A fund raising scheme was started.

I recommended that Alex Sparks be engaged to take charge of the job with our help as volunteer labor. This we did and we soon had the job done. We installed a complete new floor, new iron on the roof (the rafters of Oregon were in perfect condition) and a new Sunday School room at the rear of the Church. We all put in many hours of work helping Alex.

I recall one day in August, when we were working on the floor, a terrible gale blew from the north west. Alex's van had broken down on his way in the morning, he just made it to the church. I offered to tow him home in the evening. I used the Isis as it had more power than the old Armstrong. Peshurst is due north west of Hexham. The gale was blowing harder. It was a slow trip, I couldn't get into top gear. The gale did a lot of damage to hay sheds around the district. It blew the roof off the Memorial Hall in Mortlake.

In the early spring I had closed up the Rape paddock for grass hay. In November I engaged a contractor from Ellerslie by the name of Jack Cook to cut, rake and press the hay. It was a beautiful crop of hay. There were over three thousand bales from the forty acres. I had a new hay shed built in December, (it was 48 ft by 25 ft) to house much of this hay.

Norm Ferhing and Brian Hardy had run out of shearing so I gave them the job of carting in the hay with my tractor and three ton trailer. We didn't have any loader or stacker at this stage and it was back breaking work. The shed was beside the Hay paddock, so we did not have to load the trailer very high. We finished the carting in just before Christmas.

In the week after Christmas I headed a crop of sixty acres of oats for Rob Cooper. It was a good crop. I took off one thousand two hundred bags of oats and the header never gave any trouble.

1959

In January I headed oats for Norm Harris, Bill Cutler and Wally Bird. All this helped to pay the cost of the header. I also headed my own oats off the Swamp paddock. This was only a light crop off the virgin soil. I got six hundred bags off the seventy acres. This filled up the new oat barn.

At the end of the month Geoff started school at the new Higher Elementary School in Mortlake. Robert continued to go to Terang. He was in his fifth year of High School.

In the Autumn after I had spread all the super, I engaged Charlie Stapleton again to help me build stock yards. For the first time since 1949 I was not doing any pasture improvement. There was only the Hexham paddock to go but it could wait for a year or two.

Over the last few years I had been a keen supporter of the Hexham Football and Cricket teams. Win and I would take the boys to most matches of a Saturday afternoon. The Hexham Cricket Club had won several premierships during the 50's. They had some great players of which several were Jubbs. They were also lucky with school teachers who were good cricketers. Bob Fry and Dick Webb were two, up till this time. Bernie Dreher later on in the 60's.

Bob Fry had given Geoff and the twins a good start in cricket with coaching. To encourage them, I cemented a half cricket pitch in the House paddock. It was used quite a lot. (They later went on to play cricket and

football for Hexham. Bruce coached Hexham to its first football premiership in 99 years in 1981. Geoff was President of the Club and won the Club and League best and fairest in this year).

My brother Erwin had been, for the last few years, working for the Mines Department. He was in charge of a big boring plant which could put down a twenty inch hole to a great depth. With this machine he had been putting down test holes in various parts of the state looking for water.

It was in this year he came to the Western District. They put a test hole down beside the scoria pit on Mt Noorat. He had two chaps working with, him as assistants. They were Don Clifford and Bluey Shelton. The three of them would visit us on Sunday. A cricket match would always take place. Our boys, of course, loved this. They were great times. Don and Bluey in later years married two of Erwin's daughters.

The bore at Noorat they put down to 1600 feet. They struck good water at 100 feet which they sealed off, then after that nothing except sea shells near the 1600 foot mark. They were then shifted to Mortlake, just to the edge of the town beside the Hamilton Highway, not far from the Warrnambool turn off. Again they struck good water at around 80 feet which they sealed off. Then continued to a depth of 1350 feet and didn't find anything. The Mortlake Shire gained their services from the Mines Department to put down a bore on Mount Shadwell to better the town's water supply. They put the bore down to 80 feet where there was a big supply of good water. Erwin fitted a big Pamona pump to the supply and this pump was left running for seventy hours non stop and it pumped at a rate of 30,000 gallons an hour. The water level in the bore never moved. There is a lot of water under Mt. Shadwell!

Shearing began in November of this year. Again it had been a dry autumn, so the wool clip was only one bale up on last year at sixty bales.

It was in this month that Win informed me she was pregnant. The baby would be due in early July. Well, we were both happy about this, but we weren't going to get carried away that it was going to be a girl.

Win had hoped to keep it a secret from the public for a while but that was not to be. She had been over to her doctor at Terang to confirm it with a test. The doctor rang with the result of the test after she arrived back home. Mrs. Blackwell, the Post Mistress, must have listened into the call. She rang Edie Wood with the news and Edie rang Win to congratulate her, all within the space of one hour of the doctor ringing. Win, of course, was a bit mad about that, but she soon got over it.

1960

Another year on the way. Geoff was now getting a game of cricket with the Hexham Club, and he was shaping up well for a boy of twelve.

In the autumn I bought a new Fordson Diesel tractor. The Inter was still going well but it had done a power of work in the six years I had had it. Of course it was a kerosene tractor and the tyres were well worn down.



Kastina in 1960

In May I sub-divided the Upper Combine paddock. This gave me a forty five acre paddock free of stones for another good hay paddock. In June I had Alex Sparks back again to build a hut as another bedroom close to the back veranda. We would need the extra room seeing there was an addition to the family on the way.

