

# JOHN RAWSON

**(Major — Retired — Australian Regular Army)**

## TOP SEC

We shall grow old apace and die  
Before we know our liberty.  
Our life is short, and our days run  
As fast away as does the sun.  
(Robert Herrick: *Corinna's Going a Maying*)

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This electronic version does not include the Index contained in the printed publication because it was simply too difficult for me to do. The illustrations at the end of the printed version are also not included, although I have added some illustrations on page 2 and included the back cover of the printed publication on page 3. However, although some format changes have also been required, this version contains a faithful copy of the text included in the printed publication.

Richard Rawson, July 2006.

## Acknowledgments

For the second time, my son-in-law, Patrick Miller, has helped me with important technical aspects of book production. The illustrations are an example of his valuable assistance, given without recompense.

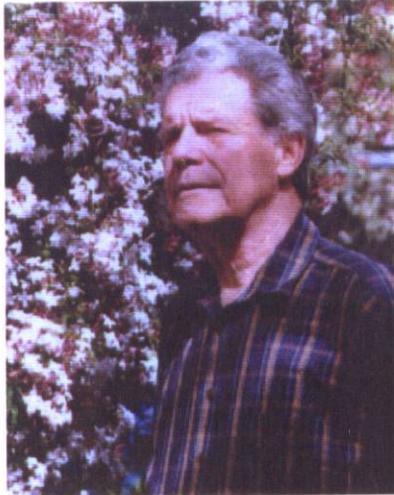
My friend, Alex Grieve, a musician of international standing and a fine artist, spent hours of his precious art-work time designing and preparing the book cover. He accompanied me to the printer. He, too, sought no payment for his professional skills.

Lynne Hamilton, of *Prowling tiger press*, was generous with advice relating to book production. My wife, Elizabeth, and my son, John, proof-read with care, and were always on hand to pass an opinion on aspects of the project.

My sincere thanks to them all.

Top: Elizabeth Rose Sutherland and Josiah John Rawson  
Bottom: Richard Rawson and Annie Eileen Pitman





John Rawson, known to many as 'Jack' in his early years, was born in Yarrowonga, Victoria, in 1922. He moved with his family to Derrinallum, Victoria, in 1927 where his father, Dick Rawson, was postmaster from 1926 to 1941. From when he was five until he was 16, Derrinallum was where he lived, and he describes many of his experiences as a boy in that small town. He shot himself on Anzac Day, 1938, and moved to Melbourne for extended medical treatment.

John found employment, first as a grocer boy and then at a confectionery factory, in Melbourne, and tells the reader of his experiences. He was never to return to Derrinallum to live. He broke an elbow on Christmas day, 1927, and the elbow's deformity led to the RAAF's rejecting his application when he volunteered to join in 1941. He went first into the Militia, and then into the AIF in 1942. Two years' service in West Australia contributed to his not 'going away.'

On VJ Day, 15 August 1945, his morale was low because the dropping of the atom bomb meant that he would not rejoin his unit, 2/8 Australian Field Regiment, then in Tarakan. He met, in Brisbane, his wife to be, Elizabeth Sutherland. He remained in the army after the war, being commissioned in the Royal Australian Army Education Corps, his third corps, in 1962. He resigned his appointment, as a major, in 1975. During his final 10 years as a commissioned officer, he encountered certain difficulties, notably with chaplains, because of his opinions on politics and religion. This book, TOPSEC, contains many details of those difficulties.

John and his wife, Elizabeth, live in Greensborough, Victoria.

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**For my grandchildren, Adam, Ashley, Fiona, Josiah and Mollie**

## Preface

In 1996, I published my *Mount Elephant Once Had Trees*. At first, it was to be a brief account of my life, an account that would perhaps be of some interest to my family. I had in mind a 30 or 40 page narrative, not in book form, but stored, perhaps, in a manila folder. I did not have a computer; I wrote it all in long hand. It simply grew and grew. My son, Richard, and my grand-daughter, Fiona, very kindly did much to help me with their word processor in the first few months, from time to time providing me with the so-important printouts.

Patrick Miller, my son-in-law, then took over the task they had begun. His encouragement for the project meant that I put more and more and more into it. I feel embarrassed to think of all the hours of work I placed upon him. Finally, he came up with a camera-ready copy of the book (including the graphics) ready, that is, to be taken to the printer. He was simply marvellous in his generosity and in the way that he made his very considerable, especially computer, talents available to me. This time I had a word processor, but one way and another Patrick has made a contribution towards the completion of this book.

I must add, too, that it was Patrick's idea that I should write another book. He said that I should concentrate my writing on my experiences in the Australian Army. The idea would be that I would give particular emphasis to my experiences as a left-winger in an Australian Regular Army that was right-wing. Not only that – I am also an atheist, a believer in socialism, a humanist. It was particularly as a commissioned officer in the Australian Regular Army that my opinions on politics and religion got me into trouble with the military authorities.

I decided that I would do as he suggested. I decided, as well, that I would escape many hours of work at the computer if I used *Elephant* as the basis for my task. I am old: there is not much time left. This book, *TOPSEC*, then is, if you like, a major revision and expansion of *Elephant*. I would reduce the family history content. Friends and acquaintances would receive less attention. I would have no appendices. My experiences as an officer of left-wing persuasion, and an atheist with it, I would treat with emphasis. I would offer reasons that may help to explain why the ARA was, and I have little doubt still is, so conservative a body. What of the influence of religion in the ARA? Certainly it does have influence, I found to my considerable discomfiture.

I had printed only 120 copies of *Elephant*. It became apparent to me that my opinions about religion, particularly, were not well received by some. Many people, not necessarily only religious people, believe that religion is somehow 'good,' that people are entitled to hold their beliefs – of course they are – and that others should not criticize religion. Why should religion escape criticism? I am yet to hear a sound answer to that question. All one has to do is to keep asking, 'Why?' Rational answers soon dry up. In truth, some people, who normally use their intelligence searching for facts, who normally use their intelligence to arrive at rational answers to questions raised by many aspects of their existence, throw aside their rationality, their desire to handle with discernment the problems that affect their daily lives, when they turn their minds to the matter of religious belief.

A number of people that I counted as firm friends, showed me, in one way or another, that they were not prepared to accept my criticisms of religious belief. There is nothing new about that attitude, of course. At least the church does not any more burn people at the stake, or set up Inquisitions, or 'not suffer witches to live.' These are just a few examples of the fiendish cruelties practised over the centuries in the name of religion. Bertrand Russell made this comment about what I shall call closed religious minds:

To have their cherished beliefs called into question makes those who are not used to such treatment feel insecure, and they react with hatred and hostility. (From *Wisdom of the West*, Bertrand Russell, p47,1959)

So this is, for one thing, an autobiography. Perhaps it may be regarded, in addition, as providing a not inconsequential contribution to the recorded history of the Australian Military Forces. Perhaps there has not been another book that looked at the position of a left-wing, atheistic officer in the Australian Regular Army. Has a book dealt before, even in the minor way that this one does, with the undoubted fact that the ARA is a right-wing organization? Has there been an account before of an officer being reported by a chaplain as a subversive, as a result of which report the officer was investigated by Security? Very few officers get round to making a formal complaint about their treatment by a more senior officer. This one did and won his case.

It is the life story of a very undistinguished Australian male, born in 1922, whose formal education in his youth ended in 1935 before he reached the age of 14. On the cover of *Elephant* is printed, 'A life shaped on the Western Plains of Victoria.' Indeed, as one would expect, those early years spent in Derrinallum, Victoria, as a

member of an unremarkable though well-respected family, must have made their mark on his character. (But we must not forget the huge influence of heredity.) He had jobs first in Derrinallum and then in Melbourne. He had working-class jobs. With his background, with his lack of any particular talents, that is what you would expect.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, he was 17. He was eager to join the forces. He applied to join the RAAF. But he was rejected on medical grounds. Finally he was called up. He became a signaller in the Militia in 1941. In 1942, he became a member of the Australian Imperial Force. It was not his wish that all his wartime service would be on the Australian mainland. He joined the Australian Regular Army in 1948, served in three corps, and had reached the rank of warrant officer class 2 by 1953. He became a lieutenant in the Royal Australian Army Education Corps in 1962.

After 34 years' service, Major JJ Rawson became a civilian again in 1975. He does not at all regret having spent a large part of his life in the army. For one thing, he came to work with and to know so many fine individuals who had made the army at least part of their careers. Indeed, the people were the best part of it all. He has no regrets even though the Australian Regular Army was a right-wing organization in which religion placed itself comfortably. His opinions, we shall see, however, finally told against him.

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## Chapter 1     A Boyhood in Derrinallum and Melbourne

‘Good on you, Jack,’ said Frank.

‘Thanks, Frank,’ I replied.

He put out his hand. We shook hands with enthusiasm. Over a period of more than four years, from the middle of 1938, we had become great pals.

We were together on one of the platforms of the Flinders Street railway station, Melbourne’s busiest station by far. People said that more than a million passengers moved through its gates each week-day. Since Melbourne’s population at the time was fewer than one million, you should realize that, perhaps, something like half that number passed through the gates twice each week day. Coming and going, you see. ‘Over-paid, over-sexed and over here,’ that’s what Aussie service personnel were saying about the Americans, whose presence in the city was no longer a novelty. Nasty confrontations were commonplace.

I was on final leave. Service personnel who were to ‘go away,’ were normally given a short period to allow them to say their farewells, to tie up loose ends, perhaps to be married. As you would expect, they were not to reveal their destination.

By this time it was September 1942. Many, many thousands of service personnel had had final leave. For many of them it was, indeed, their final leave, in Australia, at least. For they lost their lives in combat and in accidents on the land, in the air and on the sea in the carnage of the Second World War. I was, I can honestly say, as eager as most to ‘do my bit’ for Australia but, put simply, things did not work out that way. That happened to many fellows that were keen to help fight the war.

My going away was not at all thrilling in prospect. Many of us reasonably assumed that the army would send us to New Guinea. That was a thrilling, but also frightening, prospect. Then we learned that our brigade was to travel by train to Western Australia, there to engage possible Japanese invaders. Our stay there, in several different locations, was to last for almost two years.

### **A time at Boort, Victoria**

Before my meeting with Frank Speed I had travelled by train to visit my family in Boort, Victoria, where my father was postmaster. He did not go to the First World War. He lived in Melbourne in those years, my mother giving birth to a daughter, Jessie, in 1914, a son, Alan, in 1915, and another son, Bryan, in 1917. (I was born in 1922 and the youngest child, Peter, arrived in 1932.) Being a married man with a young family was perhaps Dad’s main reason for not joining up, but I do not remember the matter coming up in any serious kind of way. I did know, though, that he held opinions that many would regard as radical opinions. I do not mean radical-Right opinions. He was, as well, an atheist.

Dick Rawson (1891-1971) was a man of slight build. He was tallish and erect of figure. He was reasonable to the point of his reasonableness being a weakness. I should say that he was not a *very* clever man, but he was, nonetheless, an intelligent person. His sister told me that his headteacher tried to persuade him not to leave school at the early age – about 14, probably – at which he did leave. My mother told me that he ‘topped Victoria’ in a public service examination. My father was known for his courtesy; for his fairness in his dealings with others; for his willingness to listen to the opinions of others; for his ability to state his point of view clearly, both orally and in writing. He was not a ‘ball of fire,’ he was not brimming over with energy and enthusiasm; he was, indeed, something of a placid person. Many held him in high regard. Many of his best male friends in the years following the First World War had fought in that war. Did I not read some historian who claimed that of the Australian men who came home from that war a large proportion was strongly Right in their opinions?

When, in 1948, Prime Minister Chifley began trying to nationalize the Australian banking system, my father took very strongly to the proposal. He and two others, the local baker and a postal assistant, supported the proposal at a public meeting in Boort. Some in the gathering sang ‘Three blind mice.’ At school, other children taunted my small brother. Their parents had decided that my father had ‘The map of Russia written all over his face.’ The Boort bank managers chose not to attend a farewell to the family on his appointment as postmaster at Kilmore, Victoria. His popularity in Boort had clearly suffered a decline.

It is interesting to consider that my father neither owned, nor knew how to drive, a motor vehicle. At least, I never saw him drive one. He had never flown in an aeroplane as far as I was aware. Melbourne was the only capital city he had ever visited. He smoked although with periods of abstinence. He liked to drink, but he carried his alcohol very well.

The Boort branch of the Returned Servicemen's League gave another soldier and me, because we were on final leave, a farewell in their rooms. There was a small gift for us, an official expressing the hope that we would join the League later. Dad was with me and I noted that the official made a point of welcoming him and saying that he was welcome there any time. That remark pleased me. Perhaps it pleased Dad, too.

## **The Rawsons and the Pitmans**

My father's paternal grandfather, George Rawson, and his grandmother Mary (nee Hercliff), arrived in Melbourne, with one child, on the *Boanergio* in March 1862. By 1879, they had 11 children, three of whom, however, died at an early age. George Rawson, too, had a relatively short life, dying at Moondarra in Gippsland in 1890, aged 48. He was a farmer. The Victorian town of Rawson was named after either one of his sons or grandsons – at least that is what I understand. Our Rawsons came from Bridlington, Yorkshire, England. A woman told me some years ago that our Rawsons were known as the ones with the big noses.

FJ Pitman, a Congressional Minister, left Plymouth, England, in 1834, to settle in Australia. He became an influential cleric, particularly in the Yarrowonga, Victoria, district. He was my mother's paternal grandfather. My mother was born in 1891 at Yarrowonga: Annie Eileen Pitman. She died in 1972. Her maternal grandfather, William Bellingham Cairnes, was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1832. His uncle William was the founder of the celebrated Drogheda Brewery in Ireland. The following is a sketch of his career:

### **Mr W.B. CAIRNES, J.P.**

MR. W.B. Cairnes, J.P., whose portrait will be found in this illustration, may be regarded as one of Yarrowonga's pioneer residents, as also one of its most striking personalities. He arrived in the colony in 1854, and is now 64 years of age, hale and hearty and one of the crack rifle shots of the colony. When the Rifle Club movement was started in this colony he was among the foremost to start a club at Yarrowonga, some 12 years ago, to which he was appointed captain, a position he retains to the present day by the unanimous wish of the members. He was also appointed captain of the No.1 district, on resigning which he was specially thanked by Lieutenant-Colonel Price for the creditable manner in which he filled the position. Though essentially of a military turn of mind, Mr. Cairnes has shown himself a thorough business man, and with a keen taste for public life. He was appointed honorary magistrate of New South Wales in 1878, and of Victoria in 1881, and these commissions he still retains. He performs a large amount of magisterial work in both colonies. For several years he held the position of official assignee at Yarrowonga, and also that of Government Commissioner on the shire of Yarrowonga Water-works Trust, on resigning which he received a letter from the Minister thanking him for the services he had rendered the Government. He was one of the founders of the Masonic Lodge – St. David, E.C.– at Yarrowonga, and during his long residence in this town may be coupled with almost every important movement for the well-being, and advancement of the place, being in his time president of the Mechanics' Institute, president of the Progress Committee, president of the Rowing Club, president of the Cricket Club, etc. His timber and ironmongery establishment, which is among the pictures in this supplement (a sheet containing a number of illustrations of the principal business houses in Yarrowonga) has, through his energy, become a large and profitable business.' (From *Melbourne Weekly Times*, November 1896)

Yes, my maternal great-grandfather was married, even though the journalist that wrote that sketch did not mention Cairnes' spouse. Women, even now, near the end of the millennium, are still having to agitate, to fight, to gain their rightful place in society. In those times women, as is well known, were situated well down the scale of prominence in the functions of society. It did not matter, for example, if the benefits of education were not available to most of them. Elizabeth Matthews was an English girl who married Cairnes at Castlemaine, Victoria, in 1856. She was not yet 16. She became the mother of 14 children. He died in 1922; she in 1909.

## **The Militia and the AIF**

Frank Speed and I were both in uniform; in field service dress. He was not medically fit for overseas service, but was now on full-time duty with the Militia. His congratulations were prompted by his noticing that I now wore on each shoulder a metal badge that said AUSTRALIA. He would have noticed, too, the grey background of my signals' colour patches. Those two things were enough to inform an observer that I was a soldier of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). I had now, as well, a new regimental number: VX83879. Some would have

said that that was a rather high number, the implication being that I had 'heard the bugle' rather late. (General TA Blamey, the most senior Australian Army officer of those times, heard the bugle early: his number was VX1. He left the army in January 1946. In June 1950, having been recalled to the active list thus to facilitate the arrangement, he was promoted to the rank of field-marshal. After a long illness, he died in May 1951.)

From 3 December 1941, until 14 August 1942, I had been in the Militia. Now I was AIF. I felt almost a different person with AUSTRALIA on each shoulder. I was no longer a 'choco.' The term 'choco,' I have always understood, derived from the derisive description by some volunteers, and others, of the Militia as being *chocolate soldiers*: chocolate on the outside, and yellow inside. It is worth noting here that in 1942 brave men of the Militia went about halting the advance of the Japanese invaders of New Guinea. Major Bevan French, 39 Infantry Battalion, a contemporary of mine, though he was my senior in years, at Derrinallum primary school, was a hero of the New Guinea campaign. I remember when they commissioned him as a lieutenant in the Militia. His mother, Gertie, was proud of him, of course. Gordon Bristow, who had fought in the First World War, upset her rather when he spoke about congratulations as being hardly appropriate – Bevan was not in the AIF.

In 1941, I began learning Morse code, my intention being to join the RAAF as an aircrew wireless operator. My father and mother were not willing, believing that I was too young, to give their permission for me to join the AIF. Though it seems a strange attitude to take, it was all right for me to join the RAAF. I applied early in 1941, but the RAAF rejected my application. I had broken my right elbow at play on Christmas Day, 1927, at Derrinallum. The elbow is deformed and ugly looking, so I suppose the RAAF medical verdict was close to being inevitable. When I received the official letter, I was very close to tears. When I told the RAN recruiting officer about my medical rejection by the RAAF, he said that there was no point in my applying to join the Navy. Knowing that the Militia would call me up for service by the end of the year, I made no more attempts to join the services. I was so looking forward to military service.

It is interesting for me to speculate on what might have happened had I applied in 1941 to join the AIF. It seems very likely that they would again have rejected me for service because of my elbow. My whole subsequent life would then have run a very different course. On 25 September 1941, I had my first medical examination for enlistment in the Militia. The doctor graded me 'Fit for class 1.' The doctor did not notice my elbow deformity. I said nothing about it. On the day I reported for duty at Westgarth drill hall, I got through the medical examination all right. I suspect that I should not have – and I nearly did not. When a medical officer saw my elbow, he said, 'Oh dear!' He called a colleague over to have a look at the ugly looking thing. With others I was to leave quite soon that day for Ballarat, Victoria, where my unit-to-be was in camp at the showgrounds. Their conversation went a bit like this: 'Let him go on. If there's a problem, they'll pick it up later.' Some months were to pass before I had my next medical examination. I did not want my elbow, or anything else, to stop me, so there was no chance that I would bring my ugly elbow joint to the attention of the authorities. I could easily have avoided military service had I wanted to do so.

## **A good friend**

Francis Arthur Speed and I became friends in about June 1938. He was 18; I was 16. His family lived in nearby Ross Street. His dad was a letter carrier. I was living at 24 Urquhart Street, Northcote, a suburb of Melbourne. I had begun living there early in June 1938. Frank was a Roman Catholic and had gone to school at a nearby Christian Brothers' College. In the main, religious people do not talk about their beliefs, to outsiders, anyway, and Frank kept his beliefs to himself. I have thought for a long time now, that that attitude is a sensible one for believers to hold; they really do not have any sound arguments to support their beliefs.

Frank had gained his Intermediate Certificate. That meant that he was, from my point of view, a well-educated person. He knew something of Shakespeare and he told me the story of *Hamlet*. Frank was not tall, but his shoulders were wide; he had the physique of an athlete. His hair was sandy coloured and straight, and he could run in a manner befitting his name. He was a clerk at MacRobertson's confectionery factory in Fitzroy. He chose on one occasion to wear a sport jacket to work rather than a suit. I think that he escaped admonition. They were very stuffy times, just the same. Dress conventions in today's commercial world are much the same, though, as they were then.

## About a boy

As for me, well I was tall and skinny, my dark brown hair becoming wavy as I grew older. I was determined and persevering. I could be single-minded – some would say stubborn – and although you would never describe me as *very* strong, I was not without a degree of stamina. Smiling was something that I did very readily, but uproarious laughter deserted me as the years passed. To sing was my wont; to whistle, also. I could yodel, too. Was there, I wondered, a better whistler in Derri than I was? Whistling tunes, I mean – I don't mean whistling sheep dogs. The family regarded Dad as a rather 'silent' person. They could have said that about me, as well, I guess. In those days, I possessed an almost supreme measure of ignorance: I knew little about anything. I came to believe that it would be better if I listened rather than talked. On top of all that, I could never be regarded as clever.

Self-confidence was not something that shone out of me. I was exceedingly self-deprecatory. Had someone spoken to me about the characteristics of an extrovert, that person would hardly have had me in mind. There were nearly always two sides at least to any question I decided in my early years. This attitude was often to bring difficulties with it. Even then, the *facts* were very important to me. Later, I read the opinion, held by many philosophers, at least, that beliefs and statements are true when they correspond with fact. For example: is it a fact that there exists a supreme being? If it is a fact, then to believe in him is to have a true belief.

Although in those times I had never even heard of Friedrich Nietzsche (and I am not meaning to suggest here that I have studied him), I would have agreed with his opinion, his notion, of what he called the 'bungled and botched.' That is, the notion that a big section of humanity lacks the ability to be any more than mere cogs in the machinery of human existence. He, by the way, was not a friend of religion. He wrote of Christianity as being a 'slave morality.' His declaration that God is dead prompted bitter argument for years.

My life, even although quite without any kind of distinction, has nonetheless not been without its rewards, its joys, its happiness, on some occasions, indeed, its exaltations. Many, many millions of other human beings could say those things about themselves too, I realize. Stressful sadness, I am fortunate to be able to say, has spent very little time in attendance in my psyche. Overall, I have been very favourably ministered to by fate. How lucky I have been to have such wonderful people as my family and friends! A psychologist once told me that I am a well-adjusted person. Perhaps he was right. I hope so.

Despite my ignorance, though, despite my naivety, despite my fairly ordinary degree of intelligence, I was not without opinions, erroneous though, no doubt, many of them were – being in the wrong is a state most easy of achievement. My father and mother were always fair in their treatment of me, and I grew to believe strongly in the notion of fairness. I perhaps could usually do little about other people being treated unfairly, but I could myself do my best to be fair to others. If anyone's treatment of me seemed to me to be unfair, then, more than likely, I would react in a way designed to make it known that I objected. Many people empathize with the underdog. I am one of the many.

I wonder what that psychologist that I mentioned earlier would think about me if he were to talk to me today (5 September 1997.) Just a few days ago, an English princess lost her life in a terrible car accident in Paris. Probably she was a good person. She had two young sons and one gathers that she was a good mother to them. She was Princess Diana of Wales.

Some charities and other good causes benefited from her endeavours. 'She was,' an Australian journalist wrote, '...a popular figure who brought a breath of fresh air to a stuffy institution after marriage [to Prince Charles.]' The same journalist, however, also wrote this: 'It is also true that she was often the petulant and self-absorbed product of a stifling caste system that still pervades British society, a person who increasingly relished a life of jetsetting extravagance and a woman who died beside the latest of a series of playboy lovers-liaisons that scandalized and tarnished the image of British royalty.'

I do not want to go into detail about the reaction of the Australian media to all this. Except to say that the day-after-day coverage of the tragedy, involving page after page in the print media, and hour upon hour totals of verbiage on radio and TV, has me thinking: do I, and do others like me, suffer from some kind of personality disorder? How is it that we cannot agree with the great fuss that is being made? We are emotionally crippled or something, are we? Perhaps we need a psychologist or psychiatrist or both? Perhaps, on the other hand, we simply cannot take kindly to so much hokum.

## On religion

Earlier, I made some mention of religion, and I should like now to return to that topic. Ours was not a religious family. For a start, as I have already said, my father was an atheist. He did not drum atheism into his children's heads, though. On the other hand, the drumming of religious belief into the heads of children, any questioning of those beliefs being deliberately put aside, has been practised on children throughout the world for a very long time: 'Give me the child for his first seven years, and I'll give you the man.' That often-quoted statement is attributed to the Jesuits. What a staggering admission of arrogance, of contempt for a child's intellectual advancement and for credulity creation in his psyche! Mother said once, at least, that if there is a God he should show himself, but she did occasionally attend the Presbyterian church. For a time, she belonged to the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union. I had some contact with the church, at Sunday school mainly, up to the age of 14. I was eventually to become first an agnostic and then an atheist, but I did not make those decisions until some years later.