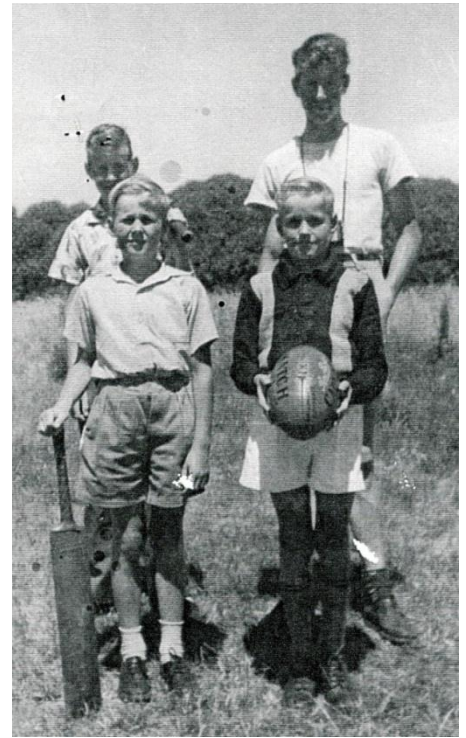
In the autumn of this year we had a good early break with the rain. There was plenty of grass for the winter. We would have a good wool clip this year.

In the morning of the 5th of July I took Win over to the Terang Hospital. Her time had come (we knew that this time it was a single baby). I wished her the best of luck and headed for home. The hospital would ring me as soon as the baby was born. (How times have changed. My sons and son-in-law have all attended the births of their children and held the hands of their spouses. I could only imagine Win's ordeal and walk the boards and wait for that longed for phone call).

I didn't go far from that phone all day. There were plenty of calls but not the one I wanted until 9 o'clock in the evening when Win's doctor rang me to say we had a beautiful daughter. Words cannot describe the wonderful feeling I had at that moment. It was terrific.

The boys had gone to bed but, of course, were not asleep. There were cheers all around when I told them they had a new baby sister.

I now had much ringing to do. I rang Win's parents at Shepparton to spread the word around there, then my Mother and Marj at Brighton to do the same with our family. Then, of course, our many friends and neighbours around Hexham and Caramut.



The boys

Next morning I went to Terang to visit my beautiful wife and daughter. Win was sitting up in bed when I arrived, all smiles. I don't think I had ever seen her look so wonderful and so happy. We congratulated each other and it would have to be one of the greatest moments in our lives together. I then went down to the Nursery to look at my daughter. She really was beautiful. A little later as I was talking to Win, the first telegram came in, and they kept coming in, and lots of cards as well. Win had the name chosen already - Susan Winifred, and I was happy with that. Telegrams and cards came from all our relatives and friends from Caramut, Hexham and Mortlake over the next few days (Susan still has them all to this day). It was certainly a time for rejoicing and we thanked God for giving us this beautiful baby girl.

It was a great home coming when Win and our daughter arrived back at Kastina. The boys were there to meet us, they were all smiling and thrilled to meet their baby sister. It was a very happy evening we all spent together.

Win and I felt this was the ultimate, the climax of our lives! We now had a beautiful daughter, something we had always longed for. Our family was now complete!

Just before Christmas on the 21st of December, my father passed away. It was a relief really. He wasn't enjoying life up to this time. He was a wonderful man, a perfect gentleman and lived a very honest life. I attended his funeral and arrived back at Kastina on Christmas Eve. Win and the boys had decorated a big Christmas tree in the sitting room, it looked beaut.

1961 to 1983

Over these years I will only summarise briefly, as the boys would remember as much or more than I would.

Wool clips for the next few years were:

1961 - 66 bales 1962 - 72 bales
1963 - 70 bales

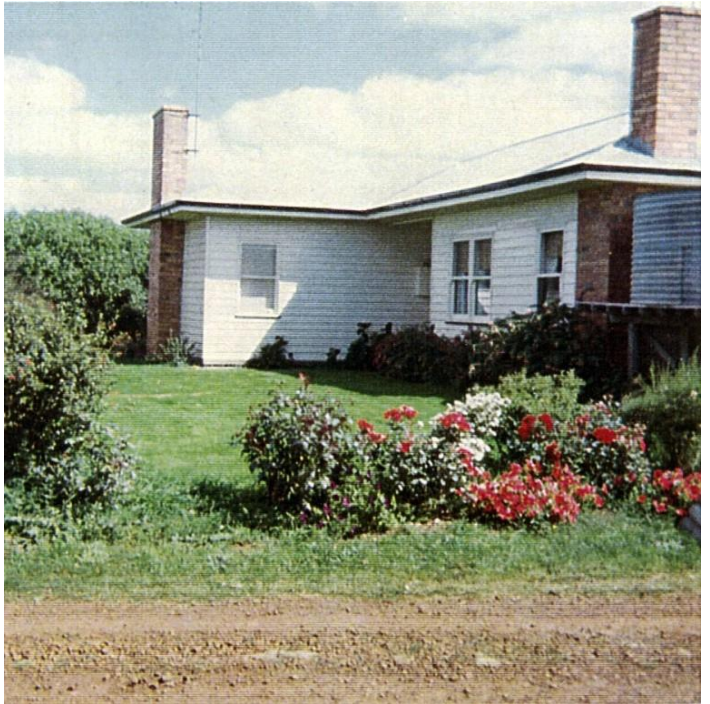
On the wool scene our wool clip gradually climbed depending on the season. In 1964 it was up to eight seven bales, in 1966 to eighty five bales. In 1967, a drought year, eighty bales, in 1968, ninety three bales.

1969 - 119 bales 1970 - 106 bales
1971 - 122 bales 1972 - 112 bales
and our last clip as Kastina, 1973 - 113 bales.

These last four years were all good ones and Kastina was at its peak. The prices were good into the late 60's. In 1969-70 the market collapsed. The lowest prices since before the War. The Australian average was down to 28 cents a pound. Our average in 1970 was 38 cents a pound. Our wool cheque this year on over one hundred bales of wool was just over \$8,000. We just managed without having to dip into our savings.

A mini boom occurred in 1972 and 73. Then the wool scheme, to control prices, started up.