When at 16 I moved to Melbourne, I was to attend the Royal Melbourne Hospital for treatment. In filling in the necessary form, my father, in answering the question about my religion, must have indicated, one way or another, that I was not religious. The hospital clerk said, 'What are you, a heathen?' I felt very embarrassed. What a nerve he had! Dad's step annoyed me, too. I brought the matter up with him when next I saw him. He smiled in his endearing way. He would have agreed with Bertrand Russell, who wrote somewhere, 'Most people believe in God because they have been taught from early infancy to do it.' For some years to come, I wrote *Presbyterian* when a form required me to declare my religion.

I am an atheist; I do not believe that there is a God. There are a number of arguments for the existence of God, and there is no disputing that many eminent thinkers have believed, or do believe, in His existence. The number of eminent thinkers who are believers has surely seriously declined during the last couple of hundred years or so. Plato (born 428-27 BC), was an enormously influential Greek philosopher. He evidently believed in goddesses if one is to accept his reference to them on the first page of his *The Republic*: 'I wanted to say a prayer to the goddess...'

The German philosopher, Leibniz (1646-1716), '...was one of the supreme intellects of all time' according to Russell. Leibniz was a believer. In 1755 there was an earthquake in Lisbon that killed 35,000 people. People wondered why, if God is good, if He is omnipotent and omniscient, He allowed such terrible things to happen. (People still wonder about such things, of course.) Leibniz thought hard about God, no doubt, and came up with an answer of this sort: 'If we did not have nasty things happen to us we would not be fully appreciative of the good things that happen.' He believed, some say: 'This is the best of all possible worlds.' The famous French writer, *Voltaire* (1694-1778), gave Leibniz a bit of a hard time, so to speak, in his *Candide*. Using the pseudonym *Dr Pangloss* for Leibniz, he went very successfully about ridiculing the philosopher.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), English mathematician and physicist, despite his huge contribution to science, held on to religious beliefs, although surely he must have modified those beliefs to some extent as time passed? How did the planets get going in their orbits around the sun? God hurled them into orbit he is said to have opined.

Had that great man, Charles Darwin (1809-1882), a compatriot of Newton, published his *Origin of Species* in the 17th century, it seems reasonable to believe that Newton's religious beliefs would have received a severe setback. The opinions of David Hume, the Scot (1711-1776), might well have had their effects on Newton had Newton known of them. Hume destroyed the ideas of both the soul and the mind. That is what some say. Before Hume, Berkeley had gone about doing his best to do away with matter. Now some wits were saying, 'No matter, never mind.' Hume, an empiricist, some have described as the greatest of British philosophers.

As for Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Russell has written that the diminutive German philosopher destroyed all the arguments for the existence of God, but then thought up one of his own. The argument went a bit like this: 'There are many good persons on this earth for whom fate has handed out a rough deal on earth. Surely there must be a God to provide them with rewards after their deaths.' (Kant evidently said that he was '...awakened from his slumber' by the opinions expressed by David Hume.)

It is easy to understand that the idea of an all-powerful being might enter into primitive human culture. Fear of death and an utter ignorance, to mention just two things, were no doubt pervasive in those cultures. In many cultures that followed, too. If humanity had never felt the need to believe in gods and goddesses and miracles

and the like, the world would surely be a very different place from the world we know. I think that there would be a very good chance that it would be a much better place.

More than 2000 years ago, the Greeks gave great impetus to the acquisition of knowledge. For something like a period of 1000 years before the Renaissance, however, the church was largely in control of things in the Western world. These were the Dark Ages. The fearful practices of the Inquisition established by the Jesuits, had their beginning. Galileo (1564-1642) was perhaps their most famous target. Many regard him as the first great scientist. Among his unwelcome arguments was that the earth goes round the sun. He was 70, very ill and going blind. The Inquisition sentenced him and forced him to abjure those of his opinions that were in conflict with the scriptures. At least they did not burn him at the stake as they did Giordano Bruno and many others. I reproduce now two extracts from the sentence of the Inquisition:

1. The proposition that the sun is the centre of the world and immovable from its place is absurd, philosophically false, and formally heretical; because it is expressly contrary to the Holy Scriptures.
2. The proposition that the earth is not the centre of the world, nor immovable, but that it moves, and also with a diurnal action, is also absurd, philosophically false, and, teleologically considered, at least erroneous in faith.  
(From *Galileo, His Life and Work*, by JJ Fahie, pp313 ff 1903)

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), an Italian, wielded then, and still does wield, enormous influence in the Roman Catholic Church. He possessed a superior intellect, no doubt. Look, though, at the period in history when he was on this earth. There is so much that humanity has learned in the ensuing years, knowledge of which the people of his day were ignorant. People even believed that everything above the earth and the moon revolved around those two bodies.

As for God, Aquinas knew so much about his existence. So much! Just how did he acquire that knowledge? It seems reasonable to ask that question. Perhaps God told him? Perhaps he was capable of such profound thought that he needed no empirical evidence to support his opinions? (But then, surely, experimentation and observation will not get anyone anywhere in an attempt to reach a supreme being – particularly if there is not one.) Many must have thought Aquinas to have been so capable. Pure reason was the tool in the understanding of the many complexities of the universe. In the eyes of some thinkers, at least.

Consider the question of God's existence. If the world were just beginning now, and yet humanity was possessed of all the knowledge that humankind does at this time possess, the question of the existence of a supreme being would not come up too seriously among the educated people on this planet. At least, that is what I think. Again, consider the Chinese people, for example. Most of them manage not to need a belief in a god. Finally, more than once I have heard it said that Albert Einstein (1879-1955) believed in a personal God. These words of his refute any such opinion:

In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal God, that is, give up that source of fear and hope which in the past placed such vast power in the hands of priests.  
(From *Out of my later years*, by Albert Einstein, pp 28-29, 1950)

So, in 1938, I began living in Melbourne. I lived there with my Uncle Harold, my Auntie Lil, and my two cousins, Alan and Thelma Martin. The authorities called me up for military service in December 1941. I shall have more to say later about my days with the Martins. I should like to spend some time now describing in some detail the course of my life from the time I was born in Yarrowonga, Victoria, on 2 April 1922.

My father was an employee of the Postmaster General's Department for all his working life. He was a letter carrier in Melbourne when he met and married my mother. Some years later, with their three children, Jessie, Alan and Bryan, they moved to Yarrowonga, Mother's home town, where Dad was to be a postal clerk. My mother's father, Josiah Pitman, conducted a saddler's business in Orr Street.

## **Derrinallum, Victoria**

We lived in Benalla later for a time, and then his Department appointed Dad postmaster at the new post office at Derrinallum. He took up his appointment on 5 May 1926. The rest of us arrived there about a year later; there was some difficulty in obtaining a suitable house in which we could live. We lived in three houses, the first one being out of the town a bit, near the butter factory, the other two being in the town.

Derrinallum was, and indeed still is, a small town. (From now on, let us call it Derri.) It is on the Hamilton Highway about 180 km from Melbourne, on the Western Plains. Perhaps the population was about two or three

hundred. The population does not seem to have changed much in numbers. Fires in 1944 and 1977, as well as having disastrous effects in the countryside, destroyed many homes and some shops in the town. The butter factory and the railway station, out of the town, remained standing.

The post office and the Mechanics' Institute hall, a couple of churches, the *Coffee palace* building and Urquhart's garage are all still there. So are Mary Davis's shop and house, Edgar Foster's shop and house. The then Commercial Bank of Sydney building and its attached house escaped destruction. (I am aware that I have not given the bank its complete title.)

One simply cannot mention Derri, at any length, at least, without mentioning the volcanic Mount Elephant. There, just out of the town, it stands, virtually in isolation – imposing isolation. Some may say grand isolation. It is not high: about 390 metres. Not high as mountains go – it is plump. One could not use 'tall' about it. It is, though, the only land formation for kilometres around that would so firmly claim the attention of the traveller. It is squat looking, bloated looking even, with a round-edged sort of appearance. Viewed from some directions, for example from the Derri-Camperdown road, one can see why someone named it *Elephant*. Nature has discarded the trees. It has a splendid crater, something like 100 metres in depth. Over the years, workers have gouged thousands of tons of scoria out of a couple of areas of its slopes, the scars detracting somewhat from the mountain's appearance.

In those times, rabbits were numerous in the district, the mountain harbouring at least its fair share of them. There was a trapper, Keith (*Stumpy*) Heard, whose lantern light you could see at night as he traversed the mountain, gathering the victims from the traps. How strong and determined he must have been! Indeed, he was a muscular individual. The foundation of his future prosperity he established in that manner. That's what people say.

The rifle club had its butts near the base of one of the scars. The removal of scoria inflicted the scars. We used to rummage in the scoria to find, usually misshapen, .303 bullets. The scar, I suppose it was at least 50 metres high, was steep and presented the climber with a hazardous face. On one occasion, in the process of such a climb, I found myself in a position where I could neither ascend nor descend. My situation was scary. Nothing prompted me, though – I had no faith even then in the efficacy of prayer – to appeal to a saviour. After an eternity, it seemed, I managed to reach safety. I lay prone for a while on the mountain slope marvelling that I had not hurtled to my death down the face of the scar. The barren slope, exuding warmth, felt so good against my skinny, 14 year-old body, so comforting that my heart quickly ceased its wild behaviour. How relieved I was! I began to sing in my not-long-broken voice.

I mean now to tell you about two shooting adventures of mine, leaving to last the episode that drastically altered my life's path. It was not at all unusual for boys as young as I was in those days, in the country, at least, to go out shooting. Perhaps we used a 12 gauge shotgun; perhaps a 410 shotgun; perhaps a .22 rifle. I used sometimes to shoot rabbits, but not only rabbits, on the slopes of my mountain.

One day I was almost at the bottom of the crater. A hawk perched invitingly in a nearby, almost leafless, tree. I took aim and squeezed (pulled?) the trigger. (Did I know then what weapon instructors later taught me in the army: you do not pull triggers – you squeeze them?) The rifle misfired. I cursed. The hawk flew up the crater quite some distance, making an elegant landing on yet another tree branch. Irritated by the failure of the rifle, I rammed the rifle butt against my left shoulder – later, in the army, I changed to right shoulder. Then, paying very little attention to correct aiming practice, I again squeezed (pulled?) the trigger. To my astonishment the bird dropped from the tree. I scrambled, in a state of trembling excitement, up the slope of the crater. The bird, a sparrow hawk, had taken the bullet through the neck. As marksmanship goes that must have ranked among the greatest flukes of all time. And yes, what a rotten thing for a kid to do! But then those days were different. Oh, so different!

'You'll come home shot one day.' About my shooting activities, my mother said that to me from time to time. The second hunting incident that I want to mention, you would hardly call it an adventure, occurred with Mount Elephant overseeing the setting. Geelengla, an area not a town, close to Derri, was a collection of dairy farms, a soldier settlement place. I was fortunate that I was using a rifle, not a shotgun, that day, for the way that the incident happened, a shotgun would have ended my life on the spot. Pellet-ridden brains are not helpful in maintaining life. We know that. George Stannard was one of my best friends. I was at his place. Only the two of us were there. He left the house to bring in the cows for the afternoon milking.

I followed him out the door, loading my single-shot rifle as I went. A magazine that I had been reading, I began stuffing down the V neck of my jumper with my left hand. As I did that, I placed the butt of the rifle on the ground. When I closed the breach of the rifle, I should, at the same time, have pressed the trigger, else the weapon would cock. I forgot to press the trigger. The weapon cocked. When the butt hit the ground, the rifle reacted with malevolence. A .22 long-rifle bullet headed for the heavens, its trajectory, however, having to suffer some slight interference from a kid's flesh and blood.

Wham! The bullet went through my left forearm, through flesh near my left armpit, and continued on, missing my head, probably, only because I was looking down at the magazine. The blow was hammer-like. Blood began spurting out my arm. I realized later that if someone had not stopped the bleeding I would have bled to death in no time. I shouted, 'George, George, George.'

Just then, Mrs Stannard came home. She went about controlling the bleeding, something neither George nor I would have known how to do. What would we have done? We had no vehicle. Mrs Stannard guided me into her truck and drove me the several miles to our home in Derri. I walked in the door and said, 'I have been shot.' This declaration, for a little time, made me rather unpopular with Dad. His reaction caused me to say something like this: 'Hell, I come home shot and you go on like this.' No, Mother did not say, 'I told you so.'

Derri did not have a medical practitioner. A friend of the family drove Dad and me to Lismore, to the surgery of Dr Davis. He sewed up the wound in my armpit and had me admitted to the Lismore Bush Nursing hospital, where I remained for two weeks. (It was morale building for me to hear him say to the nurse something about my courage.) My wounds became infected. I was delirious at times. Penicillin was not developed until 1943. I have vivid memories of a nurse, on a number of occasions, squeezing my forearm and pus coming out a bullet hole in the manner of toothpaste coming out of its tube. It was found, too, that a couple of fingers on my left hand were not functioning properly. Off I went to Melbourne for medical treatment, never to return to Derri again to live.

The bullet had partly severed the ulnar nerve in my left arm. I was very lucky that the bullet had not struck the ulnar bone in my forearm. Had it done so then it might well have been diverted. Where to? I became an outpatient at the Royal Melbourne Hospital where they gave me diathermy, etc, treatment for several months. Finally, there was surgery to attempt to repair the nerve, but very little, if anything, was achieved in the way of fixing the problem. In any case, it was not a big problem.

As far as I know, the *Lismore, Derrinallum and Cressy Advertiser* did not report the incident. The matter was hushed up, I believe, because it was not legal for a 16 year old boy to use firearms. Postmasters were not without influence in country towns in those days. Just a few days before I shot myself, electricity had come to Derri. I fired that shot on Anzac Day, 25 April 1938.

Perhaps, indeed probably, I have made too much of Mount Elephant. I ask, though, please allow me to dwell just a little longer on what was such an important symbol of my boyhood. Although the mountain was not, strictly speaking, involved in this momentous (for me) event, it might have looked down, were it possessed of the faculty of sight, upon a paddock at rest at its feet on the night of Christmas Day, 1938. It might have seen two young figures, one a girl, the other a boy, lie down together on a patch of warm and dry earth; a patch of earth just then vacated by a shoed-away dairy cow. The mountain might have seen the boy, but not the girl, for she was not chaste, lose his virginity. It might have noticed, also, that he lost it with a fairly high degree of ineptitude.

Snow fell in Derri at least once in 1927, the year our family arrived there. One morning my father picked me up out of my sleep and took me out on to the front veranda. There it was on the mountain, snow gleaming in the early morning sunshine. I was only five then, but there are other happenings, too, that I can remember about my very early years.

I can remember my grandfather's shop at Yarrowonga. He was a saddler. It seems that I swallowed one of his tacks, which piece of childlike foolishness meant that my mother searched furiously until she found it. You can guess where she found it. Green grapes can play havoc with one's innards, too. I remember making a mess in grandfather's back yard. Later, at Benalla, my parents had my photograph taken professionally, and I remember that the photographer gave me blocks to play with during the process. Subsequently, my mother sent a postcard photograph of me to her sister, Jess. She wrote in pencil: 'This is a photo of our baby. He was 3 on the 2nd of April. He's a good kid & no trouble.' The year must have been 1925. (It is, I do believe, so very important to

date documents. Some regard me as a bit of a pedant, perhaps I should add.)

In 1927, the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth) visited Australia to open the first session of the new parliament in Canberra. I remember seeing them in a Melbourne street where a brilliant military parade was in progress. I think that it must have been Anzac Day, 25 April 1927. There is more, but enough of examples of my very early childhood recollections.

So our family of six settled down to living in Derri in our house near the butter factory. (The house was still standing in 1997, but the other two that we were later to live in, fires destroyed in 1944.) The house was there for the manager of the butter factory, but he must have been living elsewhere. It was separated from the factory only by the road that enclosed that building. I think that the factory chimney was square, squat and made of bricks. There has been no butter produced in Derri for many years, but some of the factory still stands.

The Barr family, who lived quite close to us, were, I suppose, a typical dairy farming example of those times in that part of Victoria. They milked their cows by hand. They had a separator, of course, that piece of machinery that separated the cream from the milk. At milking times, the milker would crowd the cows into a smallish yard. After heavy rains, the yard would become more than ankle deep in mud and cow shit. In the bail, the milker needed to restrain the swishing of cows' tails, else his or her face might be swept with a mixture of mud and shit. I feel sure that they planted some grain. I remember seeing some needed items of machinery on the farm. They slaughtered here a sheep there a pig for their meat supply. They had a gallows from which hung for some time the carcass of the animal. The squeals of a stuck pig were frightening.

Andrew and Louisa Barr had seven children, all of whom lived at home in our early days at Derri. Jim, and Lesley, too, became my special friends, the other children being Mildred, Tom, Gilbert, Ross and Alan. Jim and I both loved to play with a football. I used to run around calling out, 'I'm Horrie Clover, I'm Horrie Clover.' He was a Carlton football champion of the late twenties and early thirties. They were a fine Australian family. They moved to Woorndoo in 1932. Those were very hard times for farmers like the Barrs. All the progeny were still on earth in 1996.

Our house was about a mile out of the town. It was a timber house with a galvanized iron roof and a cypress hedge at the front. The only lawn was at the front. It was of buffalo grass. The dunny was down the back in the shed. Perhaps toilet paper was available those days, but our *bum paper* was newspaper cut to size. Dad always read *The Argus*. The back of the shed and the back of the dunny faced the butter factory just across the road. There was a small opening through which the nightman placed a sanitary pan smelling strongly of disinfectant. Just before doing that, he removed one smelling strongly of something else.

I had demonstrated to a kid one day how I could accomplish an 'amazing disappearing trick' from the dunny proper. First, I would lift the metal lid, part of the function of which was to drip phenyl into the pan. I would then put a hand through the round hole where we placed our bottoms. I would push the pan aside. Then I would wriggle my way through the hole into the pan compartment, hope that the red-back spiders were asleep, push the small door open and move out into the fresh air.

The small door on hinges that served to fill the opening that the nightman used was constructed of several separated hardwood panels. If you looked through one of the slots, you could see a bottom should there be one in residence. One day, I saw Alan go into the shed. Assuming his purpose, I went out the side gate, made my way to the small door, picked up a long piece of grass, slipped it through a slot in the door and tickled his bottom. The bottom rose out of my sight, and an exclamation denoting surprise, alarm and then anger issued from the cubicle. I had blundered. The piece of anatomy that I had tickled belonged not to my brother but to my sister, Jessie. For weeks after she held the incident over my head: 'I'll tell Dad, I'll tell...'

So far, we did not have a wireless set. There was not, of course, a hot water service, but we did have a chip heater in the bathroom. Baths or showers were not at all an everyday event in those times. Perhaps I had a toothbrush, but if I did I certainly did not use it much. Those days, I must mention, toothache tortured victim after victim. One night when I was staying with the Sanders family, near Little Lake, Mrs Sanders packed some toothache preparation into one of my teeth's cavities thereby stopping the pain. For me, she thus assumed the status of a ministering angel.

A further 11 years were to pass before the State Electricity Commission supplied electricity to Derri. We used wood for fuel in the kitchen stove, the fireplace in the lounge and the laundry. In the laundry there was a large copper vessel for boiling the washing and a hand-operated wringer. The mornings could be miserably cold. It

helped a bit if someone had by then lit the kitchen stove. A kid, the evening before, was obliged to gather kindling and wood for the next morning's stove fire. Mother usually lit the fire, frequently splashing some kerosene over the fuel to help the flames take hold. Then she would place the large, black kettle on the flames. Often, Mother would a number of times call out, 'Bryyy in'. He would invariably reply, 'I'm getting up now Mum.' We did the toast on a long wire fork.

Briquettes were available then, the butter factory using great stacks of them in the boiler. On a few occasions, at night, one of us kids would snaffle a few of them when we were out of wood. The practice became known in the family as *honking*. Seventy years later, I can make that confession. There were pressure lamps in the ceilings of a couple of the rooms; elsewhere we used kerosene lamps or candles. There was a small tank outside under the eaves of the house; the tank held the fuel for the pressure lamps. I think that the fuel was petrol. The tank needed to have air pumped into it regularly. We used what was probably a motor tyre pump. An *Aladdin* lamp, a kerosene lamp with a mantle, was placed on a table and gave such a pleasing, soft light.

Probably there were such things as domestic refrigerators, but never in the family's stay at Derri did we have one. Not until 1950, when I was 28, was I the normal occupant of a dwelling that had a refrigerator. We had a *Coolgardie* safe, which was a cooling method based on water-soaked hessian. There was a carpet square in the lounge, but there was no wall-to-wall carpet for us. Dad stained the floor area around the carpet. Probably everybody else in the town would have shared our deprivation, in the matter of carpeting, I should say. People used linoleum. We had a matching set of lounge furniture that we called our *lounge suite*. As for a motor car, well, the thought of our owning one probably never entered our heads. There was a bicycle in the family. I remember falling off it with nasty consequences on at least one occasion. I do not remember ever seeing Dad ride it. Perhaps he did sometimes, though.

*Columbine Caramels* were my favourite confections of the time. MacRobertson's in Argyle Street, Fitzroy made them. Dad used to bring them home for me and they became known at home as *Jackie Rawson* lollies. My grand-children, Josiah and Mollie call them JRLs. Some years later I worked at MacRobertson's. When my work took me into the caramel room, I would sometimes dig a sample from the large block of my favourite caramel being processed on a bench.

We first got a wireless set in about 1930. Static was a very big problem then, often meaning that there was not much point in trying to listen to it. When it was installed, I recall my mother asking the technician, Ernie Parsons, what he could do about the interference. He replied that he could make a fortune if he knew the answer to that question. About that time, as well, a gramophone arrived, the records including some suitable for me. Dad being the postmaster, it followed that we would have a telephone. All of us kids, as time went along, learned to operate the switchboard in the post office.

When I was 14 or 15, I used occasionally to sleep in the post office to *mind* the switchboard. I did this to give Dad a break. He improved his income in that way at times. It was not unusual to sleep through until early morning before being disturbed by the night alarm on the switchboard. The single bed folded up during daytime. The switchboard was all cords, plugs, sockets and shutters. Those days a couple of dry batteries powered the telephone. Some of the subscribers, certainly those in nearby Geelengla, were on a party line, which arrangement allowed some improperly to listen in to a conversation should they choose to do so. At the switchboard the operator rang, say, once for the Smiths, twice for the Browns, three times for the Jones – and so on. Everyone heard the ring(s). Anyone could pick his or her receiver up and have a listen. Perhaps that sometimes happened.

At home relations among the family were good. My mother and father got on quite well most of the time. But not all the time. I recall on one occasion Mother hurling Dad's dinner plate against the kitchen wall. I felt so happy when they were loving or friendly towards each other. My heart sang, you may say. I do not remember my father ever hitting me. I think that my sister Jessie, though, might have, for one, been beaten in earlier times. I vividly recall her scooting down the back yard, hurdling a low fence with Dad in serious pursuit. He gave up the chase. Perhaps he had decided that he would not do that sort of thing any more.

For my part, when I later had children of my own, I discarded the practice of hitting children for ever after mistreating one of my sons. As for the physical punishment of children, we have to remember that the Victorian era was not long past. Those were the days of Dr Arnold, head teacher of Rugby School, in England. Many educationalists took up his savage practices. I remember my mother whacking me across the head on one occasion, but that kind of conduct was not her habit.

I have written a great deal about my father, but I have had little to say about my mother. That is simply because of the way my story has unfolded: I was very, very fond of them both. She was a patient and a kind mother. She had a very sweet singing voice and she could play the piano a little. She was, I think, rather proud of her Cairnes ancestry. She was not, I suppose, a marvellous cook, but she prepared enjoyable meals. She won a prize with her scones on one occasion. (The quality of her scones, we joked about in the family for a time, though, when one I threw at Bryan shattered a vestibule window.) Indeed, she was a dear mother, and there was much love and cohesion in the family, much of this being due to her efforts. In 1929, she bought a book for me from a hawker. It was a religious book with a story called *Knocking out the T*: the *t* out of can't. I feel sure that that story has influenced me. Like nearly all women, and most of the men, of the time, she had not had a good education.