On the school scene Robert went to Hamilton High in 1961 and 62. Then onto university. Geoff went to Hamilton High in 1962. In 1963 he started working on the farm. The twins to Mortlake High in 1963 and to Hamilton College in 1964 and continued on until 1967. Bruce to the Gordon Institute in 1968 doing a wool course. Bill, in this year, remained at Hamilton College.



The house at Kastina in the early 1960's



The Stafford family, May 1961. (L to R): Geoff, Osie, Bill, Robert, Bruce, Win with Susan

In 1969 Bruce completed his wool course at the Gordon and Bill returned to Mortlake High for his final year.

In the spring of 69, Bruce classed our wool clip for the first time. In 1970 Bill started at the C.B.C. Bank at Mortlake. Robert had received his Bachelor of Science Degree and Diploma of Education in 1966. Win and I went down to Melbourne University to see him at this ceremony. He started teaching at Timboon High School in 1967.

Our darling daughter Susan, of course, in these years was growing into a beautiful girl. At the age of two and a half to three she started coming around the paddocks in the land rover with me. She would insist on standing on the seat so she could see out. I would have to use my left arm as a seat belt in case she fell. She sure loved coming with me in the land rover. In 1965, she started school at Hexham and 1972, to Mortlake High School, catching a bus at our roadside gate.



Win and the boys at Fletcher Jones in Warrnambool, 1962

It was in 1967, at the start of Christmas schools holidays, we had a little Legacy girl come and stop with us as a playmate for Susan. Leonie Whitford was seven, about Sue's age. We had just bought an eighteen foot caravan and in the New Year we had a few weeks at Shepparton camped beside the lake. We did this every year for the next seven years, with Leonie spending the Christmas holidays with us each time. Leonie and Susan got on very well together. They were very happy days for all of us.

Sue finished High School in 1977, the year we moved into Mortlake. She gained her matriculation with top marks in all subjects. The following three years she trained for nursing at the Warrnambool Base Hospital and gained her Certificate of Nursing.

In Perth, a few years later she did an eighteen month postgraduate course in Psychiatric Nursing, gaining a Certificate for this.

Win, during these years continued with her work in the community of Hexham, as well as looking after the family. She had a big say in starting up a Country Women's Association in Hexham. She was either secretary or president in these years. She was the representative for the Australian Red Cross in Hexham and received her long service medal



Our pride and joy. Susan Stafford in 1962

after we moved into Mortlake about 1980. She was very active in the Mothers Club and the Church Guild during these years.

On the farming front I continued with improvements on the farm. In 1961 I ploughed up the south half of the Hexham paddock. This was mostly good high ground. It was sown down to clover, rye and a cover crop of oats.

In the following year of 1962, in January Robert did a lot of ploughing of the swamp half of the Hexham paddock. I paid him some wages for this.

In 1962 I purchased my own hay making equipment from Vern Delaney. A mower, hay rake and B46 press for 1,550 pounds. Later a pick up loader and bale elevator. All this for the price of twelve bales of wool. (Twenty years later this same equipment would have cost a whole wool clip of eighty bales).



The Park, Kastina, 1967. Susan Stafford and Leonie Whitford

Through the 60's we pressed a lot of hay. Our top year was eighteen thousand bales. The Middle Back and Far Back paddocks were re-ploughed and leveled off with a big smudger grader to make good hay paddocks. Geoff spent a lot of time ripping out big stones and then picking them up with a stone scoop.

Geoff and I also did more sub-division in 1964 and 1965. We divided the Flat, the Swamp and the Hexham paddocks, a total of about 130 chains, a grand total including the boundary I started in 1948 of about ten miles of fencing on Kastina. In this period of 1964/65 I had two more dams put down to water the Lone Pine paddock and the Far Flat. Kastina was now, I could proudly say, a top farm.

In 1967, the year of the drought we had a lot of hay stacked up. This fed the sheep well during that year. In the summer of 68 our paddocks were bare and all the hay gone. Then we had to buy wheat until the drought broke in March and April. We came through it very well. Our wool clip was still in the 80's in both of these years.



The long and the short of it. Susan, Win and Robert, Kastina, 1967

On the sporting scene, the cricket club of Hexham continued to do well in the 60's, as they did in the 50's. There were still several Jubbs playing and good players they were too; Coogan Jubb, Les Jubb, Ian and Kay Jubb. The team was always in the finals. They were beaten some times, but they won several premierships

in the 60's. Geoff was playing well and had a say in these wins. Bill and Bruce, from 1965, also helped Hexham win some finals. In 1962 I was elected President of the Club and held that office for many years.

(In 1977, Laurie Jubb, Charlie Stapleton and myself were made Life Members of the club for services rendered. At that time, the President was Geoff and the Secretary, Bruce).

The football I also followed closely. In the 60's, I followed both Mortlake and Hexham Clubs. The boys, of course, played in both at various times and were all good footballers. Geoff won Mt Noorat Best and Fairest in the middle 60's and Bruce also won it later on. They were great days for sport. Robert played football with Timboon when he was teaching there. He also played well and was in their Premiership side.

And so the farming and the sport went on into the 70's. In August of 1973 Ron Wills farm came on the market. Geoff and Bruce, Win and I talked it over and decided to buy it. The price was \$145 an acre, we ended up getting it for \$142. The farm was 600 acres. Wool was still selling well and so were sheep. We formed a partnership and called it Kastina Partnership. We all had a quarter share in all sheep and plant on both farms and a quarter share of the land of the new farm. We took possession of the farm on the 1st November, 1973. Win and I put all our savings towards buying it. We put up \$50,000 and we secured a loan from the Rural Finance for \$40,000. And so we were on our way with another farm, there was a lot more stone on it than ours, but it was good grazing land.