Speaking of books, there were not a lot in our house. One, of which I read bits and pieces, was *The Bloody Traffic*. It was a book about the armaments' industry. I found some of its passages horrifying. I was not yet 10 years old. Here was a wounded soldier, a victim of an artillery shell in Flanders. The shell blew off one of his buttocks. He lay in agony in a pool of blood, urine and faeces. Men made fortunes from the selling of rifles and cannons and shells and bombs and machine-guns it hit home to me. Surely they were evil men? They probably went to church on Sundays, though, I supposed.

As I have already mentioned, I broke my right elbow on Christmas Day, 1927. I was playing on the front lawn with Alan. I fell heavily on my back with my right arm underneath me. Just then Mildred Barr walked by: 'I think it's fractured,' she said. It was. Someone took me to Camperdown hospital to have it attended to. Broken elbows present a difficult medical problem, I believe. Years later, a radiologist described the elbow as a 'gross deformity.' Just the same, it has served me well. In 1928, I began school a few weeks late; when I did start, for some time I carried a small bucket of sand in the hope that that routine would help to straighten the arm. School was about a mile from home. The arm remained crooked. For a long time I was very sensitive about its appearance, particularly when it was uncovered.

We had three dogs, Snowy, Streak and Rover. Streak was plainly a whippet. The others were not plainly anything, although we would have described Rover as a sheep dog. Dad used to call dogs' turds *barker's eggs*. Someone poisoned Snowy. An important role that the dogs played was one of assisting in the hunting of rabbits. We did not use traps. We did not own a ferret. Streak, being a whippet, was the best at it. Rabbits were not normally able to out-run Streak. Their evasive tactics usually meant, just the same, that the dog did not have things entirely his way; there was always the chance that the little creature would reach the refuge of a burrow before it would otherwise be taken in the snapping jaws of its relentless enemy.

The poor bunny, even if it reached a burrow, was not then by any means safe. We might well dig it out – usually with a hoe. If the burrow was a deep one, or if it was part of a warren, the rabbit's survival prospects were reasonably good. One dug until one saw a white tail and furry bottom. Perhaps I would thrust an arm along the burrow to reach the bunny. (It was silly to do that because of the danger of snake bite.) You would grab the rabbit's rear end, trying at once to clamp its rear legs together with a strong hand grip. It would emerge from its haven, sometimes squealing, always twisting violently. Next you grasped it with the other hand, fingers around the head, just forward of the ears. The rabbit's body was then subjected to being pulled in opposite directions from both ends, the head at the same time being twisted back out of alignment. You broke its neck.

After calling off the hunt and before heading for home, hunters would usually skin the rabbits. Usually we would abandon the carcasses – except for food for us or the dogs – if skins were the object of the day's expedition. Once you knew how to do it, skinning was a simple process. An exposition of the process would, however, take up too much space here. If we meant to take the carcass home, gutting was a quick and easy operation. First you slit along the belly. Then, a hand in the abdominal cavity would remove the viscera plus the lungs and heart. The kidneys were usually left in position. We did not sell carcasses, but we did sell skins from time to time. We stretched the skins, inside out, on fencing wire frames, their shape being like an inverted U. It was necessary to make sure that we adhered to certain practices. For example, we placed the tail against one of the wire uprights of the frame. The frame with the skin on it we hung up to dry for some weeks at our place. Down in the shed where the dunny was.

It would have been during the winter of either 1929 or 1930 that I first went rabbiting by myself. My mother dressed me in warm clothes. I whistled up Streak. We crossed the road to Vite Vite and to Pura Pura. Over the railway line we went. (Our passenger train travelled between Geelong and a junction near Ararat.) We were soon to be among the tussocks on a property that I think was named *Titanga*. Perhaps it belonged to the Manifolds? Perhaps it did not. A hare began its dazzling run from behind a tussock. It soon out-distanced my

dog. He caught the first rabbit we saw anywhere near us though. Such a good dog!

Another rabbit ran into what turned out to be a very short burrow. I put my hand in and pulled it out squealing. Perhaps the burrow was wide enough for it to turn around and to face the exit – I grabbed it by the front paws. Then I found out just how viciously that appealing little creature can use the nails on its rear feet. It inflicted scratches galore on my hands and wrists. I had to drop it. Away it went. Then Streak and I headed for home, my trophy dangling from my right hand, the dog darting here and there, peeing on a fence post more often than you would think necessary. My mother would be so proud of me. She tended to my scratches.

Although we did not have a ferret, I sometimes went ferreting with a friend – I forget which friend. The idea was to find a rabbit warren. Since you needed to cover each burrow exit with a net, you searched for a small warren. After we placed the nets in position, we set the ferret loose in the warren. The ferret's task was to flush the rabbits out of the warren. In escaping the attack of the ferret, the rabbit would project itself into one of the nets. It would then have its neck wrung.

That sounds all very simple. Often the trouble was that the ferret did not itself come out of the warren at the convenience of its owner. Perhaps it began making a meal of a rabbit that it managed to catch. Perhaps it decided to have a snooze. Ferreting could be a very frustrating pastime. Another thing about ferrets: they stink. I used to have baby rabbits for pets at home for a time. They were the cutest little things. They hopped and hopped. I loved to watch them munching wads of grass that I fed to them, or bits of carrot or a lettuce leaf, perhaps. One day my only pet at the time managed to choose the fire compartment under the copper in the laundry for a resting place. Mother lit the fire. He scuttled out, but was badly burned. He died.

My brother, Alan, decided that Rover was old. He decided to destroy the dog. He took him some distance from the house. He put out his hand to Rover and called to him by name. He did this to bring the unfortunate old pet close to him; to make the task easier. Rover ran up to him and licked his hand. Alan, no doubt unnerved by this show of affection from his canine friend that he was about to kill, aimed inaccurately with his rifle and managed only to wound him. Rover scrambled home to a sleepout on a side veranda and lay panting and no doubt in agony in a corner of the sleepout. I came on the scene just as Alan reached the flywire door of the sleepout, the flywire being missing from a panel. To get a better aim, he rested the rifle on the panel. He was trembling visibly. He killed the dog, though, with his first shot. I could hardly believe what I was seeing. Horror, terror, overwhelmed me. I ran away up the footpath screaming. Even now it is harrowing for me to return in my memory to that putting to death of Rover.

Only some little time before his death in 1994, Alan told me that even then the memory of that deed filled him with shame and remorse. I do not recall whether my parents knew of Alan's intentions. If they did know, why did they not prevent the kid from carrying out his unnecessary execution? Alan was not a cruel man. Perhaps I was seven or eight and Alan was about 15 when that happened. I have always been one to shrink away from cruelty. Cruelty affects me particularly if it is inflicted on the weak. I include here the human animal as well as other creatures. Nature or nurture? I think that nature has a stronger influence on our makeup than nurture.

It was not often that one saw an aeroplane fly over Derri those days. James Fairbairn, who had been a flyer in the First World War, and who was a wealthy squatter, the owner of the property, *Mount Elephant*, used to pilot a Moth aircraft. (He and Dad were not close friends, I suppose, but they got on well together. They were both on the school committee, Dad being the president of that committee for a number of years.) In the early years of the Second World War, Fairbairn became Minister for Air in the Australian Government. He perished, with several other important persons, in an aircraft crash.

I saw Sir Charles Kingsford Smith's *Southern Cross* over Yarrowonga in 1932. I went up for two joyrides in the thirties, one at Derri, the other at Warrnambool. The second flight was simply magic: in the front cockpit all by myself, the propeller whizzing round just in front of me. The flight was supposed to cost five shillings. There were three of us kids – one with a shilling, one with sixpence, and I had two shillings. The others said that I should go up, and the pilot did a short flight for three shillings and sixpence. I ask you – an aeroplane flight for thirty-five cents? Is that unbelievable?

My brother, Bryan, had a horse. I suppose it had a name but I cannot remember. He made a low-slung cart with heavy, small wheels, of metal. They were pulley wheels, discards from the butter factory. He made up reins, traces and other equipment, but there were no shafts and no blinkers. One day he, Jim Barr and I were travelling on it, when rain began. We covered ourselves with a blanket, that item flapping madly in the wind. The horse

(no blinkers, you see) took off in a mad gallop, throwing us all off at the first bend. The gravel rash was painful. The crazy bolting of the horse smashed the cart to bits. The terrified horse and the smashed-up car confronted Alan, who was walking home from town. No doubt he experienced awful imaginings.

Bryan had some *white king* pigeons for a time. I do not think it was because of a shortage of food, but the fact is that we ate them. I can still see Dad wringing their necks. I think that he separated their heads from their bodies in the process. Newly born kittens had a low life expectancy – their days ended in a hessian bag placed in a tub of water. We had a cow for milking for some time. It grazed in a paddock that ran a short distance from the house down to the railway line and the Vite Vite road. I never ever did master the hand milking process. Not that I tried very much. I suspect that the debate about whose turn it was to milk the cow, did much to cause its eventual disposal. As for chooks, well we had a small number of them for a time as well. Did we eat *Billy Bunter*, our pet lamb? I cannot remember. His favourite pastime was to charge at anyone in sight and to butt with some ferocity. So serves him right if he ended up as a roast dinner. (With peas, roast potatoes and mint sauce.)

The butter factory was an important part of my life at Derri up to about 1936. The factory employed me there for a few weeks when I was about 15. Trucks used to go out to dairy farms and bring back cans of cream. A tester would stir the cream in a can. (One day the body of a rat came up with the stirrer – the cream was graded third grade.) He would then thrust a spatula into it, and from that implement take a mouthful of cream. He would swish the cream around in his mouth, spit it into a dipper, then make a mark on the can to indicate the grading of the cream. One of my jobs was to clean the cans and floors.

About this time, but I do not mean when the factory employed me, Harry Stone, a driver, began taking me with him sometimes. His main purpose was to have someone to open and close gates for him. Some of the gates were not easy to handle. The difficult gate was usually one made up of several strands of barbed wire with wooden staves holding it all together. A loop of stout wire held an end stave to a gatepost. Usually it was necessary for me to force the loop from its position. The gate would then collapse. I still have a scar on my belly from the barbed wire.

Sometimes I would travel for miles standing on the running board of the truck. One day the truck motor kept stopping. Someone had tipped sugar into the petrol tank. Time after time Harry removed the petrol line from the carburettor, tapped out sugar grains and then got going again. Another day, at Gordon Bristow's place, Harry said to Gordon that perhaps I should stay at his farm to gather the eggs. Gordon said, that by the look of me I should eat some. I was, as I have said before, a skinny kid. Bill Wilson had nicknamed me *Sprigger* – as in sparrow – because of my legs. Many called me that until I left Derri in 1938. Otherwise, people called me Jack until I met my wife-to-be in Brisbane in 1945. She chose John out of Jack, Jos and John.

Living as we did in the country, we saw sexual activity in the animal (non-human) world, so to some extent I knew about procreation and its means. I do not recall being given any instruction at home on such matters, except that Dad did give me a book called *Why I was Born* when I was 13 or so. I was a failure subsequently with my children in the matter of sexual guidance, too. Among us kids, however, sex was not altogether a taboo subject, and fairly adventurous sexual experimentation occurred from time to time.

I had a friend who worked on a farm. Cyril Hooper was milking the cows. He milked by hand. Milking machines were far from common. He put a cow in the bail. He explained that the cow was *about ready*. He next let a young bull into the yard. This was all for my benefit. The bull was dripping generously from his member. Cyril locked the cow in the bail from her neck forward. She looked back as well as she was able to at her prospect for intimacy. Her eyes told me that she was nervous. But could I detect, as well, a welcoming, anticipatory glow in those eyes?

The sexual prowess of the bull immersed my being in a wondrous surge of eroticism. Roused, I watched the acts in a state of wonderment, my thoughts a maelstrom. He did it several times. The combined bulk of the two animals was at once intimidating and enthralling. The intensity of the bull's entries into copulation rather frightened me.

Years before, when I was six or seven, a bigger kid said to another '...have one three feet long.' I thought that he said 'Italians.' I looked at myself and at other boys my age and wondered how that could be. Later, I realized that he had said 'Stallions.' I was much relieved. Now I knew that in one respect, at least, stallions and bulls were both generously treated by nature.

For a time, when I was about 13, Max Foster, Mick Davis and I used to play postman's knock, a kissing game, with two or three girls, one of whom was Joyce Oman. One day, I decided that when I was to kiss Joyce I would place my right hand on her breast – an altogether delicious prospect – feeling confident that she would think that, well, he had to put his hand somewhere didn't he? Whatever her thoughts, she looked skyward, embarrassed and the skin of her face and neck became suffused with pink. She did not remove my hand. So, increasing the degree of my naughtiness, I quickly decided to prolong the kiss. That was the most intimate Joyce and I ever were together.

One night when I was 12 or so, Alan, and his friend, *Honey*, disturbed my sleep by their presence on my single bed. The strength of their passion puzzled me a bit. Why did they choose my bed? Did they really have to thrash around like that and make such strange noises? I pretended to be asleep.

In the second half of 1932, my mother and I travelled by train to Yarrowonga. We stayed with her parents for several months and I went to school there. My brother, Peter, was born there on 6 November. I did not even know that my mother was pregnant. I have never really known why she went there to have her child. I have always supposed that it had to do with Yarrowonga's hospital facilities and a wish to spend time with her parents. Soon after our arrival back in Derri, we moved to a house in Main Street, across that street from the main group of shops. You could compare our new dwelling unfavourably with the house near the butter factory. Derri had then, and still does have, a double row of fine elm trees along the centre of Main Street.

Derri, I suppose, you could well have described as a quiet little country town; but it was not without its activities. Football and cricket teams engaged enthusiastically in their competitions. People liked to swim in Little Lake. You could catch fish if you had a vehicle to take you to Emu Creek. Dancing was popular and there were annual events such as bachelors' and spinsters' balls. Picture shows were so looked forward to by many of the residents. Shooters had plenty of rabbits and hares and even some foxes to shoot. On the other hand, the town did not have a hotel – either you bought *sly grog* in the town or you drove to hotels at Lismore, say, or Darlington, or Camperdown, perhaps. There is a slogan in more recent times that says, 'If you drink and drive, you're a bloody idiot.' There was very little concern about drinking and driving then. There was not a proper restaurant in the town. There was not a library, either. There were no resident police, dentists, doctors, lawyers or chemists. As far as I was concerned, though, Derri was a great town and that was that.

Over a fairly long period, mostly on Saturday nights, films were shown at the Mechanics' Institute hall. They were silent until *The Jazz Singer* in the late twenties. There was only one projector for a long time, so there were periods of darkness while the operator positioned the next reel. The seating was hardly of the lounge chair variety. The kids, who mostly sat at the front, placed their bottoms on long benches without back rests. This arrangement was good, in one way: during the periods of darkness, when the reel was being changed, a boy could lie back and put his head in the lap of his current girl friend. If he had one and if she let him, that is.

Somehow or other, when a film night was coming up, I managed to have a shilling to pay my way in to the movies. For a time, I was the *lolly boy* at the picture show on Saturday nights. Northeys supplied me with various confections, a tray in which to carry them (a strap around my neck), paying me nothing for my services except that I got in free. I nonetheless considered it reasonable that I should eat and not pay for a sweet of my choice. They never ever questioned the shortage of cash that ensued.

One film that I saw in those days made a huge impression on me: *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The horror, the cruelty, the agony, the injustice of warfare appalled me. For a long time I thought that my reaction to the film must have meant that I was a coward. I can still see, in my mind's eye, the young German hero, back in his home town on leave, and at his old school. The idea was that he would speak of the glory of fighting for the fatherland. He spoke out strongly, however, against war, his opinions, though, meeting not at all the expectations of the teacher or the senior class that he was addressing. They booed him from the stage, so to speak. Lew Ayres was the protagonist in the film. During the Second World War, because he was a pacifist, he drove an ambulance. I read Remarque's novel later. I was a bit shocked by some of its contents, for example, 'Kat turned his arse up to heaven and let off a mighty fart.'

Sometimes when a dance was being held, euchre tournaments would be organized in the supper room of the hall. At the time the supper room was almost a lean-to – with an earthen floor, I ask you to believe. Women played a major part in those tournaments. They sometimes co-opted kids like me to make up a necessary four. Some elderly lady partner did not like it too much if you made an error in play. I would often go to watch the couples dancing and to listen to the music.

One frightening night, people were happily dancing around the polished floor. Martin Brown, performing solo, and having had lots to drink, moved among the couples in a friendly enough, but probably irritating, attempt to be centre of attention. Reaching Sammy Stone and his partner, he engaged in what you might have described as a mild show of shadow boxing. Sammy, a tall, powerful farm labourer, without saying a word, dealt out successive punches, right and left, to Martin's jaws. Thud, thud. Down Martin went in a heap. The band stopped playing. (Of course it did.) There was more to come.

Bill Wilson was Martin's friend. Up from the end of the hall he went, 'in one fell swoop,' the most ferocious scowl on his face. In long, sliding, almost gliding strides, drawing a bottle of beer from his hip pocket as he made his vengeful way, he quickly arrived at the scene of Martin's felling. Crash went the bottle on to Sammy's head. Sammy did not fall, but he staggered about alarmingly. His partner, a slim, pretty girl in a white gown, had both hands to her face. The crowd then closed in. That was it. I was, I am sure, goggle-eyed throughout the nasty, dramatic, but fortunately brief, sequence of events.

The last of the incident that I can recall, was seeing Martin outside the hall. Fury contorted his face. He was smashing a fist into the palm of his other hand and saying, 'Bring the bastard out here.' Someone told him that Sammy was in no condition to fight him. Indeed he was not, but he recovered all right. The police did not charge anyone as far as I knew. (Not that Derri had any police.) I had seen acts of savagery before, probably. This episode, though, had a degree of ferocity to it that I thought might well have curdled my blood.

I completed virtually all my schooling, if that's not the wrong word, at Derrinallum State School Number 2050 during the years 1928 and 1935. Year eight was as far as the kids could progress. A few parents were well enough off to send a child to one of the very few high schools in Victoria; or to board at a college somewhere. A friend, Max Foster, went to a college at Ballarat for several years. He got his Leaving Certificate, a job in a bank in Melbourne, and was educated and clever enough to become a navigator in the RAAF. The Second World War claimed his life somewhere over the North Sea.

These were the years of the Great Depression. Most parents had to scrape even to feed their children; there was no way that they could afford the luxury of having a child receive further education. It was an attitude of the times, I think it reasonable to say, that the acquiring of a good education was not of particular importance in any case.

I was never top of the class as far as I can remember. If I ever was that event was surely an aberration. I was good at mental arithmetic, reading, spelling and I could express myself fairly well on paper. My handwriting, though, was the despair of the head teacher, Jack Stimson. On one occasion he said, 'Your father has about the best handwriting I have ever seen. Look at yours!' For years and years, I remained embarrassed about the quality of my handwriting. The examination for the Merit Certificate required us to reveal our artistic talents: I drew a flag. I did get 16 and a half out of 20 for arithmetic, just beating – probably on the only occasion – Max Foster. Jack Stimson looked over my shoulder as I finished off my last sum, a long division. He placed a large tick against it, said 'Right,' and that was that.

Probably Jack Stimson helped engender in me a modicum of political awareness. During social studies one day – I would have been about 12 – he spoke of some people wanting things to remain the same, and others who believed that it was best to have change. I decided at once that surely change was necessary from time to time. That day the seeds of Leftism were nourished in their growth in my character it is easy to believe.

My father, as I earlier mentioned, was the chairman of the school committee for years. He and the head teacher were good friends. There was talk at home for a time about the possibility that Dad would stand for parliament. I do not think that he was a member of a political party. He read the *Rationalist*. I saw the head teacher with a copy of that journal. Here were these two important men in my life who had similar opinions about some important matters. They both seemed to me to be wise men. I suppose that I could see no reason why I should disagree with the views that they seemed to me to hold.

I loved Australian Rules football then and I still do. Fights and scuffles among the boys were all a part of school life. I managed, mostly, to involve myself in the latter rather than the former. Corporal punishment – I have already mentioned the influence of Arnold – was practised at Derri as it was throughout the entire education system, I have to believe. More so in religious schools, I suspect.

Jack Stimson came around a corner one day just as I *flied* Ernie Hodson. He said, 'You filthy beast,' and with

an open hand he whacked me over the left ear. My eyes ran and the blow bewildered me for some time afterwards. Kids got the *cuts*. The teachers kept a long strap, rolled up, in a drawer. On one occasion, Mr Tinney had Vern Smith out the front of the class, going about giving Vern the *cuts*. The teacher was rather short; Vern was very tall. To me, the scene presented was rather comical. Tinney caught me grinning and saying something to my desk mate: 'You – out here.' The *cuts* hurt like mad.

A boy was always sweet on some girl or other. Some boys' voices were breaking in the last school year, but I was not aware of there being any case of sexual fulfilment being achieved by any young couple of my age. The boys by now, as you would expect, were beginning to become (over) familiar with the habit of masturbation. The girls, too, I suppose. And so, near the end of 1935, about four months before my 14th birthday, I had finished school. It was over for my classmates, too, kids such as Mick Davis, Don Rogerson, Gordon Heard, Bernie McLeod, Roy Drake, Jack Wilson, Margie Campbell, Isla Smith, Heather McLennan, Lila McPherson. They were great kids in that class of 1935.

Jessie had been dux of the school in her final year. The rest of us were never to achieve such eminence. Unemployment was a problem, but she, Alan and Bryan were in work most of the time. They worked in Derri or other towns, mostly in the Post-Master-General's Department. Dad's influence was no doubt helpful.

Before the arrival of electricity in 1938, here and there in the town there was a carbide light on a pole. *Old* Frank Dyer, ladder on shoulder, you could see moving about the town attending to them. He lived in a bungalow at the coffee palace, cared for the uniforms of the football team, the *Tigers*, and was often *marker* in the town's single-table billiard room. People said that he was a very well educated person. Alan told me once that Frank, a pipe smoker, said this to a man passing by on horseback: 'Please stay your quadruped and provide me with some means of ignition.' It seems that he had a sense of humour, too.

Early in 1936, I began working for Norm McInnes, a wool-classer operating as a skin buyer. He paid me 15 shillings a week. He used an old farm house on the Camperdown road, not far out of town, to store the sheep or cattle skins that he bought from farmers as he travelled around the countryside. Some times my tasks included ripping sheep's trotters off the skins, maggots flying everywhere when I did so. Sometimes, though, he took me with him and they were great trips in his almost new International truck. He was a bit of a speed demon and people knew that he drove with zest. On more than one occasion, he left tyre marks on the earthen footpath under the shop verandas. He and his companions were hard drinkers as well as being hard workers.

After only a few weeks with Norm, however, I was offered another job, this time at 12 shillings a week, at Wilson's general store. Straight across the road from home, it was. Jack Stimson, the head teacher, said that it was good that I was going to learn a trade. The hours were long, Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, too, but I rather enjoyed it all. I remember that it was close to normal for the bosses to be particularly courteous to the wealthy landowners, people like the Fairbairns and the Curries. Despite the forelock tugging treatment that shopkeepers gave them, however, some wealthy customers were not noted for always paying their accounts on time.

Later in 1936, I was out of a job. The business was failing, money being short almost everywhere then. I think that I easily earned my twelve bob a week, and my honesty was never in question. There it was. It seems to show that twelve shillings was an important sum of money then. Laurie Wilson had been a good boss. Wellmans had acquired the business. A couple of years later, Laurie had a job in Melbourne. In 1944, the fires destroyed the shop and the adjacent house. The fires destroyed our house across the street, too.

RA Northey and members of his family conducted a mixed business across the street from us. His daughter, Mavis, is the grandmother of Gavin Brown, the captain of Collingwood football team during the nineties. Trevor Northey was about Bryan's age and was my hero of the time. His son, John, a brilliant football player for Richmond, has been a prominent football coach for some years. Trevor was my principal adviser on matters relating to the opposite sex. On the night of Christmas Day, 1938, I consulted him. He assured me that there was very little likelihood that I would have contracted venereal disease (for some reason, VD was a popular topic at that time), close to Mount Elephant, a little earlier that night. The Northeys, as well as owning a Hupmobile motor car, had a *T* model Ford: a car converted to a truck. In this, we would often head off for a swim – a quite heavenly prospect on a day when the temperature was up in the nineties or higher.

Noel Northey, a couple of years older than I, was a very good footballer. He showed me a letter from Carlton on one occasion; they had invited him to train with them. When it came to relations with the opposite sex, he was,

to put it mildly, fairly forward. We went up Mount Elephant one day to smoke some expensive cigarettes he had taken from the shop. We forgot matches and had to go down the mountain to a farmhouse to get some. Earlier he sang with St Paul's choir. He could fight like a thrashing machine. (As they used to say.) He collapsed and died after a football match at Derri in the late fifties. He was close to 40 then.

Pop Northey was a painter and decorator. He coached the *Tigers* for a time. I worked for him as a painter for a few months, our jobs including the Mercer house, the Mechanics' Institute hall and the head teacher's house. Much of the time I worked with Lyle Stone, a person several years my senior whom I admired. We used to argue from time to time, in a friendly way, and he said to me once, 'You would get out of jail.' (So I did not always have as little to say as I earlier stated in this narrative.)

Lyle's father, Bert, was a football trainer, and Mick Davis and I used to go to 'rubbing down' sessions some evenings. They used to rub us down, too, sometimes. Bert said about me on one occasion, that I had an 'arse like a black fellow's dog: two bones with a hole in the middle.' I used to worry about my skinniness and I was so pleased to go into long pants. Dad brought my first pair home from Melbourne when I was 13. This change in my attire impressed Joyce Oman.

Northeys had the single-table billiard room that I mentioned when I wrote about Frank Dyer. Alan Scott, the hairdresser, controlled it. I suspect that he was also the chief condom provider for the young men of the locality. Walter Lindrum gave an exhibition of billiards and of trick shots there one evening late in 1937 or early in 1938. I polished up Scottie's *Terraplane* motor car which picked the great player up at the railway station. I did not have the five shilling admission fee. But I sneaked a good look through an open back door. The authorities changed the rules of billiards to help keep his scoring ability in check a little. Watching him, you could hardly believe your eyes.

I learned to play billiards, snooker and pin-pool and loved every moment of those fascinating pastimes. Perhaps the performance in the billiard room for which players would most likely remember me, however, was the night that I cleared every one out the back door. How did I manage to do that? Did I fail to pot the black and did I go berserk in a fit of childlike frustration? Did I hurl billiard balls around the room after knocking over a black pin? Did I attempt to bayonet my opponent with a billiard cue when he potted my ball in a game of billiards? No, nothing so exciting. I farted. With a capital *F*. This was about the time when, in 1937, we moved over and up the street to a better house next to the post office. That house burnt down in 1944.

My account of my days as a worker in Derri is coming to a close now. Soon I will return to the Melbourne of 1938. My job with Pop Northey as a painter ended. A farmer a few miles out of town needed someone to help bring in the hay. There were three of us, the other two being strong and mature labourers. One chap stood on a horse-drawn dray, and with a pitchfork tossed hay up to me on the top of the growing haystack. I then had to spear with a pitchfork the hay tossed up, and transfer it to the man whose task it was to build the stack. It was very hard work for a 15 year old, but I managed all right. The trouble was that the next morning I was so stiff and sore that I did not feel capable of continuing. That was that. Later the farmer gave me a day's pay. I thought that that was most fair of him considering that he could have argued that I let him down.

I began work at Urquhart's garage in 1937, my main task being to look after the petrol and oil sales at a service station next to the garage itself. The petrol bowzers of the day were fitted with long handles which one agitated so that the petrol was pumped from the underground storage tank up to a graduated glass (perspex?) bowl on the top of the bowser. (Is bowser a recognized word? I cannot find it in my dictionary.) You stopped pumping when the petrol reached the required figure. In those times, it was normal to sell more than one brand of petrol in service stations. One of our brands was *Atlantic*. Across the street, Northeys sold *Alba* at their one bowser. A gallon cost one shilling and eight pence. That is, about four cents a litre.

Col Urquhart had been a flyer in the First World War. He claimed that he had offered to fly an aeroplane under Melbourne's Prince's Bridge. Perhaps an ace could have done it with a very small aircraft. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles; he wore heavily oil-stained overalls; he moved about at a rapid pace; he was slim, dark-haired and of about average height. He smoked heavily. *Turf* cigarettes were his favourites. My workmate, Kelso Lemon, told me years later that Col knew quite well that Kel and I stole and smoked cigarettes from packets left open on a table. Why did he tolerate that? All this ended when I placed that rifle down butt first. Kel, a year or two older than I, worked in the garage proper, though he was not a qualified mechanic. He played a trumpet in the local dance band and operated the projector at the picture shows then. He had a permanently stiff leg having knocked it when diving off a jetty into the sea at Mornington, Victoria. Within hours he was

close to death from osteomyelitis. There was no penicillin then. He was a big, dark, good looking chap. He rode a bicycle with only one pedal, the foot of his stiff leg resting on a metal plate at pedal level. When he played his trumpet at a dance, the foot of his stiff leg rested on his perpendicularly placed instrument case. In later years he played with the Northcote City Band. I was very fond of his sister, Marcia. He was also to become a friend of Frank when the Lemon family moved to Melbourne a year or so later. There was Wally Crooks, too. That made four of us. I think that I can say without boasting that we were decent, well-behaved young persons. I was the youngest of the group.

## **The Martins of Northcote**

The Martins of Northcote, my Uncle Harold, my Auntie Lil, and my cousins, Alan and Thelma, lived in a single-fronted timber house that, in structure and quality, would have been a typical working class dwelling of those times – and in these times for that matter. Inside the house, things were different indeed from today. They did not have a hot water service, an indoor toilet, a telephone, a refrigerator, a vacuum cleaner, a gramophone, or any of the electrical gadgets that are so familiar in the kitchen in more recent times. There was not, of course, a motor car. There was no bicycle – but there was a billy-cart. How it could whizz down the Ross Street hill! Computers and television and videos and hi-fi were yet to be available. There was a gas stove in the kitchen and a gas fire in the lounge. There was one wireless – a cabinet model in the lounge that cost £19 (\$38.00) at Myers.

Teachers were those days regarded as superior repositories of knowledge, it did seem. There were often quizzes on the wireless. When a teacher took on the task, the studio audience went, ‘oo-oo-oo,’ their reaction suggesting that they expected that the teacher would know the answers. Of course, we have a much better-educated population now. I shared a room with Alan until the army called me up in December 1941.

Uncle Harold had a limp. During combat in France in the First World War, the enemy had shot him in the leg. He worked in the railways maintaining rail carriages. After the evening meal, he would go to the lounge and sit in his favourite chair near the radio. He would place a sheet of newspaper over his knees, and then roll himself a cigarette, the newspaper catching any falling pieces of tobacco. About the second evening that I was there, he said, ‘Do you smoke, Jack?’ I said, ‘Yes, in fact I do.’ I had not smoked openly in Derri, but now I did. At the time, *Red Capstans* cost sixpence for 10. I last smoked a cigarette in 1962.

Auntie Lil’s meals were always a pleasure to eat. She and Uncle Harold treated me with much kindness and understanding. I have never known completely what financial arrangements Dad made about my stay with them over the months before I began working. I understood that my father provided 10 shillings (\$1.00) a week, from which sum Auntie Lil would give me a shilling or two on my request. Money was not plentiful at home. I knew that. Perhaps Dad was not always able to adhere to the arrangements, I sometimes wondered. I cannot remember, however, her ever refusing a request for money from me. Mind you, I was not, in any case, accustomed to having more than very small sums of money at my disposal. All this might well have grounded in me a certain prudence in the matter of money management. Just the same, I would deny that I am a mean person.

Alan and Thelma were well-behaved children, not engaging, as far as I was aware, in acts of vandalism or the like. Uncle Harold, if displeased sufficiently with either one, did not hesitate to belt them quite hard. Thelma, more often than Alan, I should think, felt the strong slaps across the back from her father. You would not expect that he would strike his 16 year old nephew, and of course he did not. He was short with me a few times, but that was as far as it went.

One evening, early in 1939, my friends Frank and Kelso and I were having a conversation on the footpath at the front of the house, no distance from the front bedroom. We heard movements in the bedroom as though someone were approaching the front door. Kelso was on his bike and off like a rocket. Frank and I had no real choice but to await events. Uncle Harold came out and said, calmly enough, ‘We can hear every word you are saying.’ How stupid we were! How humiliating it was! How red hot were the things we were discussing! Aunt Lil said next day: ‘Please don’t talk at the front gate at night again.’ That was all.

I used to sing and whistle a lot. *Come back to Sorrento* was a (Gigli-inspired) favourite of mine in those times. I did not just sing it and other songs when the rest of the family were out or were up in their rooms – I sang at the top of my voice. I wonder that the family did not object, or that someone in Urquhart Street did not bang on the

door and demand that I shut my mouth. Eric Hahn boarded next door then; I knew him only slightly. We were in the army together later. I see him usually at our reunions. He has not forgotten my excursions into the singing arena. His attitude towards my performances is one of forbearance, even of mild approbation.

These days, and for years past, I see the house as I travel over Urquhart Street by train. Some years ago, I noticed that the roof had been painted. For the first time since the house was built, I would guess. It was no longer red but a silvery colour. An awful looking tree, or perhaps it is a huge shrub, completely obscures the front of the house when it is viewed from the street. It is now 60 years since an unworldly, ignorant and bewildered Jack Rawson arrived there, and an altogether new life began for him. So many memories! Perhaps I think more often about Thelma than the others, I suppose because she was a girl and I was a boy. Although I went back to Derri to see my family from time to time, I never ever lived there again. The family moved to Boort in 1941, Dad becoming postmaster there. For me, an entirely new life had begun. Fancy living in Melbourne!

It may be sensible at this point to explain what happened about the medical problem I was having, thus finishing with the matter. I used to travel by cable tram, mainly, into the Royal Melbourne Hospital in Lonsdale Street for diathermy, or whatever. The treatment was of no help as far as I could ascertain. After a few months, someone decided that I should have surgery to repair a partly severed ulnar nerve. I had the operation. Perhaps it helped a bit, but the wound permanently affected my left hand. On one occasion after I had medical treatment, I went into Coles's cafeteria in Bourke Street for a cup of tea. It cost threepence. I asked for a second cup, for some reason thinking that I would not have to pay for it. It was to cost threepence, too. It arrived, but I had to refuse it. That small coin was all I had to pay for travel home by tram to Clifton Hill. In those times, and for some time into the future, I could virtually always say how much money I had in my pocket. There was so little, you see.

The Melbourne of 1938 had a population of well under one million, as I mentioned earlier. The last of the cable tram routes was still operating, Thornbury, or perhaps it was Preston being the destination of the tram from Bourke Street in the city. We would walk across the Merri Creek bridge in High Street to Queen's Parade, Clifton Hill, to catch a tram to the city. That walk saved us a penny. A friend and I were at the pictures one Saturday night in 1940 or 1941. When we came out of the *Plaza* in High Street, double-decker buses had taken over from the cable trams. So the gripman, who 'drove' the tram was, like the cable tram, no more. It was because we were to have double-decker buses that the level of the road had been lowered under the railway bridge where High Street meets Queen's Parade. Electric trams have long ago replaced the buses.

We were fairly close to the Clifton Hill and Westgarth railway stations, too, should we choose to travel by train. The trains of that time became known as the *red rattlers*. One could travel either first or second class. Each carriage had a number of separate compartments. I never ever went first class, I hardly need to say.

The city itself was of great interest to a 16 year-old *boy from the bush*. The tallest building then, if we disregard St Patrick's spire (and perhaps St Paul's), was the recently built *Manchester Unity*. It is still on the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets. There were some traffic lights, the police officer on point duty, however, being a very important part of traffic control. Police had those tall helmets then, and one did not see pistols in holsters. I doubt that any policewomen were on the streets in those days. There were, of course, many fewer vehicles then, some few still being horse-drawn.

There seemed to be a hotel on almost every corner. There were many cinemas. I saw *Snow White and the seven Dwarfs* at the *Metro* in Collins Street – or was it shown at the *Regent* or the *Plaza*? Outside the city centre, in suburbs like Fitzroy and Collingwood, slums were noticeable. Neon signs were a feature, especially just across the Yarra from Flinders Street Station where *Southbank* has more recently been created. The newspapers of the day would simply never, as they now do, print a swear word or make any reference to genitalia. The printed media would never cater to prurience by including *tits and bums* in newspapers or magazines. Even *bloody* had an embargo on it. People knew it as the 'great Australian adjective.'

For some time, I thought that sewer vents were flag poles. *Stink poles*, the kids called them. At least one aspect of the weather then is markedly different from today. I mean the occurrence of frosty mornings. It was quite normal in winter, sometimes for several days in a row, for lawns and nature strips, for example, to be frost-coated. Later, there would usually be marvellous sunshine.

A great events for me in 1938 was the victory of Carlton over Collingwood in the 1938 Grand Final. There were 96,834 people there, something better than one in ten of Melbourne's population. There was no booking of

seats for the masses those days; you simply lined up at the gates. Uncle Harold took his son, Alan, and me. Ron Todd, at full forward, was Carlton's big danger that day, but Jim Park was able to subdue him. (The Japanese killed Jim in New Guinea in the War.) In the Southern Stand outer, where we were, the crowd pushed the picket fence down and sat around and just outside the boundary line. A telegram of congratulations for me from Dad, who was a Collingwood barracker, arrived at Urquhart Street that night. Later, Uncle Charlie's wife, Clem, was adamant that she knew for sure that the match had been *fixed*. That worried me.

During the months of the second half of 1938, I had no income of my own earning. The arrangement, as I said earlier, was that Dad would send Auntie Lil ten shillings a week for this purpose. She was a very dear person, being always scrupulously fair in her treatment of me. Auntie Lil died in 1950. Uncle Harold married her sister, Annie Huggins, later. Auntie Jean was the wife of my uncle, Henry Rawson, a brother of both Auntie Lil and Auntie Annie. I understand that she objected to the marriage so strongly that there was never to be a reconciliation between her and Uncle Harold and his new wife.

Towards the end of the year, I explained to Auntie Lil that, early in 1939, I intended to come to Melbourne to live. I would get a job and board with her paying an appropriate sum each week. The nerve I had! I do not think that I even asked her if that would be all right. She agreed to my proposal. I think that I can say that I was not at all an obnoxious youth. I can easily believe, however, that she and Uncle Harold might well have liked to have their home to themselves with their children. So I went to Derri well before Christmas, and my new friend, Frank Speed, came home for a couple of weeks. He was still with us when the fires of Black Friday, 13 January 1939, caused so many deaths and so much destruction in Victoria.

Early in 1939, I returned to Urquhart Street, as before sharing a bedroom with Alan Martin. Getting a job was the next thing. Dad had spoken to his friend, Jim Fairbairn, MHR, about my being given a job at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fishermen's Bend. I knew this but, as I had not heard anything, I went about seeking work. I went for an interview at Healings the wireless manufacturers in the city. I later found that they were prepared to employ me, but in the meantime I had applied by letter for a job advertised in a newspaper.

### **The grocer boy**

One morning, Jack Halliwell turned up at the front door. He ran a cut-price grocery store in Sydney Road, Coburg, across the road, and south a bit, from the post office. I had made written application to him for a job that he had advertised. He asked me some questions, and agreed to employ me, the pay, as I remember, being about 37 shillings a week. The job offer pleased me. I started within a couple of days. Soon after I started, I received word about the job at Fishermen's Bend. Too late. Dad, understandably, was very annoyed with me. Had I gone to work there, I would have been in a reserved occupation. My life would have taken a very different course.

At first, I had to catch a bus over to Brunswick, and then a tram up Sydney Road to Coburg. Jack Halliwell gave me a loan of £5 or so, and I bought a second-hand bicycle. He took money out of my pay for a few weeks. I cycled the distance in all weathers. Sydney Road, Coburg, it goes without saying, was a much less busy vehicle thoroughfare than it is now. One Friday night, after work, I whizzed down the road on my bike, travelling beside a tram, virtually unimpeded, for a longish stretch. My brother, Alan, who had come by tram to see me with Vera Smith, who was later to become his wife, said later, 'You certainly can push that bike.'

Six of us, including the boss, all men, Percy, Len, Harry, Jim and Jack, worked in the shop in our white coats and white aprons. A well-sharpened pencil, preferably not a stub, we carried at an angle behind the ear. I was the junior worker. Percy and Len Womersley were brothers. Percy was Jack Halliwell's deputy. He was a strongly built man of about middle height. He was probably younger than 40. His hair was fair and straight. Shop assistant though he was, you could easily have taken him for a member of the upper middle-class, in the way that he conducted himself and in the way that he dressed outside shop hours. He liked the bowler hat. His suits were expensive. He was generally an elegant figure. So was his wife – a lovely looking, tall and dark woman who to this observer seemed just right to be Percy's wife. A year or so ago, I saw a news item about her in a Melbourne daily newspaper. She had died in her nineties. The news item gave the impression that she was a notable figure in the Coburg/Brunswick area. A sort of queen, I gathered.

Monday to Wednesday we spent, in the main, preparing for a very busy remainder of the week, including Friday

night and Saturday morning. During those early days of the week, we went about *bagging* goods like sugar, flour, fruits, etc., for sale later. We used very little string. During that time, my work confined me mainly to a room at the rear of the building. I worked on some of the less appealing tasks: opening boxes of dates, for example, and weighing them up into the required amounts. Often, grubs riddled the boxes of dates.

Up the front, the others went through bag after 70 pound bag of sugar, for one thing. They served customers. They talked all the time. Sex was the favourite topic. This was the time of the *phony* war in Europe and conversation about it ran sex a close second. My worst job, on Monday morning, was to clean the shop window, brass frame and all. The window, by the way, had very little on show – because of the cheap prices, it was not necessary to dress up windows to attract customers. I was reminded of this lack of window dressing when I visited Moscow in 1988.

On Thursday, we became very busy, and yes, we as good as ran around the shop gathering items that the customer on the other side of the counter wanted. Once all the items were in a pile on the counter, one began to arrive at the cost to the customer. Choosing a suitable surface, say, a four pound bag of sugar, we would move one item at a time aside, its price being recorded on the sugar bag. Believe me we were all very quick at adding up the bills. We rarely made errors – up the figures, then down them.

We would particularly annoy the boss if we accepted a dud two shilling coin. The receiving of such a coin was not unusual. The idea was to inspect for an absence of clear-cut milling on the coins' circumference, or to toss a suspect coin onto the marble platform along the front of the cash register. You listened for the sound it made. On Friday nights, the boss paid us our wages from the money in the till. My work paid me well now, compared with the earlier days at Derri. I was even able to buy a sport coat, a pair of trousers and a tie on one groundbreaking sortie to a shop almost next door. The owner of the shop said to my boss, 'That boy's got good taste.'

The restocking of the shelves was another big job that we had to do, either from the back rooms or upstairs, mostly after closing time. One learned to stack bottle after bottle, or tin after tin, on to a bent arm, then race back to the shelves, there to place them. Perhaps the next thing to do would be to run up the rickety staircase, heave a carton or crate of goods onto a shoulder, and wobble back down the stairs with it. Jim, who was a small person, did not ever manage to master the trick of carrying many bottles or cans on an arm. He would arrive at the shelves with, say, only four or five items, sometimes to a derisive comment from one or other of us. We could not see why he could not manage a better contribution. Everyone had to do his share. Still, we liked him.

Jack Halliwell bought in large quantities and this was a big part of the reason for his success. A huge truck load of goods would arrive in the backyard and two or three of us would unload it. One day, on the truck, I sat down for a moment while waiting for someone to receive goods from me. The boss, of middle height, was very thin (the fellows thought that he indulged in too much sex), square-shouldered, rather sour-looking at any time. He came up to the vehicle with the blackest look on his face. He did not approve of my taking a rest. He was no friend of unionism, that one, but he had his good qualities. No one took anything like an hour at meal time. The others did not so I did not. I thought that unions were certainly necessary if the bosses were not to exploit the workers. Why could not all workers see that, I wondered.

This really was a cut-price grocery shop. I remember that a woman came in one day with a long list of groceries on a piece of paper. She said, 'Price these.' I did so. She said, 'You're cheaper than that so-called cut-price place down the street.' That revelation would have been no surprise to Jack Halliwell. We had hordes of customers those last three days of the week. A complaining customer did not get much sympathy out of him – hell, he had customers to burn. Not satisfied? Go somewhere else!

Sometimes a customer would make it plain to me –it was usually an elderly woman – that she would prefer to be served by one of the more mature workers. Halliwell and his wife asked me home to their house in Bell Street for a meal one evening and, attempting to find a girlfriend for me, they also asked a sweet little brunette. Their scheme failed. She did not take to me at all. I did have a girl friend for a while when I was with Halliwells. I used to ride my bike to Coburg at night sometimes and at weekends. My pals back in Northcote were more important to me than she was, however, so that romance ended.

I fell heavily for a girl named Iris Mattock. She, I suspect, found me a little *slow*. Iris was a salesperson at *Ezywalkin* on the other side of the street. Down a bit south. She was small, slim, had long dark hair and was vivacity itself. I was only 17 or 18. To see her, produced spasms of excitement, of nervousness, unprecedented and never again equalled in intensity in me. Teenage vulnerability in matters of romance is widely recognized.

Once when we were *parking* near the Coburg Lake, she said, 'You don't put any pressure in your kisses.' Subsequently I concentrated on *pressure* kissing methods with Marcia and Jean Taylor, another member of our group. It took them a while to accept, and to get to like, my new osculatory technique. (Mind you, neither of them ever said that she liked my new way of kissing girls – but there were other, unspoken, messages that confirmed my opinion.)

In 1939, the Lemons, Kelso and Marcia, and their parents, had come to live in Dennis, which was no distance at all away from Urquhart Street. Fred Lemon was in the railways, and his job there was to open and close the railway gates at the Victoria Road crossing. Frank, Kel and I became almost inseparable, and we were later joined by Wally Crooks who, like Frank, worked at MacRobertson's confectionery factory in Fitzroy. I was still fond of Marcia, and we got on well, but she seemed, anyway, to prefer Frank. I was terribly jealous at times. She married an airman later.

In those days (perhaps such gatherings are still enjoyed), there used to be annual grocers' picnics, butchers' picnics, confectioners' picnics and so on. Sometimes, a picnic was held at Portarlington, or Sorrento, or Portsea. A group of us would attend an appropriate picnic, travelling across Port Phillip Bay and back on the paddle steamer *Weeroona* from Port Melbourne.. They were simply wonderful outings. *Roll out the Barrel* was a popular song around the piano, especially on the way home. The *Weeroona*, I understand, became an officers' mess up north somewhere during the war.

I was only 17 when the war began. I seem to remember Prime Minister Bob Menzies saying, 'It is my melancholy duty...', on wireless at the north end of Hoddle Street with Frank one evening. Perhaps he had a portable radio. Were there portable, battery wireless sets then? I remember thinking (hoping?) that it would all be over before I was old enough to go. Very soon, we could see a guard on the railway bridge over the Merri Creek at its northern approach over Urquhart Street. That did not last long though. Then Melbourne, from time to time, had blackouts at night, with a couple of searchlight beams darting around the sky finally fixing on their (friendly) quarry flying high overhead.

In June 1941, when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, the fighting qualities of the Red Army much impressed Uncle Harold and Auntie Lil. She commented that a system cannot be so bad when the Soviet people fight so heroically to defend it. That, at the time, seemed to me to be sound reasoning.

In those times, I began to take an interest in aeroplanes, Frank, to some extent, promoting that interest. I used to read aeroplane tales in magazines like *Daredevil Aces* and others equally trashy. Frank told me about the RAAF with its Hawker Demons and Avro Ansons, and the RAF, too, with its Hawker Furies, Hawker Harts, Hawker Hurricanes and Wellington bombers. Then became available illustrations of, wait for it, the Vickers Supermarine Spitfire. It had eight machine guns, for heaven's sake. We talked about navies, too, and I learned the difference between battleships, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, etc. Frank, though a Catholic, was an Anglophile, I do believe. He believed that though they tended to muddle through, they won in the end. We pored over three of his books: *The King's Navy*, *The King's Army*, *The King's Air Force*.

Frank and Wally Crooks had done some training with the Militia They showed me some of the movements of bayonet fighting. Using a broom in the Boort post office, I later went about executing the butt stroke with Bryan as my adversary. The head of the broom came off, striking him a terrible blow to the side of the head. Whether that caused the problem I do not know, but for years he had a problem of head pain.

Frank, Kel and Wally were all very decent and sensible young individuals as I earlier intimated. I was fortunate to be part of that group. Kel, obviously, could not join the forces. Wally did, but I have quite lost track of him. Kel died of cancer in 1990. I had seen almost nothing of him over the years. I have seen very little of Frank, either.