1974 was a great year for farming, we had a good autumn break in early April, followed by good rains in May. In the autumn of this year Geoff, Bruce and I extended the woolshed a further 25 feet and made it into a 4 stand shed. In the spring we had our first shearing as a partnership. From a total of seven thousand sheep including two thousand, two hundred lambs we had a wool clip of one hundred and seventy six bales of wool, averaging 385 lbs in weight per bale.

Farming went on with its ups and downs during the seventies.

Win at Holy Trinity, Kew, 2nd September, 1967



In 1977, Bruce and Geoff both married and Win and I decided that, along with Sue, we would move into Mortlake to live and let the boys have the two houses that were on the farms. They were now doing the bulk of the work. I would still go out and help them in the busy times. In the slack times I was now taking it easy. Also, I was helping Win with the Meals on Wheels.

So life went quietly on.

Win encouraged me to be involved with the Mortlake Lawn Bowls Club where I made many friends.

Sue completed and passed her Higher School Certificate and in February 1978 she left home to live in the Nurses' Home at the Warrnambool Base Hospital where she did her general nursing training.

After so many years of raising and looking after a family Win and I were finally alone.

After moving into Mortlake in 1977, Win increased her community work. She did a lot of hospital visiting and she was an active member of the CWA (Country Women's Association), the Red Cross and Church Guild. She organized the rosters of these groups and other groups for Meals on Wheels, taking a turn herself in many of them.

It was really amazing how Win had managed to carry on with so much of her community work. In May, 1974, Win was diagnosed with a rare incurable disease called Wagner's Granduloma. This was a sad and bitter blow. However, Win, with her strength and determination, carried on looking after the family and doing her community work despite periods of intense radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

In 1981, Hexham won its first ever football premiership. Bruce was to be captain-coach of the team but, owing to his sickness, he could not play though he still managed to do the job as coach. His mate Doug Rogerson was captain. Geoff won the Mt Noorat League Best and Fairest for the second time. He was also President of the Hexham Football Club as well as winning the Hexham Best and Fairest.

In May, 1983, the Shire of Mortlake awarded Win a Certificate of Merit in recognition of her services to the community. It was very fitting that our friend of thirty years, Keith Jubb, the Shire President, should present Win with this certificate.

In August 1983, Win and I celebrated our 40th (Ruby) wedding anniversary. Susan organized a surprise party for us and all the family attended with Susan flying in from Perth to really surprise us both. It was a great day.

It wasn't long after this that Win's health declined further, her strength failed and she passed away with grace and dignity amongst all her family in the Mortlake Hospital on 28th December 1983. She had peace at last, a truly wonderful lady was laid to rest. I thought I would also have peace knowing that my wife was at last free from all her pain and trouble, but it was not to be. The fact soon hit me; my beautiful wife was gone forever!



Kastina from the air in the 1970's



Hayshed and cattle on Kastina, 1971



The Woolshed, Kastina

It was a terrible blow to me but I eventually recovered from the pain with the love and support of my wonderful family. My good friend Clive Dunn was also a great help and comfort, and, of course, my many friends belonging to the Mortlake Bowling Club and Senior Citizens Club.

In 1984, "Kastina Corriedales" which Bruce had been farming was sold to Daryl and Peta Richardson as Bruce had contracted Hodgkins Disease and was unable to continue farming. He 'has subsequently overcome this and is now cured. In 1986, "Kastina" was sold to Ron Allen and his sons who took possession in March, 1987. Geoff, wanting a change from farming, moved into Mortlake.

It is at this point I have chosen to finish my life story. With Win no longer by my side and with the sale of both farms, "The Green Fields of Kastina" had disappeared forever.



Susan and Win, 1972



Susan Stafford at twelve years old, August, 1972



Fashion Parade, Hexham Hall, 1975. Sue Stafford modelling on the catwalk



Attractive soldier, Pte. Sue Stafford, 19, of the Support Company, Warrnambool, a sub-unit of the Second Battalion, Royal Victoria regiment, made a pretty picture as she stood outside the main command post of the battalion camp in the Big Desert last week.

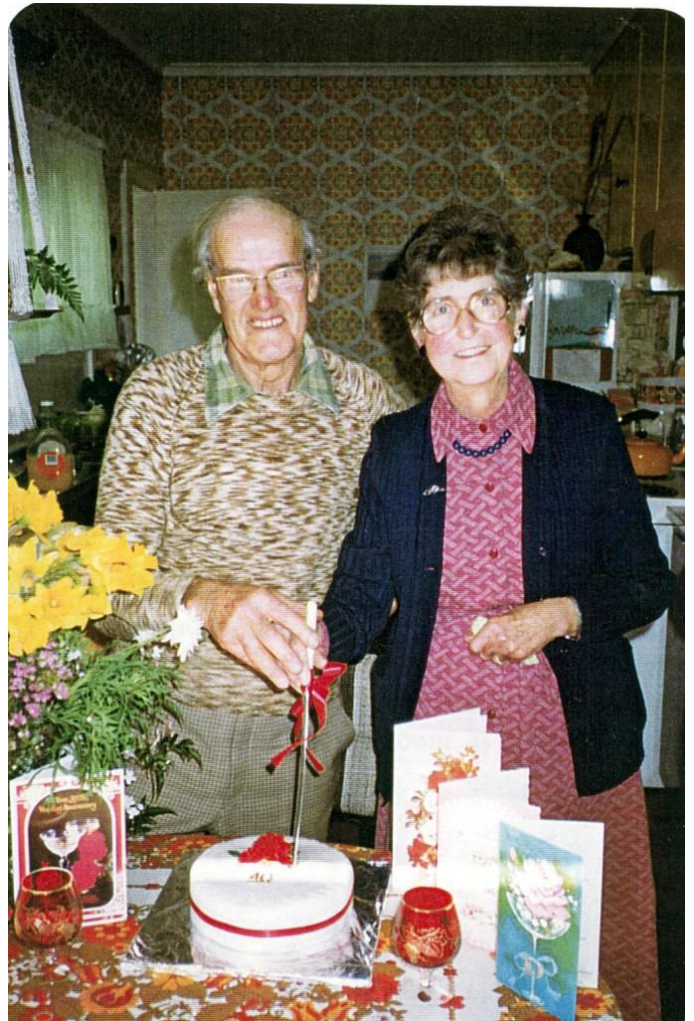
The sign says 'Donny Dow's Disco', but the only music in the

dugout came from field telephones connected to offices in the field during a war exercise.