### **The confectionery factory**

Jack Halliwell was not pleased when, some time in the second half of 1940, I told him that I would be leaving in a few days to begin work at MacRobertson's factory. I should have given him more notice. A couple of the others, too, thought that I was foolish to leave. Frank had persuaded me to change jobs; it seemed to be a good idea, especially because that job would be closer to home, and there would be no Friday night or Saturday morning work. (In fact, I did work some Saturday mornings later, being paid overtime, however.)

MacRobertson's confectionery factory covered a number of blocks in Fitzroy. Sir MacPherson Robertson was a tycoon in the confectionery industry. He was also noted as a philanthropist. He was by now in his eighties but, dressed up in white coat and trousers, he often walked around his kingdom, looking here, looking there. Looking, too, at the women, ushering them through doorways with a paternal (?) hand. He had an eye for the girls, that lad. One day he came into my working area and in no time had one arm around the shoulder of my attractive female workmate. People used to say that his factories produced over a thousand lines, a line being a type of confection. It was easily the largest such place in Victoria – probably in Australia – places like Hoadleys and Allens being not at all comparable in size, variety or output. Employees had to punch a clock in those days. For some reason, I did not have to do that.

For a short time, I was in the dispatch section. Here we put together orders that vehicles would take to outlets around Melbourne. Without really being aware of doing so, I moved around at a fast pace, as I did at Halliwell's. Later, when I was working in the flavour room, one of the workers, a union official, came in for supplies. He referred to me when speaking to my boss as 'the snake.' I later realized that what he was referring to was my scampering around the dispatch section. I felt a bit hurt about it, of course. After all, I thought, I do support the trade union movement. I wished to explain to him why I did my work so quickly but I never ever did.

Later, I worked in a large storehouse. Then they sent me to work in the flavour room, my boss there being Ted Tame. I liked him and I liked working there. My pay went down a little because I was now working under the confectioners' awards, whereas before I was getting the storemen and packers' rate of pay. This seemed a bit unfair. A senior boss said that perhaps they would make a pay adjustment if I made myself indispensable. Some hope of that! In the event, I committed a blunder that might well have resulted in my being sacked. A foreman of one of the rooms came to get a quantity of peppermint oil to put in a batch of sweets. I gave him spearmint oil. My error ruined the batch. He was on the verge of punching me, but Ted stopped him. Just the same, the foreman really should have made sure that he had the right flavour before using it.

The worst job was making up a big wooden tub of flour and whatever to make an adhesive to stick labels on cardboard boxes, cans, etc. The flavour room was, strictly speaking, a part of the laboratory. Dr Fritz Stiebel, a German Jew, was in charge of it. He had as his assistant a young woman named Fay. (I should prefer not to include her surname.) Ted was quite determined that Dr Stiebel should not get to know any of the *tricks* of the flavour room. He was very curt with the Doctor despite Ted's inferior position in the setup.

Australia is a multicultural nation now. It has been for years. Even so, large numbers of Australians oppose the situation. Particularly, they oppose the influx of Asian people over more recent years. There was a huge influx of people from a war-ravaged Europe, beginning in the middle 1940's. Before that occurred, when you mingled with the Australian population, and as far as race was concerned, people looked much the same everywhere. Except, of course, that we had our aboriginal people, the original owners of Australia, and a small population of Chinese citizens. There was a sprinkling of people of other races, as well, obviously.

Fritz Stiebel stood out as being different. His given name suggested that he was German. He was unmistakably a member of the Jewish race. Most Australians – including this one – knew nothing much at all, if anything, about the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people. Perhaps he managed to escape to Australia from Europe. Perhaps he had been here for some time. It would have surprised me if he did not meet with prejudice, much of it, in the Australian society of those times. I feel compelled to comment, as well, that almost every other person among those with whom I have contact in these times seems to hold racist opinions. Asians are now the main targets.

Dr Stiebel was obviously a foreigner as I have said. He was a short person. He was a gentle person. His head was large and without much hair, and I always think of him when I see Immanuel Kant depicted in a book or whatever. His feet were large and he had an odd walking action – his walk was a sort of waddle. I do not say these things to denigrate him – I had no reason to dislike him.

After a while, I began work in the laboratory proper, that is, with Doctor Stiebel and Fay. The main job I did was each morning to go over to a huge factory section where workers were manufacturing chocolate. I would bring back samples of several different types of chocolates that were in the process of being manufactured. I would weigh carefully a gram of each type, put them in crucibles, and place them in an oven. I would then weigh them again. The difference in weight indicated the amount of cocoa butter that the workers would need to add to that batch. I did not ever ruin a batch of chocolates – thank goodness.

Another job was to help in the control of the cocoa bean grub. The beans came from the Gold Coast of Africa. They stored the bags of beans in a huge warehouse; from time to time I had to 'paint' a sticky goo in a band along all the walls. The intention was, I think, to prevent the grubs travelling up the walls. Where to, I do not remember. There was a machine that produced a fog of a pesticide of some kind. The reason I worked on Saturday mornings at times was to operate the machine in various rooms. I had much of the factory to myself, and could sample all sorts of things. The snowballs were delicious. The *Old Gold* room was a favourite, too. Most of the rooms, in normal working hours, had women workers. I felt a bit intimidated walking through a room.

Not long after I started in the laboratory, Dr Stiebel finished. One day he just did not arrive at work. The authorities took him, I heard. An enemy alien, I supposed. Fay took over the running of the laboratory. She was a Presbyterian Ladies' College girl and had matriculated there, one of her subjects being chemistry. She had nearly gone *up to the shop*, but her parents (he was a big wig with a State Authority) decided against that for financial reasons, I gathered. (The *shop* was Melbourne University, the only university in Victoria then.)

She wore a green dustcoat, which colour blended pleasingly with her sandy and rather frizzy hair. She was no beauty but her figure was cute. Her freckles were cute, too. She had prominent and rather large, meticulously brushed and very white teeth. When she ate, say, an apple, she did so with verve but yet with the decorum of the lady that she was. She was not tall. She spoke in the educated manner of those that were products of the private school system of the day. Ted Tame embarrassed me mightily one day. Fay walked through the flavour room (I did not yet know her well), and I commented, crudely, to him on her shapely bottom. My actual words? 'Look at that arse.' He called her to us and told her what I had said – the exact words. She reacted with the composure that you might expect from a PLC girl.

So from then until I finished work to go into the army in December 1941, Fay was my boss. There was no chance, though, that I would agree to paint that goo in the cocoa bean warehouse again. On second thoughts, perhaps had she asked me earnestly, I would have. It had never occurred to me that we would *get together*, but she made it plain that she liked me and we became friendly. Ted Tame knew what would become of our relationship. He said to me, kindly enough, that parents, having provided education for their daughter in the way they had, would never agree to her having any sort of continuing relationship with someone like me. I was acutely aware of my inferior position in society. When I met them the parents were friendly and kind, but it was all over by mid 1942.

Fay had a boyfriend. He was overseas with the AIF He was a musician with an important symphony orchestra. I ran into Fay in the Melbourne central business district in 1954. She had four small children with her. She had married her soldier. I was a warrant officer at the time. She said that it pleased her that I seemed to be doing quite well.

During the 1941 football season, I played with MacRobertson's team in the Saturday Morning League. (Perhaps I did not work Saturday mornings then.) Other teams included ones from other factories and the breweries. I was not a huge success in the second ruck or forward pocket. I could take a good high mark, but some opponents easily brushed me aside. I was so lightweight.

In 1940, my brother, Alan, had joined the RAAF as a wireless operator. The authorities called Bryan up, but the army discharged him as medically unfit after a short time. My sister, Jessie married Harry Gray in 1939. A child did not survive. The marriage did not last. Schizophrenia afflicted poor Jess in the early fifties. She died in 1988. Alan married Veronica (Vera) Smith in 1940.

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## Chapter 2    The war effort: a tiny, unheroic contribution

### Army life begins

On 3 December 1941, I reported to the Westgarth drill hall. At an end were my years at 24 Urquhart Street with Uncle Harold, Auntie Lil, Alan and Thelma. It had been, for me at least, a happy relationship. So too, I repeat, the happy years of friendship with Frank, Kelso and Wally were at an end. I was to make many other friends of great value to me during the years that ensued, I hasten to say.

Travelling by train, a number of us recruits arrived at Ballarat. At the showgrounds, soldiers greeted us with cries of, 'You'll be sorry.' Since I knew something of the Morse code, I had asked the authorities to allocate me to Signals. I had joined 2 Cavalry Division Signals (Not a horse in sight.) Major-General WJM Locke commanded the division. 2 Cavalry Division soon after that became 2 Motor Division. My rank was signalmán, the equivalent of private. Our Commanding Officer was Lieutenant-Colonel Jim Downey. He interviewed me after a day or two. My documents said that I was a laboratory assistant (at MacRobertson's), and I was, too, in a sense, but not in the sense that interested him and planning: I was quite lacking in educational and professional qualifications, as I have explained.

Very soon, the medics vaccinated us and gave us inoculations. Some of the fellows were, for a time, rather badly affected by those medical precautions. In no time, we were learning foot drill. Corporal Joe Cronin, a sadist I reckoned, had us left-righting around what was probably a horse trotting track. We practised Morse code. We slept in tents on floor-boards, palliasses helping to ease the discomfort. The pay was six bob a day for a seven day week. (It was an anomaly of the times, that we in the Militia were on higher pay than AIF soldiers.) The food was not at all up to Auntie Lil's standard. Constipation did not help matters.

Within a few days of my enlistment, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour. Not long after that, before Christmas Day, 1941, anyway, we had moved to a new camp site at St Albans Park, Geelong. A war in Europe was one thing. A war in our part of the world was a much more serious matter most of us would have thought. The fact was that we really had little idea, although only for a short time, just how very seriously the war was threatening Australia's future.

Guard duty now came along to help make life more miserable. We had no weapons to carry yet. There were not enough of them. Night was the worst time. Someone would wake you, at midnight, say, and for the next four hours you would walk round and round the perimeter of the park. Lie down under a tree for a sleep. That was a strong temptation. To do that, though, would be a very serious breach of discipline, resulting, quite possibly, in a spell in confinement. I had a bit of a snooze at least once, just the same. Life was so different now!

I do not remember any buildings at St Albans Park. Up our end, there was one tap – no showers; cold water shaves. There were *thunder boxes* for toilets, with a hessian screen giving a little privacy. On Christmas Day, 1941, there was much jollity, *Volum* beer, a Geelong brew, being the major stimulant among the chaps. Too many huge tin mugs of *Volum* had me throwing up grandly. There was plenty of food, the quality being reasonably good. Some of the fellows used to go absent without leave into Geelong at nights, among them Frank Nippard. He liked to dance. He was to become a very close friend.

Lieutenant Ken (*Grunty*) Hunter took a detachment of us out for a few weeks to a site at Frogmore on the Barwon River. We had a transmitting and receiving wireless set, a 101. We became part of a wireless net, one aim being to give those of us who were to be wireless telegraphy operators some practical experience. We were, most of us, in any case, learners. On top of that, the atmospheric conditions often made it impossible to establish and maintain good communications with the equipment of the times. Particularly at night. It was a big thrill for me when, on the first occasion, I managed to receive a complete message, slow though the process of success was. It became popular, even sometimes on the air waves, to use the two Morse signals *dah dah dit, dit dit dah dit* when you felt like being rude to, say, a fellow operator. (Hint: the two letters were *G* and *F*.)

The unit had issued us with our Rifles, short magazine Lee Enfield, .303 by now. Mine was stamped 1910. It had been made before the First World War. Sometimes it felt good in your hands – other times it was a pest. On occasions you got into trouble through not attending thoroughly to its cleanliness. One of the things, the main thing, used to clean the rifle was the pull-through. Here was a length of strong cord, longer than the rifle barrel, a loop or two at one end and a short length of brass tubing at the other. You dropped the brass tubing down the

barrel of the rifle through the breech end until it emerged from the other end. Then you grabbed the brass tubing and, having placed a small square of oiled flannelette in one of the loops, you 'pulled the rifle through.' When not in use, the pull-through – the cord rolled up around the brass – and a small cylinder of oil were stored away in the butt-trap of the rifle. Later, in Western Australia, we were issued with a different rifle, although it was the same calibre as the Lee Enfield. As I recall, it was made in Canada. It had an aperture, or *peep*, sight.

There was a Thompson sub-machine gun, too (*Tommy gun*.) We took it in turns, under proper supervision, to fire it one day down by the river. At last they issued us with steel helmets. Orders required us to wear them for some hours each day – to become used to them, I suppose. One fellow, Arthur someone, liked wearing his so much that he seemed hardly ever to take it off his head. I think that he fancied himself as a warrior. We swam in the river a lot, and it was our means of keeping bodily clean, as well. Poker was popular. Several of us hired a car and driver for £5 one Saturday night and went to Melbourne. We travelled at 90 mph some of the time. It was a big Ford V8. *Snowy* Brett and Bill Verney, as well as Frank Nippard, were valued friends of mine by now.

Early in March 1942, we moved our unit to a big camp in Stud Road, Rowville, Victoria. Conditions were much better there. The area even had buildings, including a 'wet' canteen. (The authorities had only recently sanctioned the establishment of the canteens.) Again we lived in tents, now having to dig slit trenches nearby. The trenches were full of water much of the time. It was not unusual for someone being, perhaps, half-boozed, to step into a trench on his way back to his tent. Some of us did our first rifle shooting practice, travelling by truck all the way to the Williamstown Rifle Range. Situated near the sea, the range area has become a housing estate. One expected the .303 rifle to 'kick' and hurt the shoulder. This occurred, though, only if you did not hold it properly to the shoulder. Still, it was a big change from a *pea* rifle. Alex Grieve blew *reveille* on his trumpet each morning and he blew *lights out*, too. In more recent times, he became a world identity as a French horn player. He received an Order of Australia award in 1994. The award was for his contribution to music. He is also a talented graphic artist.

We began to learn about the motor vehicle, too, and Corporal Robertson, who conducted a written test on the internal combustion engine, told me that I topped the test. My time working at Urquhart's garage had provided me with some knowledge of engines. They taught us to drive, mainly in International 12 cwt trucks. One day, after a lesson, Captain Jones told me that I had passed the driving test. Very soon after that, I had to drive a group of men to near Prince's Bridge, Melbourne. They were to row, or something. Believe me, they were lucky to get there and back in one piece. Often, from then on, perhaps when Captain Keith (*Happy*) Howard was giving us a lecture on wireless theory or some allied topic, Sergeant Stan Hatwell would come into the hut and ask for 'Sig Rawson please.' This often meant that I was to drive some major or other in a Ford staff car to Dandenong. Confidence? I had very little. It was all very exciting. Later, they gave me 15111, a Chevrolet 15 cwt utility, which then became my responsibility. I took it later on a train to Western Australia, and kept it for a year or so.

Route marching became a normal part of training now. One night, Frank Nippard and I had been in bed asleep for, perhaps, half an hour, having earlier had several pots of beer at the wet canteen, when up we all had to get. It was to be a 10 mile route march. Hell, we were miserable! There was one epic march up into the Dandenongs, which march, thank heavens, had to be concluded on the second day because our brigade was to march through Melbourne. They trucked us back to Rowville. I can still hear Bill Payne, the silly bugger, calling out, 'Sir, we want to finish the march.' Like bloody hell we did! I can remember Johnny Goodwin's feet – so badly blistered they were. Bill and Johnny were very good friends of mine. They have been gone a long time now.

During the time at Rowville, I went out on another detachment similar to the one from St Albans Park. We camped in an apple orchard at Red Hill on the Mornington Peninsula. It was April 1942, and there were apples everywhere. There were no problems with constipation there after the apples got going. As for other foods, we did well there, too. Most of the time we were there, the supply depot was, for some reason, over-supplying us with rations. Corporal Joe Bain, our cook, took advantage of this bad piece of administration. So did we all. Fay and I were still contacting each other at this time. She wrote me a letter in which she stated that she was 'pleased to receive a visitor,' a few days before. For a time, I did not understand her meaning.

Many of us were keen to join the AIF (Australian Imperial Force). For a time after I was called up there was an embargo on transfers to the AIF. The government lifted the ban. Months after I had applied, the changeover was effected, in August 1942, as I have already mentioned. There were a few in our unit who chose not to join the AIF.

## To Mullewa, WA

We, some of us, became 5 Signals Squadron, 3 Motor Brigade Group, the 5 later being dropped. Major (*Buzz*) Leeming was our OC (officer commanding). Captain Jack (*Ash* or Bill) Ashby was second-in-command. The brigade was formed in May 1942. It was commanded by Brigadier KA McKenzie. Bill Ashby told some of us in more recent years that he and *Buzz* chose their unit members. They preferred those that could play football. Though he should not have, *Buzz* as good as told us, by referring to the longest stretch of straight railway line in the world, that we were off to Western Australia. One of the brigade's roles on arrival in WA was to operate as a mobile striking force.

Lieutenant Ron Jacoby was to take an advance party, and about 20 of us boarded a troop train at Mob Siding, Seymour, on 3 October 1942. It took us six days to reach Mullewa, a town inland from Geraldton. In the first day or two on the train, I lost all my money playing poker. The days were OK, but the nights were not so good because the crowded conditions made sleeping difficult. The smells did not help, either. 'Who dropped that?'

It was the task of the advance party to prepare a camp site. The rest of the unit was due to arrive in two or three weeks. There were no buildings of any sort. No latrines. No water supply. There were plenty of mulga trees and insects and some near relations in great variety. The thing that I remember enjoying most was huge mugs of black tea. We put up tents, slept on the ground, and worked hard, the heat even in October being rather fierce. Whenever our superiors allowed us to do so, the heat being so savage, we wore a minimum of clothing. This baring of bodies to the sun meant that white men became brown men. Well, not quite. I do not know about Greek gods, but some of those young Aussies might well have been so described.

Digging latrines was a rotten job. Using them was not the most dignified position to adopt either. If you think about it, though, it is a natural position. What is more, most become accustomed to doing things that way in no time at all. Shallow-trench latrines; deep-trench latrines; bore-hole latrines; a simple hole dug with an entrenching tool; they all became part of the craft of waste disposal — and I return to this indelicate topic later.

Now let me deal with that marvel of urine disposal, the *pissaphone*. You could not have men peeing indiscriminately here there and everywhere. At least you had to do something to try to control where they disposed of their urine. The hygiene bloke came in here. He buried a length of galvanized iron down-pipe at an appropriate angle into the earth. Perhaps there was a bed of stones. A small iron trough placed on the top served as a receptacle. Occasionally, a skite complained that the receptacle needed an increase in size. We were some distance out of the town. The town was out of bounds. That meant nothing to some of the older and bolder men. Sometimes, I gasped at the sheer audacity of some of my comrades. Sometimes, I thought, am I a man or am I not?

The nights were quite marvellous. The sky sparkled at its splendidly beautiful best. Oh, the vastness of it all! A mystery it used to be. But science has solved for us many of the puzzles of the universe. No matter how hot the day, it was necessary for most to have covering, a blanket, perhaps, in bed at night. People called the breeze the *Geraldton doctor*.

In the mornings there was frequently the call of 'Take your hands off it.' On occasions, the well-endowed ones liked to exhibit their erections. A steel helmet, hanging from its chin-strap, was one of the many adornments one might have the dubious pleasure of viewing. 'I've got a fat' was almost a standard reveille-time remark. For quite a time, our ration of water for all purposes was a service water bottle a day: a quart, perhaps. With most the washing of genitals and anus received a priority. A number of unit members were troubled with a urinary tract infection that we knew as 'fish hooks.' The water supply was the source.

By the time *Colonus* had won the 1942 Melbourne Cup, the rest of the unit had arrived. I was a member of *H* Troop; we were the wireless telegraphists. Another troop was responsible for line communications. They were the *Cable wallahs* — what a bunch! There were instrument mechanics and, too, there were cooks, clerks, dispatch riders, drivers and others. We numbered about 100. We were next to Brigade Headquarters. (Adrian Quist, the tennis player, was an officer on that headquarters.) The brigadier now was a Collins Street dentist. His name was Clareborough.

Well before Christmas, 1942, our unit title had changed to 3 Squadron Signals, 1 Australian Armoured Division. Our brigade of motorised infantry and an armoured brigade made up, with ancillary units, the armoured division. Normally, though, a division would have three brigades not two. Our brigade's motor

regiments were 4 Australian Motor Regiment, 26 Australian Motor Regiment and 101 Australian Motor Regiment. (The Japanese heard about this formidable array of might and sensibly decided not to invade Western Australia. At least that's my story.) By September 1943, 1 Armoured Division had been disbanded, and our brigade had been placed under command of 2 Infantry Division. That division was itself disbanded in April 1944.

Major-General HCH Robertson was General Officer Commanding 1 Australian Armoured Division. *Red Robbie* was a regular officer who had commanded 19 Infantry Brigade in the Western Desert. Blamey banished him to WA, some said. When the Armoured Division was disbanded he became GOC of 2 Infantry Division. Later he replaced Bennett at 3 Australian Corps, and later still assumed command of Western Command. After the war ended, he was promoted to lieutenant-general and became commander of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan.

The senior commander in WA was Lieutenant-General H Gordon Bennett who headed HQ, 3 Australian Corps. Born in 1887, he had served with high distinction in the First World War. He was at Gallipoli, and later commanded 3 Infantry Brigade at the age of 29. He had been promoted to major-general in 1926. In 1940, he became GOC 8 Australian Infantry Division in Malaya and Singapore. He escaped after the capitulation. Not everyone thought that so leaving his troops was an acceptable thing for him to do. Some gave him the unkind nickname of *Sandshoes*. He had his critics, but someone decided, just the same, to promote him to lieutenant-general. He was *kicked upstairs*, so to speak. He sought a more active role, flying to Melbourne to see Blamey. But Blamey would not satisfy his wishes. He then asked that his appointment be terminated so that he might return to civilian life on 15 April 1944. He died in Sydney on 1 August 1962.

Friendships began further to cement. It followed fairly naturally that those that shared a tent at Mullewa and got on well together, preferred to keep sharing a tent when the unit moved to another site. It happened that way with us, although I do not mean to say that there was never ever any variation of personnel in the tent that I occupied. During our approximately four months' stay in Mullewa, I visited Geraldton on at least a couple of occasions. The ocean was wonderful. One day, I sold to a pawnbroker a gold filling from one of my teeth for nine shillings. Another time, the unit sent Ivan Fisher and me, with 15111 and a wireless set, to a site near Geraldton to provide communications back to brigade headquarters for a Western Australian Militia Light Horse Regiment

## **The Lieutenant and the Signalman**

An officer of that unit was very helpful and friendly. He lived on a big property not far out of Northampton with his wife and lovely small daughter. Ivan and I could not both be away from the wireless set together. He took me for an evening meal to his home, and I could not understand why we left his home much earlier than I thought was necessary. He had driven a number of us to Northampton in an army one-ton utility vehicle. The others had gone to a film that was some time from finishing. He had parked the utility in the main street. The street was without people in evidence. He took the driver's place, and indicated that I should sit in the passenger seat. I did so. Almost immediately, he placed his right hand on my crutch. He said, 'Mind if I play?'

As I have said before, I was very naive in my youth. Not that I was unaware that there was such a thing as homosexual experience. Even so, I had not the slightest idea of his intentions. For a couple of seconds I simply sat still. I was, you could say, dumbfounded. He was a lieutenant and I was only a signalman. Because of the billowing out nature, the voluminous style, of the crutch section of my trousers, he did not reach his mark before I got myself together. I said, 'I need a piss,' and left the front seat in a hurry. I got into the rear of the vehicle and awaited the arrival of the others. I thought: 'Bugger him, what does he think I am? Such a nice bloke. Does his wife know that he is like that? Do his fellow officers know? His poor sweet little daughter. Do the chaps at the film know? What will they think of me?' He stayed in the driver's seat.

He failed with me, but that did not stop him trying with Ivan, too, in the next day or two, even though he must surely have thought that I would tell Ivan. It was not my intention to spread the details of the event around then. He was a likeable fellow, and I did not want to harm his reputation. I decided that I would tell Ivan only if the lieutenant asked him to tea. The lieutenant did ask him. I told Ivan. Thus prepared, Ivan quickly knocked the officer's hand away, told him to 'fuck off' and then left his presence.

When Ivan and I got back to our unit, we were telling a group of our friends about the incident. It was embarrassing when it came out that the officer was a cousin of one of our friends. For a long time – but not then

– it has been my opinion that nature made homosexual men and women the way they are: they are, so to speak, as *normal* as heterosexuals. (The officer seems to have been bi-sexual.) In all my years in the army, I saw almost nothing of homosexuality. In those times, homosexuality was engaged in very much more covertly than is the case today, of course.