The complete "Office" of the command post was dug in to the desert sand to a depth of nearly two metres and camouflaged to make it invisible from overhead.

Several Warrnambool girls were among the 216 officers and troops of the battalion to spend a fortnight on the desert exercise in the Mallee south of Murrayville. The troops returned home on Saturday.

Private Susan Stafford on two-week Army Reserve camp, south of Murrayville, 1979



Osie and Win on their 40th Wedding Anniversary, August, 1983



Osie and Win with her Certificate of Merit, presented in recognition of her services to the community by Keith Jubb (right), President of the Shire of Mortlake, 17th May, 1983

Epilogue - 1997

Now in the eventide of my life, as I complete this journal, I look back down the years and relive again those very happy days at Kastina.

The twenty years of the fifties and sixties were wonderful years for Win and I. In the fifties, we watched our four boys grow up and develop. They all did well at school and we were very proud of them.

In the sixties, they grew into fine young men. We gave them every encouragement as boys, to take up sport. This they did and they became very proficient in cricket and football. Win and I spent many a happy Saturday afternoon watching them play.

Of course, in the sixties, our pride and joy was our baby daughter and watching her grow into a beautiful child. She also did well at school and sport. In the seventies we watched her with much love and pride grow into a beautiful young lady, full of life and vitality.

After her mother passed away, Susan went touring the world. She would always ring me from the various countries she visited. She also wrote me many letters. A strong bond of father and daughter love developed between us. I was very glad to have that bond of love in those lonely years.

During the sixties and early seventies, our farm continued to improve. In the first four years of the seventies our wool clip was over one hundred bales each year. Kastina was at its peak! Win and I were very proud of what we had accomplished. The Green Fields of Kastina had really arrived.

I look back and remember the war years and realise what grim years they were and the futility and trauma of war. How peoples' lives were torn apart when their loved ones were killed or taken prisoner. Also, the anguish of just being apart and not knowing what might happen in the future.

I remember standing on the bank of the Danimal River in New Guinea after the tragic flood and hearing the sad news of the death of my good friend and a member of my troop, Nelson Webster. It was a big blow to me and would have been a terrible shock to his family. Again, at Ami in the mountains of New Guinea where I helped bury several of our Squadron killed in action, it is hard to describe the pain and hurt you feel. These fine young men paid the supreme sacrifice. Such is war!

I thank God that I came through the war years safe and sound. I realise that my war was a reasonably easy one compared to the hundreds and thousands of servicemen and civilians in all theatres of war. The terrible bombing raids, the shocking slaughter of millions of Jews and peoples of many nations.

I think of our own men of the 8th Division taken prisoner in Singapore and how they suffered with starvation, disease and cruelty at the hands of the Japanese, and the thousands that died there. War certainly is a terrible thing!

But, out of it all came some good. The bonding together of families and friends to help one another during the bad times of the war. The great comradeship that developed in the Services. The wonderful support we got from our families and friends throughout the war.

I especially remember Win's letters written to me while I was in New Guinea, and how they inspired me and lifted my morale. I remember writing one particular letter to Win, in which I promised her that we would have a farm and a home of our own after the war ended, and, in that home, I would give her all the comforts of life money could buy, and all the love I could give. It may have sounded a bit like a fairy tale at the time but it gave us hope and something to look forward to and, of course, it all came true.

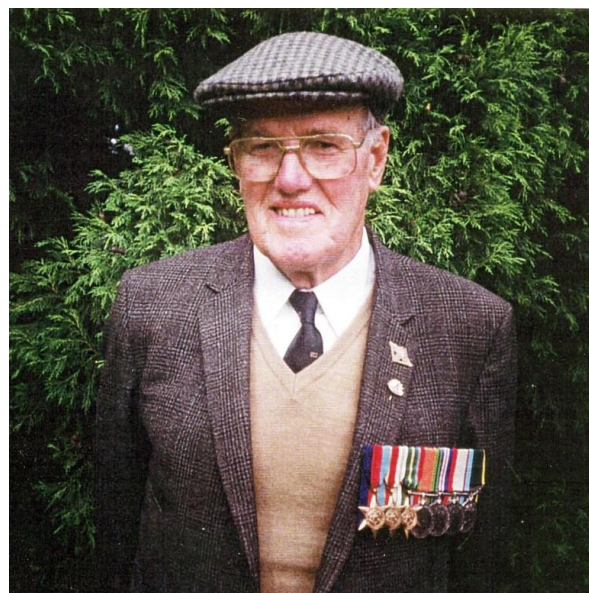
Between us we raised a wonderful family and developed a great farm. I now thank God for the deep love of my beautiful wife Win and the forty happy years we shared together.

To my children and their fine families, I thank them for their love and support in these latter years.

To my beautiful grandchildren, I give my blessing and best wishes for their future.

To future generations of the Stafford family, I bequeath this book - TO THE GREEN FIELDS OF KASTINA.

Osie Stafford



*Our Re-union banner, carried on Anzac Day march
Our colour patch in the middle with the colours brown, red and green,
signifying our motto : Through mud and blood to the green fields beyond*

Osie dressed for the Anzac Day march, 1989



Anzac Day march 1989, with Bill Stafford (in hat), Stan Poppins (at front), and Bruce Stafford (in beard) holding guy ropes.