## Mingenew, WA

Mingenew was our next stop. I had my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, on 2 April 1943, there. A telegram arrived from Dad. That night we celebrated in the tent, drinking our small ration of bottled beer. *Emu* it was: an unpopular West Australian brew. Later that night, a gale force wind blew and the tent fell down on us. We drove the tent pegs in much deeper when we put the tent up again.

Not long after that a miracle occurred. The OC promoted me to corporal. I do not want to overdo the self-deprecatory bit, but I simply could not, and still cannot, understand why the OC preferred me before many others in *H* Troop. Frank Nippard, Ken Tulloch, Bill Verney and the others in the tent were kind about it all. The two stripes, a few days later, saved me from being charged, Major Leeming told me, for neglecting to keep the steering box of 15111 topped up with oil. I knew a little about engines but I had never heard of a steering box. One aspect of being a corporal was just wonderful: I was no longer rostered for duty in the kitchen. The realization that as long as I kept my stripes I would not again be a *slushie* came as a special joy to me. Oh, those rotten greasy pots and pans! Many years later, *Buzz* Leeming told me that it was Captain (*Happy*) Howard *H* Troop commander, who proposed my promotion. *Happy*, from a wealthy Melbourne family, died in a motor accident in Borneo a year or two later.

Under *Red Robbie*, ' as General Robertson was known to all, the division's training schedule became tougher and tougher. A route march of 24 miles or so was not unusual. I had been a corporal for only a couple of weeks when the unit sent me off to attend NCO's Training Cadre Course No 4. The course lasted only two weeks, but it was, as fellows said, a *bastardry* course. It had mainly to do with weapon training and foot drill. The discipline was designed, I think it's fair to say, to break the spirit. Yes, I know, the Foreign Legion was probably worse.

A couple of NCOs did 'toss their rank in' and rejoin their units. On the staff were three warrant officers class 1. They were great men, no doubt, for the training role they played, but real bastards we reckoned. They were Thomas, Watson and Hannell. *Fango* Watson was easily the most famous of the trio. His soldiering style made him famous. At the time, he was RSM of an armoured regiment. Years later, he became RSM at Royal Military College, Duntroon. Later still, he was commissioned. This, some thought, was in some ways a pity, for his aura deserted him, it was said. In 1958, Major Hannell was Chief Instructor at the School of Military Intelligence, Middle Head, NSW.

One day we were on one of the many parades: move a finger, look sideways, scratch your bum, rattle your eating utensils – yes, on meal parades, too – and you were gone: 'Take a drill soldier.' Or two drills, or three – more about them later. Back to the parade. A soldier near me, when we were stood at ease, fumbled his grasp of his rifle. 'Drop it,' ordered Hannell. The soldier, perhaps thinking, 'Surely the bastard can't order me to do that,' did nothing. 'Drop it,' said Hannell. The soldier took his hand away from the weapon and it fell to the ground. 'Now pick it up and clean it later,' Hannell shouted. 'You rotten swine,' I thought. The soil was sandy. If on one of the frequent arms' inspections the inspecting officer found even a speck of sand, or dust, or any other foreign matter on or in the rifle, you were sure to get at least one drill. That is, you would attend a defaulters' parade later that day.

Our unit did not have defaulters' parades. Corporal Jim Trinnick, from our unit, attended the course, too. He was 32 or so at the time. I saw him just recently, for the first time since those days. He told me that on one occasion an instructor goaded him so viciously that he went very, very close to bayoneting him. The instructor realized that. He said, 'OK corporal, I know how you feel.' Jim was one of those that went away *owing them drills*. Do not ask me how it was that I missed out on that that distinction.

Not far from the main parade ground was the drill area. It was not level like a parade ground; the land sloped

upwards on each side of it. When the syllabus for the day had been completed, some of us went back to our tents, there perhaps to ponder over the possibility that they would not miss you if you gave the drill a miss. One puffed a cigarette, perhaps, making sure not to throw the match on the tent floor. Take a leak. Put on all webbing equipment, including back pack and haversack. Put on your gas mask haversack, steel helmet – the lot. Grab your rifle. Then the chosen few left their tents for an appointment with a sadist let loose for half an hour. A sadist who, doing his absolute best in the way of bastardry, particularly liked to have the squad double up and down the slopes at the short trail. (Understand that some of those sadists managed also to be bloody good fellows.) To explain those terms would be too boring all round, so I ask you to excuse me. I proved, by the way, that it was possible not to attend a drill parade and to get away with it. Our persecutors did not always write down our names when they handed out drills.

*Red Robbie* reviewed the final parade. He told us that we were up to the standard of first-class privates. I thought, you old sod, you know damn well that we were better than that. Training like that got into you a bit. When you got back to your unit, you tended to be so ‘mad with the zeal’ that you were in some danger of over-doing things. Most cooled down after a while, however. Your mates were likely to ‘put you in the picture,’ as well.

In our tent we got on very well, although on more than one occasion arguments about this or that saw me holding one point of view and my mates another. I did find, and always have found, that some people, at times, take a highly critical, an unfair and intolerant point of view, about other people. The rank and file endlessly slated officers and senior other-ranks, who were the centre pieces of army gossip. I often got into trouble for defending someone in discussion. I do not mean to suggest, however, that I was in any way morally superior to my pals. I suspect that more than one of them thought that I had to be rather dim-witted to hold the opinions that I expressed from time to time. Non-conformist? I suppose that I was becoming one. I never ever did, though, become an activist in any real sense.

Church parade was held on Sunday. There was no real pressure to attend, in our unit, at least. The regiments and battalions usually had a chaplain, but units like ours, of squadron size, did not. Those of us that did not attend, had to do jobs in the unit lines. We did see a film from time to time in the West, but perhaps not when we were at Mingenew. By this time, we had been on leave by train to Perth at least once, those visits being highlights of our service life. Most of the time we had virtually no contact with people other than members of the army. Normally, we had no access to newspapers. There was not a wireless in our tent, and I cannot think of anyone who had one. We did, of course, have our transmitter and receiver sets in our vehicles.

No doubt we were, to some extent, at least, kept informed, particularly about the progress of the war. Probably, brigade or divisional headquarters issued news bulletins. There would, too, have been a short wave receiving set operating at our headquarters. An officer read any mail that we posted. Acting as a censor, he cut offending bits out with a pair of scissors. And then there was Aussie Rules Football. For such a small unit, we did do well in the matter of availability of football talent. *Buzz* Leeming and Jack Ashby had seen to that. As for me, well, put simply, I showed promise that never reached fulfilment.

## **Dandaragan, WA**

In August or September 1943, we moved to Dandaragan. We were hardly there when Corporal Jack Downey and I went off to attend a hygiene course for a couple of weeks. We learned about malaria control, the disposal of waste, deep-trench latrines, shallow-trench latrines, bore-hole latrines, incinerators (one they called the ‘toid-burner.’) We were taught about the predominance of deaths from disease over casualties inflicted by the enemy in warfare. It could well have been that course that inculcated in me a permanent awareness of the need for cleanliness in the handling of foodstuffs and fluids. The common house fly, because of its disease-carrying characteristics, became an enemy of mine forever. By this time, *Buzz* Leeming had left us and we had a new OC, Major George Rice. The next time I saw *Buzz*, in 1944, in Melbourne, he was in RAAF uniform, an airman, and doing aircrew training.

There was a Federal election for both houses on 21 August 1943. For the first time I had the right to vote. We did not have to travel to a polling booth somewhere else; the voting was carried out in our unit. The people returned Ben Chifley’s Labor Government to office. These were the days before the great split, and the Labor

Party was heavily reliant on the votes of Roman Catholics. I remember Captain Howard saying that there must not be any collusion when he saw a group chatting about the election.

They had clothed us by now in armoured fighting vehicle uniforms, including beret (not that our motorized brigade had any tanks.) Our squadron had been issued with the latest vehicles for wireless sets. We called them *Bun wagons*. (I drove 15111 to an ordnance depot.) We were now using the same pattern wireless sets, 19's, as those fitted in the *Stuart* and *General Grant* tanks of the armoured brigade. A team came along to test our wireless telegraphy ability, and Stan Hatwell, our transport sergeant, told me later that I was second behind Jack Downey.

Our squadron got going on providing a variety show for troops in the area. As I have mentioned earlier, I sang and whistled a lot – it was a habit that I had. At an earlier time, in the Northampton Hotel, a town north of Geraldton that I wrote of earlier, the publican shouted four or five of us free drinks for a time as I sang to the mob. A tent mate, Johnny Goodwin, produced the show. He was a very able comedian, in later years working in Victoria with the well-known Joff Ellen. Because of nervousness, I was not too keen about taking part, but *Snowy* Brett persuaded me to do so. I sang *White Christmas* and *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*. It was a very ordinary performance, I am sure. *Snowy* said afterwards, 'Oh, those bloody vowels!' (In 1961, I worked, with help, on improving my vowel sounds, I believe with some success. You know: 'The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain.') The famous pianist, Isador Goodman, gave a concert on one occasion. Fellows called out time after time, 'Play *In the Mood*, sport.'

Training continued. We did much firing practice, and I became classified as a first-class shot with the rifle and the Bren gun. We often went out on 'wireless schemes' in our new vehicles. On one such scheme, some miles out of Perth, we had what was a fairly routine problem with communications – 'No comms' we would enter in the log.

Bill Verney, Ivan Fisher and I headed for Perth in our wagon. My intention was to visit my friend, Dawn, who lived in a suburb. She and I *parked* in the front seats of the wagon. Oh, the trouble we might have been in! Demoted to signalman. At least. Perhaps there would have been a court-martial. I felt a bit ashamed of myself.

Route marching was a bore, especially the once-a-week night march of ten miles. On these, we sang a lot, and you would hardly believe how coarse, how disgusting, the words of the songs were. Put simply, songs were usually not sung unless they were brimful of foulness. We were most unlikely to bellow out *Once a Jolly Swagman* when we were on the march. *Balls to Mr Winckelstein* was a famous song. There was one more popular than that, however. Did it have a title? A *Cable wallah* might well have written it, for it was very hot stuff and they invariably played a major part in its rendition. But I think not. (In passing, I should say that they were an irrepressible, irreverent and, I think I can say, an admired group of men.) Anyway, it was not altogether an easy matter for me, for one, always to sing without tending to feel dissolute, the putrid lines that made up its awfulness. Here is some of it:

She's a great big bastard twice the size of me,  
With hairs around her cunt like the branches on a tree,  
She can run, jump, fuck, fight, wheel a barrow, ride a bike,  
That's the sort of dirty bastard wants to marry me.

I had met Dawn Black at an entertainment centre in Perth. There she was, standing there, by herself, tall, slim and tastefully dressed. Bob Eberle and Helen O'Connell, with Jimmy Dorsey's orchestra, were singing *Amapola*. We did not dance – we had a soft drink. It took rather a lot to persuade me to dance. I lacked confidence and I was not too good at it, either. We became engaged when I visited Perth again. It turned out, though, that I simply did not have enough affection for her to continue the relationship. On my 22nd birthday, at Chidlow camp, I received a gift from her, and here I was telling my friend, Frank Nippard, that I had to end our engagement. So I wrote to her that day. I felt such a rat. I wondered about my emotional capacity. Before I left Melbourne, I had had romantic thoughts about the West: perhaps I would meet some beautiful girl there and marry her? I did meet a few, but there was only one, right near the end of my stay, whom I might have wished to marry. Too late.

Speaking of musical entertainment, there was Tommy Dorsey, and Glen Miller and Harry James and Ray Eberle and all the others that we listened to on wireless. A member of the wireless troop, Ron Wilson, had an amplifier and records: Louis Armstrong and Harry James were among his favourites. His son, Ross Wilson, became well known in the musical entertainment groups known as *Daddy Cool* and *Mondo Rock*. Ross sings

and is a successful composer of music.

## **Chidlow WA, and back East**

In January 1944, we moved camp to Chidlow outside Perth. 1 Australian Armoured Division had by now broken up as I have explained, and we formed part of 2 Infantry Division for a time until it disbanded in April 1944. After that, our brigade HQ commanded various other units in WA until 3 Motor Brigade Group was removed from the Order of Battle in August 1944. In April 1944, there was a Japanese raid scare. For a time we were on six hours notice to move. A scare was all that it was.

Headquarters gave us leave to Perth fairly often, and we went AWOL, too, every now and then. For the first time in a WA camp, we had proper showering and toilet facilities. One night, Sergeant Stan Hatwell and I returned to camp together after being AWOL. Stan has insisted over the years that my being with him on his return to camp saved his life. A signalman who was on picket duty, and armed with a pistol, and who, Stan maintains, hated him, would have shot him had I not been present as a witness. I do not remember the incident.

Corporal Sammy Gilbert and I went off to an amphibious training course at Point Walter Combined Operations Training Centre on the Swan River, Perth. We were to complete the course of two (or three) weeks, and remain for the next course as junior instructors. In the event, our course was the last to be held, for the time being, at least. I was glad. It was April. The water was unpleasantly cold when you jumped into it with equipment on from the *Queen Mary* a wooden, fairly high, structure on the banks of the Swan River.

Some of the training was a bit scary, the cliff climbing at night, for example, and some of the unarmed combat training. I will never forget Captain McKissock, the boss of that training. You have heard of barrel-chested men. He was one of them. During unarmed combat training, he was always stripped to the waist. 'Blood, blood,' he used to say, as he demonstrated, perhaps, how, unarmed, to relieve a charging attacker of his rifle and fixed bayonet. And then to kill him. I learned so many knots, now forgotten. The night exercises in landing ships on the river were exciting. As for the training being sometimes a bit scary, well I am sure that we all knew well that our situation was much less scary than that of thousands of other Australians fighting in foreign lands.

We did not drink a lot; indeed, the authorities rationed beer and cigarettes. When we did have some drinks in Perth, we usually drank in the saloon bar of the Adelphi hotel. John the barman looked after us. There was, on two or three occasions, an American sailor there with whom we became friendly. One day, Bill Payne – he must have had too much to drink – was telling the sailor what a white man *Rawsh* was. The sailor was black. I liked gin squashes then. I liked them so much that one day I had 14 of them – in those days one kept an account of how many glasses of this or that one had consumed. Subsequently, I created a horrific mess in a toilet at the Toc H hostel. And I don't just mean a mess in the toilet bowl.

The Allies invaded Europe in June 1944. It was great news. The war against the Japanese had still to be won, however. Many of the troops in WA were sent back to the Eastern States to be re-allocated to units involved, or to become involved, in campaigns against them. With many others, I entrained for NSW on 18 August 1944. It is a curious thing, but I am unable to recall any of the detail of that trip. It was not a matter of being boozed or anything like that. I went on leave from Melbourne for a time, staying at my brother Alan's place in Caulfield. I travelled by train to Boort to see my family, taking with me my rifle, bayonet and other equipment because I knew that they would interest my small brother.

## **The 2/8th at Ravenshoe, Qld**

The next move was to Walgrove, NSW, where I made contact again with a number of my friends. Then I travelled to Redbank, Queensland, where someone decided to post me to the Signals Section, 2/8 Australian Field Regiment, a unit of the famous 9 Australian Infantry Division. (Rats of Tobruk.) So, late October 1944, Ravenshoe on the Queensland Atherton Tablelands was my next destination. I had not one member of my former unit with me. My morale was not so good. I had thought of 'throwing in my stripes' so that I might have then gone somewhere with at least one of my signalman friends. But I didn't. Even if I had relinquished my rank of corporal, I might well have gone off by myself anyway.

My new unit was an artillery regiment that had been in action at El Alamein and other places. Our section

supplied communications to brigade headquarters, for one thing. The chaps in the section, all of whom had been in action, were friendly enough. I felt something of an intruder because, unlike them, I had no overseas service to my credit. I was a *reo*, a reinforcement.

The climate on the Tablelands was very pleasant. A small group of us found an ideal swimming place in a stream that we could reach in a quick twenty-minute walk. At a picture show in Ravenshoe, with hundreds of other soldiers, I first saw Frank Sinatra. He was in the film, *Reveille with Beverly*. When he came on camera to sing the soldiers booed him in their hundreds. When he began to sing hardly a sound came from the large audience. It was remarkable. He sang *Night and Day*. To many, he was an unwelcome rival to Bing Crosby. Perry Como was entering our entertainment scene then, too. I played basketball with a unit team.

In March 1945, the members of the unit, on the parade ground, were 'warned for overseas draft.' I thought, so I am going to the war at last. No. Again events frustrated my wishes. The CO had directed our section lieutenant to provide a NCO to attend a ten weeks' weapon training instructors' course at the Small Arms School at Bonegilla, Victoria. He nominated me. There is almost no doubt that I was to go rather than any other NCO in the section because, for one thing, I was new and untried. A veteran in the section, Signalman Cubitt, told me that I was going because I was 'too good a bloke.' He was a tough soldier, that one, and his words helped my morale a lot. In the years that followed, some of my seniors considered that I inclined to become too friendly with those that I outranked.

### **The Small Arms School**

I left Atherton by train, first to Cairns, on 26 March 1945. Heavy rains had caused disastrous floods in Queensland, and the disruption caused delays on the journey south. Conditions were fairly good at the Small Arms School, later to become the School of Infantry, and although discipline was strong, it was not a school of bastardry. The idea was that we would learn all about a range of weapons, and learn, too, how to teach others about them when we returned to our units. The ranks attending went up to warrant officer. Perhaps there were some officers.

We did no more than fire the Vickers medium machine gun. We went into a fair bit of detail, however, with a number of other small arms: 3 inch and 2 inch mortars; projectors infantry tank attack; the Boyes anti-tank rifle; hand grenades; several types of rifles and pistols; Bren guns; machine pistols (sub-machine guns). It was about this time that we began to hear and use 'tank attack' instead of 'anti tank,' the idea being to show aggression. There were many lectures, too, about this and that, including the theory of small arms' fire, judging distance, etc. I was a very nervous instructor, but I gained some confidence as the course progressed.

At the finish, the Chief Instructor told me that I had done well for a sig. (A signals' corporal would be presumed, naturally enough, to know less about such things than, say, a corporal of infantry.) Lieutenant-Colonel Latchford was much too kind. In recent times I have seen my course report. It was far from flattering. Let me just say that there were a number of criticisms. They included criticisms of my instructional ability, my keenness, my control. There were other criticisms. There was so much about me that needed improvement.

President Roosevelt died while I was at Bonegilla. In 1944, he had won an unprecedented fourth term as President of the USA. He had taken measures to correct the bad state of the United States economy. His policies were not welcomed at all by the plutocracy, to name one group in opposition to his employment, for example, of the economic theories of the Englishman, JM Keynes. Roosevelt's party, the Democratic Party, was, and is, far from being a Socialist Party, but I thought it to be infinitely better than the Republicans. I still do.

By then I knew that I could never be on the side of the wealthy. What did the wealthy care about ordinary people? So to me it followed that Governments that represented wealth could not at one and the same time represent, do their best for, both the rich and the poor. I wondered then, and I still do wonder, how it is that working-class people can bring themselves to vote for parties of the Right. Yes, I know that there are many (unconvincing) answers to that question.

On one occasion, Mother and my sister, Jessie, travelled by train to Albury, staying at a hotel for a few days. They went to a football match in which I was a player. In my case, at least, the course was rather a waste of time and money, as I was never to teach weaponry to anyone after that. The experience as an instructor, though, was useful in later years. I received a letter from my very good friend, Frank Nippard. He had been posted to the

Signals' Section of the 2/7 Australian Field Regiment, another 9 Australian Infantry Division Artillery Regiment. He had just recently gone ashore at Tarakan as I would have done had I remained with my unit. The landing was frightening, I gathered from his letter.

After the course finished, in June 1945, I spent a few weeks in Melbourne. The war in Europe had ended in May. I travelled day after day from my brother Alan's place in Caulfield to the transit unit at Royal Park only to be sent on leave again. Finally, I was off by train again, reaching Wacol Camp outside Brisbane where the medical people gave me all the necessary inoculations and vaccinations in preparation for my rejoining my unit on Tarakan.

## **The atom bomb**

Just then the Americans dropped the atom bomb. What constituted an atom bomb, I had not the slightest idea. That momentous event was to end my chances of going to the war. I really did want to go. What a shit!

I thought that the war against the Nazis and Fascists and the Japanese was a just war: the Nazis just simply had to be stopped; the thought of Australia's being occupied by the Japanese or anyone else was intolerable. I put aside here the undoubted fact that both Germany and Japan were justified in thinking that they had been treated unfairly in some respects before hostilities began. That did not mean that any war in which Australia was to participate was necessarily a just war, however. Not in my opinion, anyway.

I think that I can honestly say that I have never been so despondent over a period of a few days as I was then. I had been in the AIF for three years but I would not be going on active service. What a bugger, I thought. And for all the remaining years of my life I was to be conscious at times of a certain feeling of inadequacy: I had volunteered but I had not gone away to a war that as a nation we were morally right to assist in fighting. It is true, too, that thousands of individuals who did go away were never to face a hostile enemy, even so.

Over all the years, however – and I say good luck to them – they have received many benefits to which I have not been entitled. At times, I feel a bit put out about that. No doubt some others in the same position as I am feel that way a bit, too. An example of benefits is the *Gold Card* issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. People like me will not get one in a few months time when they are issued to all those that 'faced a hostile enemy.'

## **A chance meeting**

I was not in the mood to join in the celebrations in Brisbane, in the streets. To say the least, I felt depressed. Another corporal and I just walked along the streets through the huge crowds that were celebrating peace. By just the merest chance, in a Brisbane street, I met Betty Sutherland. She looked most fetching with her slim figure, her fair hair and the blue beanie that she was wearing. She was with another girl. Someone said 'Hello.' Had we not stopped that night there would, of course, be no one on earth just like Richard Rawson, or John, or Jennifer, or Robyn. There would be no Adam or Ashley or Fiona, or Josiah, or Mollie, my grandchildren. And so on.

## **A mate departs**

A week or so after the war finished, I met someone in Brisbane. He was formerly in 3 Squadron Signals too. He said, 'Bad luck about Frank, wasn't it?' Frank Nippard had been killed in action in Tarakan, in July 1945. Subsequently, I wrote to a chap who was in Frank's section, and in his reply he told me what had happened. The 2/7th was out of action. Japanese soldiers were entering the unit lines at night, stealing food. The lieutenant in command of the signals' section decided that he would take a patrol out in an attempt to capture or kill Japanese. To do this was not part of the normal role of a signals' section in an artillery regiment; the lieutenant probably sought the approval of his commanding officer. The lieutenant made Frank the forward scout of the patrol. The enemy shot him through the head from very close range. His grave is in Tarakan.

Frank Nippard was in the very top, and small, group of those individuals whose friendships have been most important to me in my life. I had been to his home in North Coburg and had met his mother and some other

members of his family. Like a couple of my earlier friends, Mick Davis of Derrinallum, and Frank Speed, he was a Roman Catholic. He was a very intelligent person. Short of stature he was and he had red hair. He had a gift of repartee. There would have been few, if any, men in the unit that did not like *Nippy*. He was 25 years old when the war took his life. On Melbourne Cup Day, 1945, my brother Alan and I walked from Flinders Street Station to catch a tram in Elizabeth Street to the races. Suddenly, there was Mrs Nippard. She saw me and the next moment tears poured from her eyes. Her son, Jim, about 14, had tears in his eyes, too. I managed, myself, not to cry. I offered a few words that I hoped were comforting, and moved off with Alan, churned up emotionally, naturally enough.

I left Wacol Camp in Brisbane, sometime after the Victorian Football League Grand Final, probably in September 1945. I recall racing around Brisbane trying to buy a *Sporting Globe*, which paper I knew would contain details of the Grand Final. Carlton had won. Whoopee! Betty and I had agreed to write. Alan and Vera were kind to let me stay with them again, my unit now being the Recruit Reception and General Details Depot, Royal Park. This was where, in Victoria, the discharge process for the army was going quickly ahead.

## Discharge Depot

I did not have enough points for discharge yet. I began working in Hut 52, the last point of contact for the dischargée. Somehow or other I became a two-finger typist, helping to record certain details of each soldier as he entered the hut. So far in my life, as I recall, I had had the nicknames *Jack*, *Sprigger*, *Rawsh* and *Two Pot*. (The last one, short lived, was given to me at Rowville by someone because in the phonetic alphabet the letter *J* was *jug*. So *Jug Jug* – so *Two Pot*. It had nothing to do with booze.) Now, someone who had seen service in New Guinea began calling me *Big boss Tapita*. I have forgotten why.

I had to give some thought to what sort of work I should seek when the army discharged me. According to the laws of the day, MacRobertson's was obliged to re-employ me, but I did not find attractive the thought of going back there. Bill Ellison, formerly of 3 Squadron Signals, decided that he would apply for the Victoria Police Force, more or less talking me into applying with him. The police force accepted him. The force rejected me. I have to say that the rejection did not disappoint me. Perhaps I am not sufficiently authoritarian to have been a police officer. That deficiency did not help me in the army either. When the medical officer saw my right elbow, he said that I would need to return with X-rays and a radiologist's report. The army did the X-rays for me, and the report included, 'A gross deformity of the right elbow with marked arthritic changes.' (It has turned out that arthritis has hardly troubled my right elbow yet.) The police surgeon said, 'Of course, you know we cannot accept you.' The police reaction to my elbow again suggests that I could easily have avoided military service had I so wished.

## Marriage

Around Easter 1946, I travelled by train to Brisbane to stay with Betty and her mother, Mary Lydia Sutherland, in their place at Auchenflower. We had decided nothing then about our future relationship. Betty visited Melbourne later in the year and that decided things. We married in the Registry Office, Melbourne, on 2 November. Alan and Vera and Jess and Bryan were among the small group that attended the ceremony. We went to Healesville by bus for a short honeymoon that night.

At the time, rental accommodation was hard to obtain in Melbourne. Returning from Healesville, we were fortunate to have the use of a flat in Carlisle Street, St Kilda, for a couple of weeks. Then we had a week or so in my friend *Snowy* Brett's place in Burnley while he and his mother were away. Again, Alan and Vera came to the rescue, and we stayed with them at 6 Prince's Avenue, Caulfield, for a time. Then we got our *big break*. We began renting a room with the use of the kitchen, etc., from Nicky, who lived in a simple, weatherboard house in Cromwell Street, Caulfield. She was a widow with two small girls. She was very kind to us. Our room opened up onto a veranda that, later on, Nicky had boarded up and glassed in for our use. That was where Nana, Betty's mother, slept when she came down from Brisbane in the second half of 1949. Nana, such a great help to us, was with us for most of the time over the next 20 years. After that, she lived close to us. I cannot recall ever having more than a brief disagreement with her.

## Repatriation hospital

Early in 1947, I was sent with many others to 115 Military Hospital, Heidelberg. The Repatriation Department was soon to take over the hospital. I was by then entitled to take discharge. It so happened, though, that they gave me a job in the discharge process of soldiers who were now surplus to requirements there. So I hung on, having no job to go to, being now married and due to be a father in May. A small unit was raised at the hospital. It was designated Administration Cadre, AMF Wing, RGH, Heidelberg. I became one of its members, being mainly concerned with clerical duties. To get there I either took a tram to Caulfield station or I walked to Malvern Station. I next boarded a train to the city, another train to Ivanhoe, and then a bus to the hospital.

Major Alf Raine commanded the unit. He was a likeable person. We used to play tennis on the hospital courts. He invariably beat me. Captain Ray Bradmore, who bought for £5 the first Biro ballpoint pen I was to see, helped me a lot. He applied in 1948 for my promotion to sergeant. He helped me through the process of joining the Australian Regular Army when it was formed, also in 1948. In 1949, he persuaded higher authority to post me to a staff-sergeant's job at Puckapunyal when the newly formed 91 Camp Hospital was opened in about September 1949.

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## Chapter 3 Life in the Australian Regular Army to 1965

### Enlistment in the ARA

When I joined the ARA I became a member of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. The 'Royal' bit came later. I was no longer a sig. Indeed, joining the AAMC was something that I think I would never have contemplated except for the circumstances of the time. In saying that, I mean no disrespect for a fine corps. My ARA regimental number was for a while VP32234, but it was changed later to 3/1254. (The oblique stroke was later dropped.) I had four regimental numbers in the army.

Like, I believe, many others, I joined the ARA because I happened to be in the army at the time and to do so suited my circumstances. In passing, I think it most unlikely that had I left the army I would have taken the decision to join the ARA. I was married and I needed a job. It was not a matter of patriotism for me. It was a matter of being fairly content with the work that I was doing. What would be my next job? A soldier's life involved movement from time to time; I had become accustomed to changing environments and quite liked the thought of a continuance of that style of subsistence. That my changing environments did not include active service, however, was to cause me some concern over the ensuing years.

### Radicalization

Another member of the small unit had a much bigger influence on me than any of the other members. He was Sergeant Jack Gill. If I ever doubted which side of politics I supported – there was no doubt, really – the influence of Jack Gill's opinions was absolutely decisive. I feel sure that he was a Marxist. I do not, though, recall his ever speaking of dialectical materialism or of surplus value, for example. Perhaps he did but I was not capable of understanding his explanations. I discovered that he had political aspirations. I heard him talking on the telephone to a Labor Party official one day, asking that the party preselect him for a Victorian seat. In this he was not successful. I knew little about politics then, but as the years passed, I corrected that situation, to some extent, at least. I was firmly on the side of the Left.

Jack, like us all, wore uniform during duty hours. He chose to wear boots rather than shoes, although the army permitted the wearing of shoes by then. He was Militia as I remember, a medical problem making him unfit for overseas service. He had straight, blonde hair. He was fairly tall and strong looking, although a bit stooped. His eyes, I forget their colour, were steady. He seemed to me to be well-educated. He spoke with deliberation and clarity, so that his arguments and explanations were usually easy enough to follow.

He gave capitalism a very hard time. Indeed he did. He spoke of the need for strong trade unions, of first-class and free education and health systems, of huge income gaps, of deprivation and misery in some sections of society. And as for the capitalist press: whew! Committed members of the Left would say those things, wouldn't they?

I regret not at all that Jack Gill radicalized me. I admired him for his concern for those whom the economic system treated unfairly. A system that government must not leave unfettered. (What better example of a free go for greedy men, with economic and social chaos the outcome, than the late 20th century situation in Russia?) A system that has adherents whose concerns concentrate heavily on acquisitiveness, profits, power, vanity and other selfish motives. Governments must act against the greedy. Not that capitalism is alone in its faults, I must add. No wonder that I was in the process of shedding any religious belief that I might have had, I thought. How does all that stuff fit in with, say, the Sermon on the Mount? What hypocrites many of them were to call themselves Christians! To be regarded as a Christian, I had read, one at the very least had to believe in a supreme being and immortality. I could not imagine too many hard-headed capitalists believing those things.

I came, then, to have some little understanding of two of the opposing economic systems, capitalism and socialism. I much preferred the latter. There were times in the future, having chosen to be a member of the ARA, when my preference of economic systems and my rejection of religion would cause me some difficulties.

## Diversity of opinion

Close to a million Australians were in the Services during the years of the Second World War. There was, no doubt, great diversity of opinion about almost any topic, every sector of society being represented in the war-time forces. It became acceptable to speak admiringly of our Soviet allies, our communist allies. But the Berlin airlift and with it the Cold War began in 1948: our allies were to become *commies*. From what I knew of the Russian Revolution, I thought the revolutionaries entirely justified. And I still do. That is not to say that I thought everything done in its name at the time or subsequently could be morally justified, though.

The war-time forces and the ARA, as far as diversity of opinion went, became markedly different – there was to be much less of that diversity. It became plain with the passing of time that conservative opinion had taken hold of the military ethos. There never was, I firmly believe, in my time in the ARA (1948 to 1975), anything even approaching the diversity of political opinion that obtained during the war years. One needed only to be a member of a sergeants' or officers' mess to realize that, if one thought about such things. I was a member of one or other of those messes over a period of 26 years. Mind you, I am not saying that the messes had no members (except me) that voted for other than the conservative parties, but we were heavily in the minority. That, I do say.

I mentioned earlier that I had had some difficulties as a result of my beliefs. For years, though, these were of a fairly mild nature. Certainly, no one ever attacked me physically, although I had some close calls. From time to time, others used the word *pink* about me. Just the same, I have no reason to believe that in my 20 years as an other-rank, certainly, my chances of being promoted suffered because of my opinions on politics and religion. No one made my life miserable. Indeed, I had friendly relationships with some individuals who were, as the saying went, somewhere to the right of Genghis Khan.

As time passed, though, I became even more persuaded that opinions of the sort that I held about politics and religion were far from widely accepted by a big majority of members of the ARA. I mean, particularly, commissioned officers and senior other-ranks. Again, the political question was a *hotter* one than the question of religion, not so many being much interested in the latter. So I decided that it would be sensible of me to watch my tongue. Some others made that decision too, no doubt. It was considered bad form, in any case, in messes, to speak about politics, religion or sex. Some adhered to that code, particularly the more senior officers. Some felt free to express their political opinions. Nearly always those opinions supported conservatism.

To a large extent, but not entirely, as will be revealed as I progress with this narrative, I did steer away from those topics in conversation. In the fullness of time, if you like, my opinions, in 1967 and in 1973, caught up with me. *Crunch time*, so to speak, had arrived. A Catholic chaplain, and then an infantry lieutenant-colonel, both of them representing conservatism and religion, decided that they had had enough of me. The cleric's complaints about me brought Security into the picture. The lieutenant-colonel's treatment of me caused me to take written action in protest. The Australian Military Board vindicated my complaints about that officer. The lieutenant-colonel's career took a turn for the worse. A certain major-general did not escape unscathed, either, I have reason to believe. The chaplain, being a member of a protected species, probably got pats on the back.

Perhaps there are simple enough explanations to make clear why the ARA much prefers government by conservatives. Perhaps a big majority of Australian career soldiers, particularly its commissioned officers, by their very makeup, their mind set, are cut out to be supporters of the Right. Probably a young Australian with Leftist opinions would not consider a military career. Although those two opinions may be valid enough, you would need an expert to research the matter thoroughly. That's not a task that I could manage even with much research. Later in this book, though, I do express some more opinions; I think that those opinions do have some validity.

Our first son, Richard, arrived, looking long, bruised and with an unhappy visage. He and I first met, at the Winston Private Hospital in Burke Road, East Malvern, on 25 May 1947. His dear mother had what people call a *hard time* in the process. Over the years, much has been done to reduce the agony involved in child birth. Much earlier relief would no doubt have been available except for religious superstition, for one thing:

Simpson, in 1847, recommended their [anaesthetics] use in child-birth, and was immediately reminded by the clergy that God said to Eve: 'In sorrow thou shall bring forth children.' And how could she sorrow if she was under the influence of chloroform?

(From *Religion and Science*, by Bertrand Russell, p 105, 1935)

Marriage is a difficult relationship for most of us to maintain. It seems to me to be a bit unreasonable to expect members of the human race to practise monogamy. I mean, to have permanently one mate only. This is not to say, however, that it's not worth a good try: Elizabeth and I have made a good try, I do believe. No doubt we have been helped along in this by the deep love that we have always had for our children; and by our pride in their having become good citizens, possessed of some very fine qualities.

Things occur in most marriages that seriously threaten their continuation. Things happened in our marriage that endangered, on more than one occasion, its furtherance. I am not sufficiently gallant to accept all the blame, but I do accept most of it. It is not my intention, for more than one reason, to go into any detail about the problems that arose.

The Australian Labor Party was in power federally from 1941 to 1949. One hates to think of what might have resulted had the bumbling conservatives been in government during the war years. (Yes, I know, I'm prejudiced.) Chifley got the Snowy Mountain Scheme going in 1949, the task being completed in 1972. At the war's end, the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme meant that thousands of ex-service members with the necessary talents were to undertake education and training courses free of charge. There were plenty of jobs. For years after the war ended, acute shortages of all kinds of things, building materials, for example, caused hardship for many. As already mentioned, housing was a particular problem.

Anti-communist fervour reached great heights in those times, the capitalist world being terrified of the philosophy of political economy as constructed by Karl Marx. In the event, the Australian High Court ruled Menzies' *Communist Party Dissolution Act* as illegal in 1951. Never mind, at least Carlton won the 1947 Grand Final against Essendon. A very lucky win, indeed. I went by myself.

When, in 1947, Richard was a few months old, we visited my parents in Boort for a short stay. While we were there, Betty's mother became very ill in Queensland. Betty travelled by train back to Melbourne, and then by air from Essendon Airport to Brisbane. She worked for some time at Myers in the City (my sister, Jessie, was there, too), the extra income being especially useful now that we had a child. I can still see Richard's face when, in 1949, he saw his mother coming along Cromwell Street with his tricycle.

## **Puckapunyal**

By September 1949, I had begun my new duties as Company Quartermaster-Sergeant at 91 Camp Hospital Puckapunyal. I had earlier completed a Quartermasters' Course at the Royal Australian Army Service Corps School, Puckapunyal. (The AASC became royal later.) I was responsible for indenting and accounting for all stores (except medical stores) and supplies at the hospital. Soon, they promoted me to staff-sergeant, that being the appropriate rank for the job that I was doing.

The big problem now was to find a place for us to live, the family now including Nana, as I mentioned earlier. At the time, a number of army huts (corrugated iron) had been, and were being, converted to living quarters for families. It seemed to me that I had a good case for being allotted one, but those at Area Headquarters that decided such things had my name well down the list of applicants. 1 Infantry Brigade had just come back from being part of BCOF, British Commonwealth Occupation Force, in Japan; their members were receiving housing priority. I shall not go into all the details, but the Minister for the Army, who had publicly invited letters from soldiers, received a letter from me. Complying with his directive, the authorities found a place for us by Christmas, 1949.

These were not the best of quarters, being emergency quarters. The unlined building had been part of the venereal diseases' section of the hospital during the war years. We were not short of toilets and showers. The kitchen had a wood stove so large and black that Betty and Nana could hardly believe their eyes when, one day, just before Christmas, 1949, we 'marched' in. In early 1950, however, we moved 100 metres or so to a temporary quarter in Suakin Road, and there the family remained until 1956. (But I went to Healesville in November 1952.)

We were now, so to speak, in our first real home. It was a tin hut, lined inside with *Caneite*, two bedrooms, an electric stove, a *Wonderheat* in the lounge and, how marvellous, a hot water system. We thought it was great, although the laundry, with a wood copper, we entered through an outside door. Home to this little place came John Sutherland Rawson (born 23 February 1951), Jennifer (born 28 February 1953), and Robyn Maree (born

30 May 1955) from the Seymour Hospital where they were all born. I had to cart soil for gardens and lawns, usually by jeep and trailer. I worked very hard at that for more than a year. In 1990, the place was still standing, but was no longer a living quarter. It was so small!

My work at the hospital was fairly demanding, it being often difficult to satisfy the stores' requirements of the matron and nursing staff. It was not always easy, either, to meet the demands of the Registrar of the hospital, Lieutenant Lou Atkinson. (A Registrar combined the duties of adjutant and quartermaster. Lou left the 'Q' job for me to handle.) The army had commissioned him fairly recently. He had come to the hospital from the appointment of hygiene officer at Area HQ, Puckapunyal. He had been a prisoner of war in Malaya. He was a tall chap, his short, fair hair in ringlets. He had so much drive that he was almost insufferable. Drive, I believe, does not necessarily have as concomitants, knowledge and the appreciation of difficulties, to mention just a couple of his shortcomings from our point of view. In the mess we did not need much encouragement to drink beer: he was so much the topic of conversation that we almost had to extend the bar hours. I should add that Lou, I understand, received an award for his contribution in Vietnam years later.

On occasions, the patient strength, it began as a 30 bed hospital, jumped alarmingly virtually overnight when an epidemic of upper respiratory tract infection, say, hit the camp. The National Service Training Scheme in 1950, and the Korean War, meant that the hospital needed more beds, and it later it became 3 Camp Hospital with an establishment for 90 beds.

In the army, officers' and sergeants' messes and canteens for the rank and file are important centres of social activity. I spent more time in army messes than was altogether wise, or fair to my wife and children. There is no doubt that the notion *mateship* is not an idle one; drinking is only part of enjoying mess life. Betty, to some extent, joined in the mess life, and she made friends among the army spouses. There were sporting activities to engage in, and we went to films at the camp theatre. The camp had its own primary school. The children loved the large swimming pool. Poor Richard had a terrifying experience having his tonsils removed at Seymour Hospital.

When Ben Chifley played it rough with coal miners in 1949, I was about the only one in the mess (there were not many of us) who was not on his side. I voted for his party, admired him and would usually agree with his decisions. On this occasion, I did not support him. It was a big issue in the mess for a short time. My reputation as a bit of a *pinkie* no doubt grew. (If some thought you to be a *pinkie*, then no wonder, you may say.) And I was.

In 1951, as I noted earlier, Prime Minister Menzies attempted to ban the Communist Party in Australia. His Government passed the *Communist Party Dissolution Act*. Its legality, however, was challenged in the High Court. The court ruled it to be illegal. Menzies arranged a referendum. The Australian people, although only just, said 'No' to the proposal. Again I was easily out-numbered in the mess. There were furious arguments. We even put aside the conversations about Lou Atkinson. Captain Don (*Doc*) Hedley, though he should not have, spent a fair bit of time in the mess with us. He enlisted in England. He said that he did not know what Menzies proposal was all about until he talked to us in the mess.

In 1951, I began correspondence courses with the Melbourne Technical College (later Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) at about sub-intermediate standard. When, in 1941, I had applied to join the RAAF, with the intention of being an aircrew wireless telegraphist, the flight-sergeant who interviewed me wondered whether I should apply for pilot training. I would have loved to have been a pilot, but what chance would I have had with virtually no education, I had reasoned. He gave me a couple of very simple problems in fractions, but I had no idea how to solve them. Perhaps we did not do them at Derri. This was one incident that persuaded me that I should try to *improve* myself.

There was, too, the hope that the army may sometime commission me. With only a Merit Certificate? Not even a possibility. In 1951, on those grounds, I failed when I applied for a commission. I had some solid support for my application, from Colonel Glyn White, for example, who was Deputy Director of Medical Services. Eventually, I gained a five subject Leaving Certificate and a four subject Matriculation Certificate. Not much, I know, but my self-esteem benefited, as did my future financial and promotion prospects. From those times, too, my interest in good literature firmed, and the breadth of my general knowledge expanded modestly.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) came to Australia in 1950, and I suppose it was from about that time that my admiration for him began. He was no right-winger I soon decided. But he could be, and on occasions was, a

strong critic of Communism, as it was being practised, at least, in the Soviet Union. He had it just about right, I thought: he was usually Left enough in his opinions for this admirer. An address he gave over the ABC is contained in an audio tape among my possessions. My opinions on religion, politics, death and many other aspects of existence have been profoundly influenced by my readings of that great English philosopher, mathematician, logician, social commentator – in listing his abilities, one does not know when to stop.

He wrote a book a year for 70 years and a paper or essay or the like every fortnight over that period, I read somewhere. Much of his literary output, I must stress, is very difficult for me to understand. I never even attempt to understand his mathematics. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. The Nobel Prize is not, I understand, awarded for philosophy – otherwise a person who has been described as the most important philosopher of the century, among other tributes, must surely have been a very serious contender. Allow me now to provide an example of his most marvellous use of the English language, not to mention the iconoclastic, the chilling impact of the prophecy that he adumbrates:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual beyond the grave; that all the labour of all the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so near certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.

(From *A Free Man's Worship*, by Bertrand Russell, 1902)

Earl Russell was, as I am wont to say, the greatest person of whom I have knowledge. Many others have influenced me, too. Darwin has for one, and John Stewart Mill for another, among the many. Earl Russell's influence, for all that, was paramount in the formation of my adult opinions. I recall seeing him on TV in the sixties. The interviewer asked him: 'Lord Russell, do you fear death?' Russell replied: 'Not in the slightest.' In my heart I simply knew that he was being truthful. I hoped then, and I still do hope, that I, if aware of my impending demise, shall face my end courageously. Russell described Spinoza as the most lovable of all philosophers. Spinoza wrote this about death:

A free man thinks of nothing less than of death; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life.

In 1951, I began to have trouble with my right hand, it being difficult, for example, for me to retain a proper grip on a tennis racquet. At first, the doctor suspected polio. As with my shot left arm, the medical people diagnosed a problem with the ulnar nerve. Bone in my broken elbow was becoming larger and was pressing on the nerve. At Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg, they cut some of the bone away and resealed the nerve. So, damage to the ulnar nerve has similarly affected both of my hands. A wasting of muscle, for one thing, has occurred. Even so, the conditions have not been a serious handicap.

## The new Army

The Second World War was behind us now, and the Government had to make provision for the needs of a peace-time army. Soldiers were again to be quartered in permanent barracks. All of a sudden, out of the blue, it seemed to many, soldiers were to have beds, and mattresses, and sheets, and pillows and even bedspreads. Chests of drawers, wardrobes, personal tables, bedside mats, cups and saucers, plates of several varieties, milk jugs, on and on went the list of stores that would add to the comfort of the Australian soldier. One read the barrack scales with amazement and, of course, some pleasure.

The main uniform changed from field service dress to battle dress. Even a raincoat was to be on issue. Oh, it was such a change from sleeping on a ground sheet, sometimes on a palliasse, but more often on the ground or the floorboards, perhaps with a back pack or a kitbag for a pillow. Those conditions still applied to a large extent during exercises in the field, as would be realized. The famous hat, *hats khaki, fur felt*, remained the standard piece of headgear, although some such as armoured personnel were to continue to wear berets.

On 19 December 1949, Ben Chifley and his Labor Party lost power at the Federal elections. His Government had begun the deceleration of defence expenditure in the immediate post-war years. That policy did not endear him to the Australian Service chiefs. The people sent the party, to use a cliché, into the political wilderness for 23 years. Robert Menzies, a very conservative, if brilliant, fellow replaced Chifley as prime minister after a

Federal election on 10 December 1949. Defence expenditure began to pick up again. Menzies remained as prime minister for 16 years, the coalition parties continuing in office until 1972. Was 23 years of conservative Government in Australia an important factor in the entrenchment of a strong element of conservatism in the ARA even if that conservatism was not already there? I think so.

## **The ARA and conservatism**

Allow me now to list some of a series of important Service-related events that occurred during the long reign of the conservatives. The establishment of the South East Asia Treaty Organization was one event that I shall not consider further. Service numbers began to grow. These events, I believe, did much to cement a strong feeling of admiration, not to mention an attitude of grateful servitude, towards the conservatives, in the minds of many army members. Here and there in the list I shall make a comment or two:

### **National Service Training**

◆The government introduced the scheme in the early fifties. There was quite a big influx of British ex-servicemen to help fill the establishments. At the end of the scheme, in 1959, there would have been a decrease in army numbers. This reduction clearly members would *not* have welcomed.

### **Officer Cadet School**

◆OCS at Portsea, Victoria, was established in the early fifties. The Royal Military College, Duntroon, was not able to graduate officers in the required numbers. At OCS, the course was of only 22 weeks' duration. Later, the course was increased to 44 weeks.

### **The Korean War.**

◆During those years, McCarthyism raged in the USA. He had his Australian admirers, no doubt. Australia raised what was known as K Force. Numbers of Australian wartime soldiers re-enlisted.

### **Labor Party split**

◆The famous Labor Party split occurred in 1954. How could a soldier have any confidence in such a party? What of the Roman Catholic members of the army? Now they had the Democratic Labor Party to support if they wished. No doubt many stopped voting Labor and switched to the DLP — a party even more conservative than the Liberals and the Country Party.

### **The CMF**

◆There was a big expansion of the Citizens' Military Force.

### **The Woomera Rocket Range**

◆Britain established this to experiment with rockets able to engage in nuclear warfare.

### **The Soviet invasion of Hungary**

◆There was widespread indignation and anger in Australia. The Soviets might have argued that, after all, the Hungarian army joined with the Nazis in invading the Soviet Union on 21 June 1941, just 13 years earlier.

### **Indonesia**

◆Indonesia had huge internal problems in the sixties. It also had a policy of confrontation with Malaya. Its leader, Soekarno, lost power to General Soeharto after an abortive coup attempt by the Communist Party (PKI). The communist influence there worried Australia, but before too long Soeharto managed to have most of them slaughtered. So that made the Australian Prime Minister feel better about things. According to the journalist, John Pilger, in 1998, Harold Holt said this to the *New York Times*: 'With 500,000 to one million communist sympathizers knocked off, I think it is safe to assume that a reorientation has taken place.' Paul Keating, a Labor Prime Minister later, was a strong supporter of Soeharto, even though the latter was a dictator who led a corrupt, capitalist, nepotistic regime.

### **Malaya**

◆The ARA made an important contribution there. So did the other Services.