Anzac Day march 1995, with Jimmy Monk (in grey suit) leading the regiment



Stan Poppins and wife, Joyce, with Osie Stafford and daughter, Susan, 24th April, 1989



Four members of the Pioneer Section 2/10 squadron 2/6th Cavalry Commando Regiment in the grounds of Duntroon College, Canberra on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the forming of the regiment, 3rd November, 1989



The steps to the War Memorial, Canberra re-union, 3rd November, 1989



*Harry McKay and Osie Stafford (right),
Canberra, 3^d November, 1989*



*Standing : Bill Smart, Osie's brother Erwin Stafford
Seated: Jeanne Bastyan (nee Smart), Osie Stafford
and Osie's sister Elsie Smart (nee Stafford)*



Osie's sister Ruth, Osie, Elsie and Bill, 1993

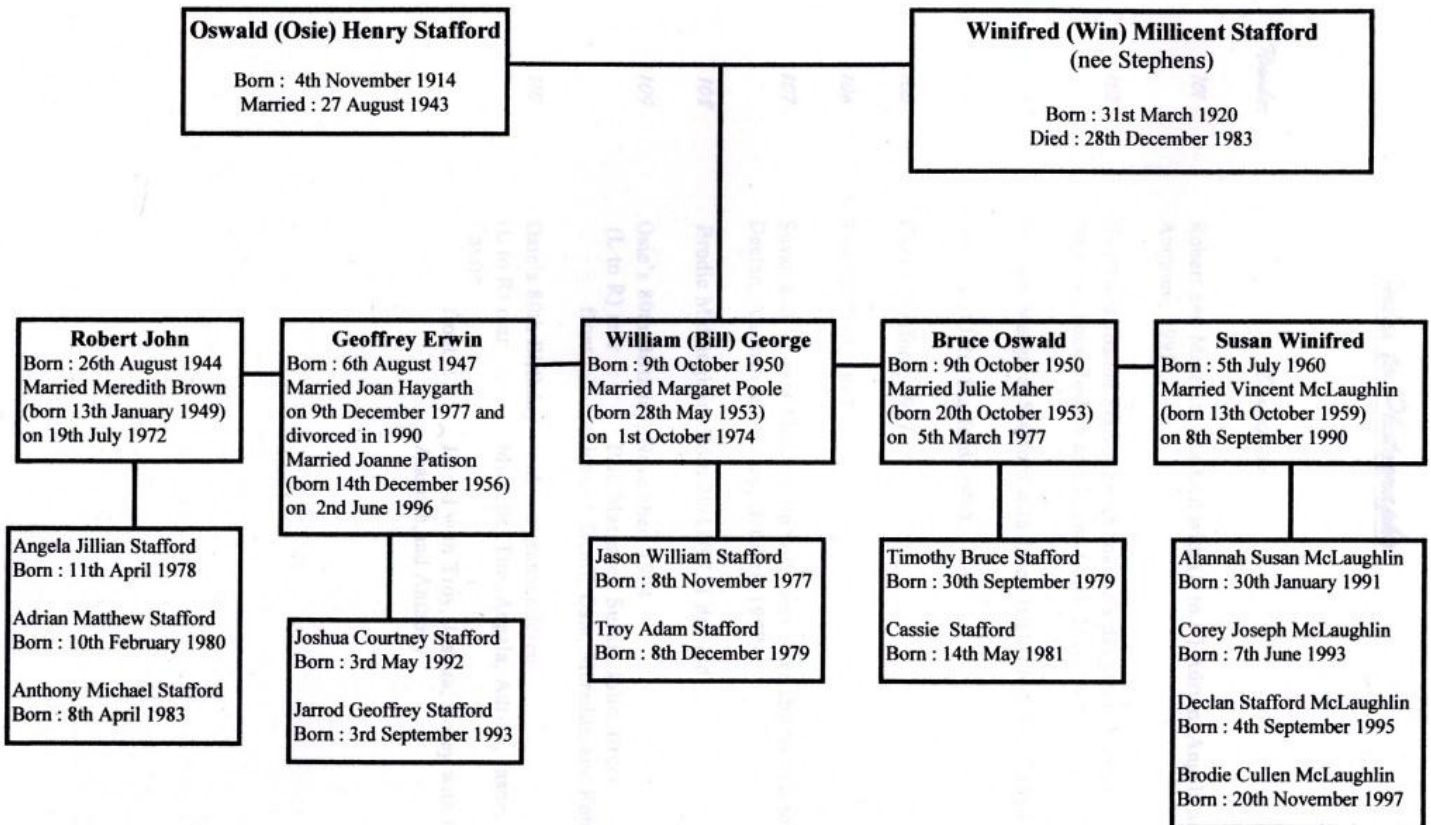
Afterword (Written in 1997)

Osie Stafford is now 82 years old and lives in Mortlake in the same house he and Win moved into after leaving the green fields of Kastina.

He enjoys relatively good health and spends most of his time bowling, working at the Bowls Club or with his family which now includes thirteen grandchildren.

For the benefit of interested future generations of the Stafford family, a record of births and marriages for the immediate family is shown in the Family Tree below. Family photos taken during the 1990's follow this.

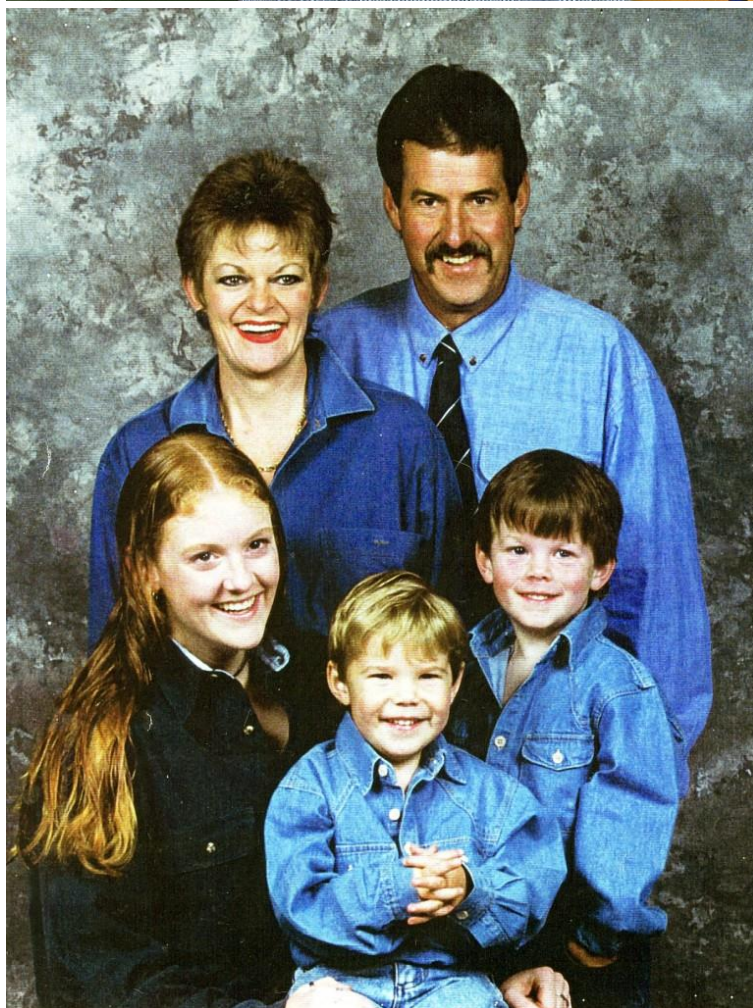
The Immediate Family Tree (as of 1997)





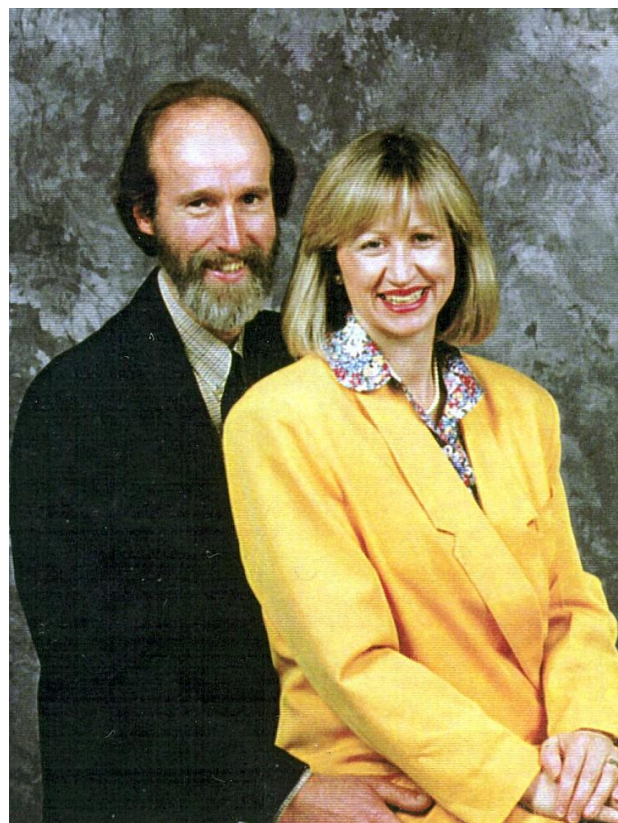
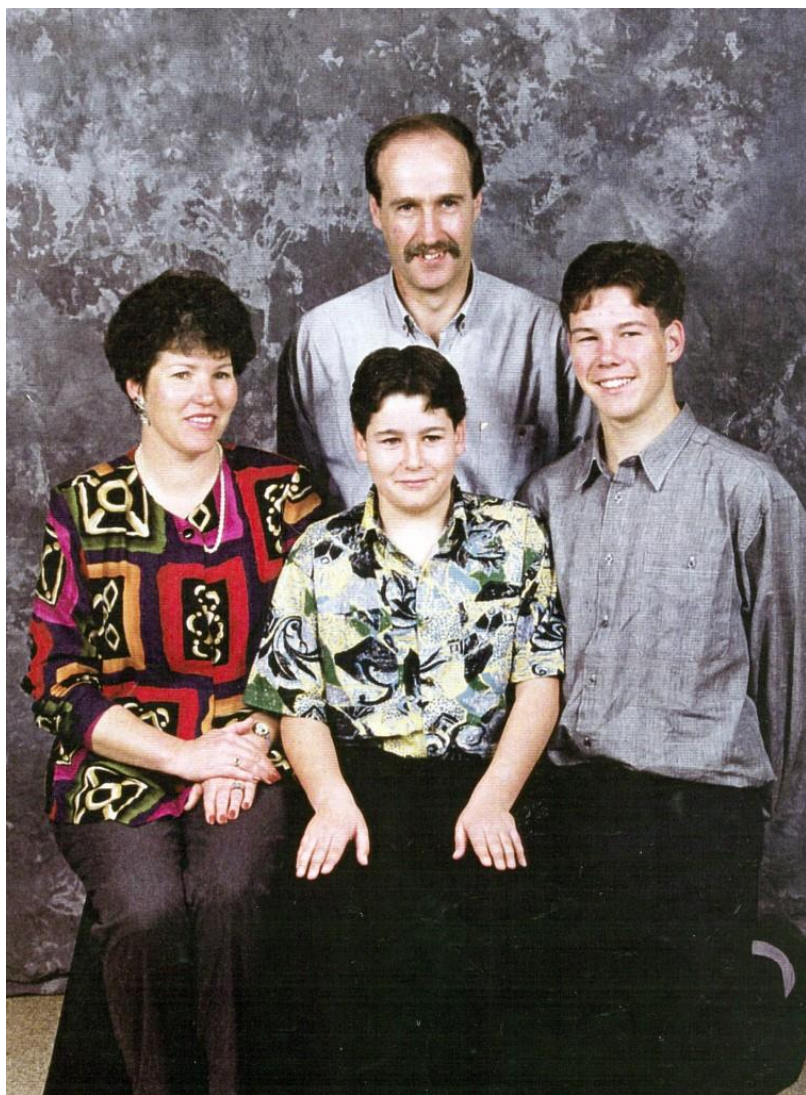
*Robert and
Meredith
Stafford
with Adrian,
Anthony
and Angela.*

*Photo taken
in 1995.*



*Geoff and Joanne Stafford with Joanne's
daughter Michelle and their two sons Jarrod
(left) and Joshua.*

Photo taken in May 1996.



Bruce and Julie Stafford.

Photo taken in 1990

Bill and Margaret Stafford with Troy (left) and Jason. Photo taken in 1994.

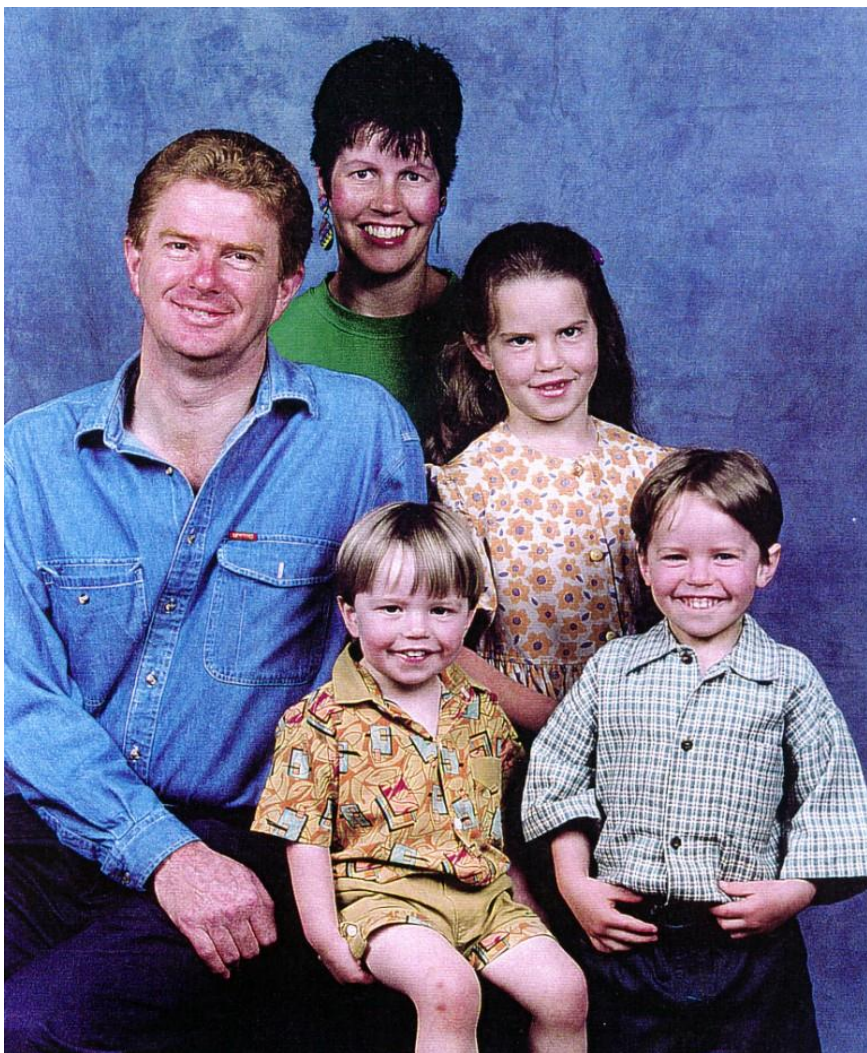


Bruce and Julie's children

Tim and Cassie Stafford.

Photos taken in 1997.

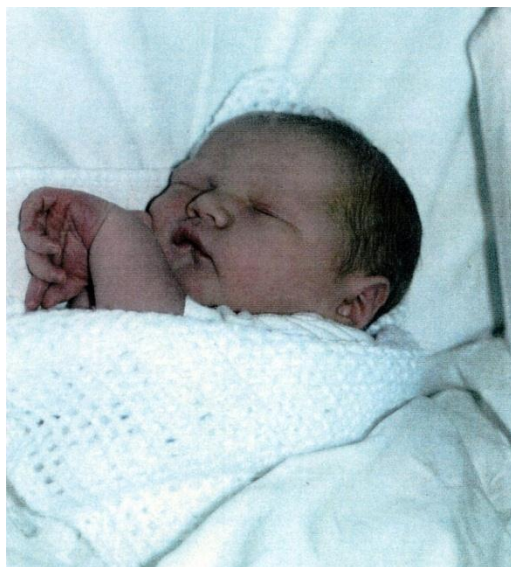




Susan and Vincent McLaughlin with their three children (L to R) Declan, Alannah and Corey.

Photo taken in October 1997.

And then 1 month later a new arrival.



Brodie McLaughlin at 1 day old.

Photo taken on 21st November, 1997



Osie's 80th Birthday Celebrations in November 1994.

Back Row:

Bill & Margaret, Susan, Julie & Bruce.

Front Row:

Joanne & Geoff, Osie, Meredith & Robert



Osie's 80th Birthday Celebrations. This photo taken with his grandchildren.

Back Row: *Michelle, Tim, Angela, Adrian, Jason and Cassie*

Front Row: *Troy holding Jarrod, Joshua, Osie holding Corey, Alannah and Anthony.*