## The war in Vietnam

◆The Government reintroduced National Service, mainly to provide additional young men for service in Vietnam. The Officer Cadet School, Scheyville, NSW was established. Australia's participation in the war caused serious verbal and sometimes physical conflict in a seriously divided society. Perhaps the Left and the Right in Australia had never been so at odds over such a long period. 'All the way with LBJ,' said Prime Minister Holt.

Australia became involved in Menzies' time in three wars. Anti-Communism flourished, particularly through twin attacks by capitalism and Catholicism. Defence people, in the main, had much to gain – from the likelihood of much adventure; the improved chances of promotion through expanded defence budgets and the increased establishments that ensued. How grateful the officer corps, to mention one group, must have been! Why wouldn't many ARA members, even if they were not already conservative in their outlook, get to think that conservative Governments were the go?

Prospective Labor Governments seemed most unlikely to be anywhere near as truculent. They did not give the impression, either, that they were likely to be as accommodating in the provision of opportunities to see the world; opportunities to experience high-level excitement; to gain rapid promotion; to be provided with up-to-date fighting equipment. Labor politicians were a group of wimps. A gutless lot. The party was *soft* on Communism, the Catholics particularly cried.

Though he was an officer in the University Regiment, Menzies chose not to join the AIF during the First World War. He exhibited a fair degree of belligerence in his years in office, however. In that time, Australia became involved in the conflicts in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam. In this regard, he was not unlike some of the young members of his party during the war in Vietnam: they were all for Australia's involvement in the war, but decided that they could do more for their country if they did not go to it.

It was probably about 1950 when the Government asked ARA soldiers to sign a document that had to do with their conditions of service. In future, if the member said 'Yes' in the document, he or she was expressing a willingness to serve anywhere in the world as decided by the proper authority. I said 'Yes.' Soldiers in the First and Second World Wars who were to serve overseas, were all volunteers – that is, the Government had not conscripted them. That was the law. The government had now changed the law. Conscripted soldiers served in New Guinea: that was an Australian colony.

That I had signed that document affirmatively meant that the army was legally able to send me to the Korean War. The army did not send me to Korea. Had they sent me, I would have gone to Korea without protest because it was my duty to do so. Just the same, I was not at all convinced that it was a *just* war. I made no application to go to it. Menzies made much of a *red tide* to Australia. He did his best to scare the people, to make them fear China. The 'sheep skins for Russia' period was well behind us; now Mao and his 'evil' intentions were a high priority in our Government's propaganda. I have always liked to know the facts. No doubt the Government told us many of them. They fed us with many grossly distorted versions of the facts as well. As for the media, and speaking of distortion of the facts, well, conservatives were in Government. The media generally in Australia has always supported conservative Governments. Indeed, things have not altered so very much in that respect.

## School of Army Health

During 1951 and 1952, I was to attend two courses, one at Portsea, during which time John was very ill with whooping cough. The other was at Healesville at the AAMC School of Army Health. The second course was significant because I managed to finish first in the class, and that influenced the chief instructor at the school to have me posted there as an instructor. I arrived there in November 1952, and was promoted to warrant officer, class 2, some time later.

At this time, there were no married quarters at the School, which was located a couple of miles out of Healesville in a former guest house, *Summerleigh Lodge.* We discussed the matter at home. We decided that it would be best, for the time being, at least, for the family, that is, Betty, Nana, Richard and John, to remain in Puckapunyal. The rental was very low, and the electricity then was free. Places in Healesville that we might have been able to afford to rent were not of a good standard.

So, for most of the time for about four and a half years, I lived apart from my family. Usually, I travelled home to Puckapunyal only every fortnight for the week-end. On not too frequent occasions, someone gave me a lift in a car for at least part of the way. In the main, however, I relied on trains, buses and hitchhiking. Eventually, in March 1956, we moved into a new brick married quarter in the School grounds.

In the winter of 1958, I transferred to the Royal Australian Army Education Corps (Perhaps it did not have the 'Royal' then.) HQ posted me to 20 National Service Training Battalion located at Puckapunyal. Area Headquarters allotted us a married quarter at 1 Vivi Street. The house was a Swedish prefab, small but comfortable enough.

Richard and John both went to school at Healesville by bus. There was a bus, also, to take the spouses and families shopping in the town. We bought our first television set at Healesville. For most of the time at the School, I was an instructor but, for the last year or two, I was School Sergeant-major. This carried the rank of warrant officer, class 1, but I transferred to Education before the promotion became effective.

A problem for me was that I was not at all an experienced Medical Corps soldier. Here I was instructing in some subjects that I had knowledge of only from the courses that I had earlier attended. Suddenly, through an injury to my friend, Bert Duncan, the senior instructor put me down to teach first aid. I was without any practical experience in first aid. This decision made things particularly difficult for me, because some of the students (all were AAMC) came down from the battlefields of Korea. Another concern was that I had not served overseas and, as I always did, I felt a bit of a fraud about that as well. There were courses for female nursing personnel, both officers and other-ranks, as well. In my opinion, women were superior to men when it came to foot drill, which had an important place in much of the training. Good heavens! the reader may say.

The interaction of personalities at the school over the six or so years that I was there, would itself make interesting reading. One would need to have the time and the ability, however, to place it all on record. Lieutenant-Colonel WW McLellan, OBE, a pre-war Permanent Military Force soldier, a person with great drive, was the Chief Instructor. (The CI was meant, at first, to be a medical practitioner, but that never did occur.) Our relationship was fairly patchy; there were at least two confrontations of major proportions. That I remained there for a long time, even becoming, eventually, his School Sergeant-major, suggests that he was at least reasonably satisfied with my contribution there. Indeed, on one occasion after he saw a squad of women go through their paces on the parade ground, he said, 'John, you can stay here as long as you like.' He supported me in another unsuccessful attempt to gain a commission.

Healesville is situated at the base of a section of the great dividing range. On one occasion, Captain George Evans and I took the students to a forested area. Under his direction we were going to do some water divining. We lighted from the vehicle and moved a short distance to a creek-bed-like depression. There was no evidence of water on the earth, but you could easily believe, because of the location, that there would be water underground. Captain Evens moved to a tree – perhaps it was a willow – and cut from it a forked stick. It was about 50 cm long, I should say. He trimmed it and then demonstrated how it should be held. The stick was to be held horizontally by the fork at about chest level, the knuckles of the hands facing the ground.

The students took it in turn to hold the stick as directed. Before I had my turn, I plainly saw that the stick began to bend, its end pointing towards the earth. I am not able to say how many of the group experienced the consequence that I have described, but I would certainly say that most did. I have no doubt about my own physical experience on that experiment. The attraction on the stick was of such forcefulness that I felt obliged within a couple of seconds not to resist it. Indeed, I felt that I would not be able to do so. When people debunk water diviners, I remember my experience at Healesville in 1954.

Bert Duncan and I became very good friends, and there were others also with whom I formed strong friendships. Barbara Maxwell, of Eurasian birth, who topped every course she ever attended, finally became an instructor at the School of Army Health. Bert had been in love with her for a long time, it was plain to see. His father was mentally ill, and I think that one reason why he never, as far as I knew, sought to marry Barbara was his fear of the perils of heredity. At a very much later time, he married someone else; there was no chance of children then. He died of cancer a few years ago. Barbara, at the time a member of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps, transferred to the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps later. It was no surprise to me when she became a colonel and director of the Corps years later.

## The switch to RAAEC

I was setting off now on quite a new path in the army. I had been in the Corps of Signals, the Medical Corps and now I was to be an assistant-instructor in the Education Corps. As I said in my short speech to the people who gave me a farewell party at Healesville, I had had an undistinguished career in the army. Not very many soldiers had served in three corps, though, so that was something that made me a bit unusual.

Before I left Healesville, my new corps sent me to Queenscliff for a few days to learn how to use the 16mm film projector. Later, I went to Middle Head in NSW to attend a short course that served to introduce me to the RAAEC

## 20 NSTB

The National Service scheme was not far from its end when, in 1958, I joined 20 National Service Training Battalion at Puckapunyal. I had a large hut that my unit called the Education Centre and Library. There was little education work to be done. As for the library, hardly anyone ever borrowed a book. I did perform a useful function in one area, however, my work as treasurer of the sergeants' mess bringing an end to a long period of financial losses. I did this at Healesville, too, I mention in passing. The mess corporal was the main offender, but no one got around to taking action against him. I played too much poker and drank too much at 20 Battalion, although I did give up drinking for three months in 1959.

Betty and I decided that perhaps we could buy a car if she could get a job, and this she did, with Army Canteen Services. She was a very capable shorthand typist. So, on 3 December 1959, we took delivery of a new Austin Cambridge A60, much to the delight of everyone in the family. It cost about £1200. I taught Betty to drive, and in no time at all Richard (12) and John (8), with hardly any instruction from me, demonstrated their driving abilities in the back blocks of Puckapunyal. I obtained my civilian licence earlier, simply by going to the police station at Healesville with my army licence.

## The Teachers' College

During 1960 and 1961, I attended a Primary Teachers' Training Course at Coburg Teachers' College. Having the car made the necessary travel a simple enough matter. I lived at Watsonia Barracks during the week and occasionally at weekends. I was part of an adult group and made some good friends, even now being in touch with Tim and Lois Hunter who were fellow students in the adult group. Lois Arthur was a delightful Juliet in the college production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1961.

If I had any real success at Coburg, it was a result of written work such as essays, short stories, etc, that I submitted from time to time. (I am not talking about examinations.) Usually, I am prepared to assert, my written material received top comments from a lecturer. In the early weeks of the course, I became aware that some, at least, were not convinced that the written work was done by me. One day, in fact, John Murray, the lecturer in English, early in 1960, popped on us an essay writing exercise in the classroom. I realized what the intention was. I felt ill at ease and made little effort to get going on the writing. Perhaps that helped confirm their suspicions. In the event, as time passed and I did lots more writing, I am sure that they came to realise that I did not have a *ghost* writer. At an earlier time, Tim had said, when the lecturer gave me a paper back with very complimentary remarks on it, something about my wife having written it. He said it jokingly, but I suspect that he was a bit dubious about the paper's authorship. Perhaps they could not see how a soldier who seemed rather dumb could manage to write reasonably well.

A very satisfying experience for me was the rehearsals for, and the performance of, *Romeo and Juliet*, over four nights in 1961. I played Friar Lawrence and had many lines to learn. Gil Brearley, later President of the Australian Film Council, produced and directed the show. I must now have a little boast. The night of the final rehearsal, Gil had with him some theatrical authority whose name I did not know. Next morning, Gil pulled me aside as we were passing in a corridor and said, 'You were marvellous last night.' He seemed very pleased. It was a strange thing, but almost from the final performance the hundreds of lines that I had learned, and I needed prompting not once, deserted my memory. Some members of the family were in the audience one night. (Some

of us recorded some poetry, too, in 1961. A record is about somewhere.) Gil wrote on a programme that I had 'missed my vocation.'

We all went out at times for practical experience at this or that school. I suppose that the above average mark for teaching that I received at the finish was acceptable enough. The writing mentioned earlier was not taken into consideration, I am persuaded, in the academic mark, or perhaps I would have done better than the average mark I received. Overall, it was an ordinary performance on my part. I did find it hard to be interested in some of the subjects, for example, infant teaching.

For a time, some of us did an elective subject, philosophy. Bertrand Russell's name came up here. I went to the Coburg library to borrow his book, *Why I am not a Christian*. The book was not on the shelves but hidden away in a back room somewhere. Do such things still happen, I wonder? Bertrand Russell:

The love of free inquiry and free speculation has never been common. When it has existed, it has existed in only a tiny minority and has always roused furious hatred and opposition in the majority.  
(From *An Education in History*, by Bertrand Russell)

At home, things were going along well at the end of 1961. Betty was still working. Richard was off to high school in Seymour. John, Jennifer and Robyn went to Puckapunyal State School. A little earlier, Robyn went to Seymour Hospital for the removal of her appendix. She was as brave as could be. Jennifer jumped a grade at school.

### **An other-rank no more**

Early in 1962, we went for a fortnight's holiday at an army resort at Queenscliff. It was our first family holiday. Just before we were due to return to Puckapunyal, an official letter arrived informing me that I was to go to Canberra a few days later. I was to attend a Selection Board, the intention being to commission me were I selected. I flew to Canberra in a Fokker Friendship, my first flight since 1939 or 1940, from Essendon. I was there a day or two, and a few days later, at Puckapunyal, the promotion to lieutenant became effective. Richard said, 'Good on you Dad.' My son was proud of me. How marvellous!

That the army commissioned me just then, however, was prompted by certain circumstances rather than by any strong claim that I had to be so promoted. Jerry Whelan, a good friend, and a real *character*, as they say, had been a warrant officer, class 1, at the Puckapunyal Education Centre. He had been commissioned some time before. I sought his place at the Education Centre because it would have meant promotion to WO1, and a continuance of the family's home at 1 Vivi Street. The corps, though, wanted me to go to the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, to replace a WO2 who was to go off to civil schooling. The solution: I would go to Portsea, not as a WO2 instructor, but as a lieutenant. I hardly felt inclined to object to the arrangement. In March 1962, the family moved to Sorrento, living in a house that we rented there. In May, we moved into a married quarter at 9 Lyons Street, Rye. Richard went off to high school in Rosebud, where he was to complete his matriculation in 1965.

On my service as a commissioned officer in the ARA, it may be helpful to keep the following in mind: I was a Direct Entry Officer. Other categories were graduates of Royal Military College, Duntroon, graduates of the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, graduates of Officer Cadet School, Scheyville, Administrative and Technical commissions and CMF officers. Duntroon supplied almost all officers who were to reach very senior rank – perhaps I should not have used 'almost.' Direct Entry Officers were not numerous in the ARA.

Broadly, the Staff, the Arms and the Services made up the army. The Staff gave the directions. The Arms did the fighting. The Services were the providers of needs such as rations, transport, medical, ordnance, and so on. As for precedence, Armour was at the top, followed by Artillery Engineers Signals then Infantry. Perhaps I have erred with the sequence a little, but Armour was certainly top and I am almost sure that Infantry was fifth. Armour replaced Cavalry, you see.

I was close to 40 when commissioned. There was almost no possibility that the army would promote me beyond the rank of major. I was a RAAEC officer. Because it was not our role to fight, we were (quite reasonably?) regarded by many as not real soldiers. Soldiers called members of Education *chalkies*. A RAAEC officer did not write any of my Confidential Reports. I am not saying that that circumstance was necessarily to my detriment.

Perhaps it was; perhaps it was not.  
**Officer Cadet School, Portsea**

The Government established the Officer Cadet School, Portsea in Victoria in 1950 or thereabouts to supplement the supply of commissioned officers to the ARA. The officer output from Royal Military College, Duntroon had become insufficient. The Government had also begun a National Service Training Scheme; then there was the arrival of the Korean War that began in 1950. At Duntroon, the cadets trained for three years. They graduated as first lieutenants. The standard of educational achievement was higher for entry to Duntroon than to OCS.

The OCS was located at what used to be a quarantine station. Its role was to give the cadets the appropriate training and then to graduate the successful ones as second-lieutenants at the end of the course. For some years the course had been of 44 weeks' duration. A cadet began his course either at the beginning or the middle of the year. There was a senior and a junior class in training at any given time, except during breaks at Christmas or the middle of the year. Most could choose the corps to which they would be allocated on graduating. The numbers of cadets built up in the early sixties. My guess would be that the highest figure reached would have been around 150.

Both Duntroon and OCS, it hardly needs to be said, would have had, let us use the term, their own cultures. Over the years, there have been disturbing reports about the culture at Duntroon – bullying by senior cadets, for example. Duntroon, however, is another story. Cadets trained at OCS for only 44 weeks. They were fewer in numbers than at the College. Any potential bullies among them did not have as much time as those at Duntroon to develop and practise their undesirable character traits.

There are qualities other than bullying in military institutions that I could perhaps write about, I realize, but I will not do so. For one thing, to do so is not within the scope of my present intentions. For another, I believe that the Officer Cadet School at Portsea did not anything like approach being an institution whose members could practise virtually unimpeded activities on which the Commandant had placed an embargo. (That seems not to have been the case at Duntroon.) The cadets would have known what the Commandant required of them about such things as bullying. The staff would have been quick to take any necessary corrective action. The Commandant's philosophy of training was at work. I can write only of the period, close to four years, when I was there. Colonel Coleman and Colonel Bates were Commandants during that time.

Twice a year the Commandant, and an officer from Psychology Corps, formed a Selection Board that interviewed Australian OCS applicants. They travelled to several States to do so. Several cadets from New Zealand were in each intake. In 1962, the Territory of Papua and New Guinea sent its first cadets to OCS. They were Ted Diro and Patterson Lowa. The challenge for them was huge. Subsequently, Brigadier Diro for some time commanded the Papua New Guinea Army. A cadet from Nigeria graduated from OCS. I could say much about the cadets, but for reasons of space I shall say just this: they were a fine bunch of (mostly Australian) young men. I was fortunate to be associated with them. (I have remembered another nickname: *honest John* was one way some cadets referred to me. Do not ask me, for I do not know, what some others might have said.)

The experience I had had as an instructor in the RAAMC was a great help to me at OCS. On the other hand, here I was, at nearly 40, newly commissioned – I had had no experience at all as an officer, obviously. Believe me, it's a different world from the world of the other-rank. The first morning that I awoke in the officers' quarters, a corporal came in, took my shoes away, and brought them back polished. I felt embarrassed that someone should clean my shoes. Saluting an officer was never really a problem for me. Now, as well as saluting, I was being saluted. This created in me a very odd feeling for quite a time. The occasion was to come when, in the interests of discipline, it was necessary to demand of a soldier that he had better not look the other way, but should 'throw me one.' Two badges, stars officers (*pips*), were on each shoulder. At the beginning it was hard not to look at them fairly often. I am an officer, I would think. Fancy that! And here I was, nearly 40, I repeat.

### **Annual Confidential Reports**

Every year, it was a commanding officer's (or equivalent) responsibility to complete a report on every commissioned officer under his command. I have obtained copies of all the Confidential Reports of which I was the subject. At the risk of being tedious, I should like now to write about that procedure in some detail. Higher authority used the information in the report as a guide in determining an officer's most effective use in the army,

including his suitability for promotion. The CO gave the officer his report to read. If he disagreed with something in the report, and he could not persuade the CO to alter the report to his satisfaction, the officer might make written representations about it. I did this on one occasion – in 1973.

Once completed at unit level, the CO forwarded the report to the next higher formation for comment. It then went to the member's Head of Corps at AHQ, then finally to the office of the Military Secretary. At that office, the responsible officer gave the report a score, a Standard T Score. I do not know exactly how they arrived at the score, but I feel sure that it was not a percentage. I say that because even when he dealt with very good reports, the Military Secretary allocated only, say, 60 points. How could 60 per cent be a very good score? Anyway, more about the Standard T Score as I go along.

Reporting officers, using a tick, were responsible to make judgements and recommendations on the following characteristics of the officer reported on:

Appearance	Interest	Quickness of apprehension
Judgement	Knowledge of the work	Attention to detail
Paperwork	Acceptability as colleague	Management of subordinates
Ability to speak	Overall opinion	

The document made provision for a CO to comment on his ticking decision. A note against 'overall opinion' read: 'To what extent would you want this officer to serve under you in war?' A CO's decision here was of huge importance to the future promotion prospects of the subject officer. The CO was to tick one of these under 'overall opinion:'

- NOT want him
- Take a chance on him
- Happy to have him
- Prefer him to most
- Fight to get him

All the other characteristics had a note against them, too. (A 'pen picture' of the officer was another important requirement.) Each characteristic, as it appeared on the document, was followed by as many as seven statements. The procedure required the reporting officer to place a tick against one or other of them (in some circumstances he might tick two of the statements), and he could make a written comment if he wished to do so. A tick on a line marked 'S' opposite a particular statement indicated a marked degree of the tendency described in that statement. Consider the statements after 'quickness of apprehension:'

- Not quite as fast as most of his fellow officers S
- As quick to grasp a point as most of his fellow officers
- Very quick on the uptake S

Colonel STG Coleman, OBE, was the Commandant for most of the time that I was there. For the first few weeks he addressed me as *Rawson* which practice was something junior officers had to expect as likely from officers of his rank and higher – and perhaps even lower. He gave me my best Confidential Report. He was a big, bluff man, dark-haired and with a moustache; he bubbled over with energy and enthusiasm. He had served as an infantry officer during the Second World War, and in the fifties had reached the rank of colonel in something of a hurry. Among the officers he, at least, was older than I – he was born in 1916.

In my mind's eye, I can see him now: his tall, rangy figure, dressed in Rugby Union football uniform, shorts baggy and down to the knees, training with, and urging on, his officer cadets on the playing arena. He simply loved that game, and he was so proud of his young men, it was easy to see. Guts and determination. They were but two of the admirable qualities that he sought by his training methods to inculcate into those that he led. And he was so much a leader!

On graduation days (there were two each year) he would normally address the assemblage after the graduation parade, itself a splendid spectacle. A high-ranking dignitary would always be in attendance. Most times, the Governor-General of Australia was that dignitary. I have in mind the attendance of Viscount De Lisle at a graduation in either 1964 or 65. He served with the Grenadier Guards, winning the Victoria Cross at Anzio, Italy, in 1944. For all the Governor-General's aristocratic background and his undoubted gallantry in the face of the enemy, it was the Aussie colonel, Stan Coleman, that I thought the more impressive figure. He would have said that the most important group at OCS was the officer instructors, and I was to be one of them. (There were

NCO instructors, too, and he would have acknowledged their huge importance.)

There were about 14 officer instructors, all captains, from a variety of corps, some graduates of Royal Military College, Duntroon, some graduates of OCS. All were younger than I was, all but one being about 10 years younger. That one was the other RAAEC officer there, Captain Peter Shekelton. I knew him well. He later became the Corps Director. Peter, an Englishman, had been in training with the Fleet Air Arm when the Second World War ended, if I can rely on my memory. He was born in 1926. He was about middle height; he was of slim build; his hair was dark; he had a black moustache; and he was very good-looking. He spoke and conducted himself in the way of, my impression anyway, the quintessential English gentleman. Like Lord De Lisle, he might have graced the ranks of the Grenadier Guards. He seemed to me, however, not cut out for that kind of role – I thought him to be very well suited to his role as an educationalist. From OCS he went off to Staff College, which attendance would be almost mandatory were the army to promote him a few notches.

The appointment occupied by Peter, Captain Paul McLean, not yet 30, later took up. He had come in from the CMF. Some years later, Paul became a Senator, a member of the Australian Democrats Party. Those officers were a fine group of men, at least one of them, Captain Neville Smethurst, later reaching general officer rank. I think that he became Chief of Operations. In 1975, Neville was CO of the Special Air Service Regiment – the army chose him for that appointment boded well for his future promotion prospects.

Usually, an officers' mess is a place where members observe proper decorum. On more than one occasion, however, in the time that I was at OCS, getting on towards midnight, probably, some captains and an occasional major might have been seen tripping one another, spilling drinks, wrestling furiously on the carpeted floor. These were the sorts of things that they no doubt did when they, themselves, were officer cadets at Duntroon or Portsea.

One night there was drama, indeed. A certain major (whose name I may later mention) attempted to trip, from behind, a captain, a New Zealander. The captain reacted quickly. He threw the contents of his glass of beer at the face of the major. Oh, I say, old chap, that's extremely bad form – trip, that's OK, but never, never empty a glass of beer on another officer. The upshot? Incredible! Someone told Captain John McGuire the next day – not the Commandant I feel sure – that it was only because he was a New Zealander that OCS did not march him out. No, I did not join in. I remember once standing with my back to the fire, warming my bottom, wondering what it was that was wrong with me. I must say, though, that I thought the procession of antics juvenile in the extreme. But then I was older and with a different background – of course, I don't mean a *better* background. Again, I was a *chalky* lacking, probably, an aggressive persona.

Despite what I have just recounted, however, I repeat that they were a fine group of individuals. I shall always remember them and be grateful to them for the way they accepted me, an outsider, really, into their company, the officer corps. After 18 months there, I was promoted to temporary captain. That elevation in rank did much for my morale and not a little for the family money matters. In those times, second-lieutenants served 3½ years before being promoted, lieutenants served four years before being made captains, and captains waited for six years before they put up their crowns. The army, however, granted temporary promotion to many officers in those years. Officers had to pass promotion examinations before substantive promotion was approved. Above the rank of major, promotion was by selection.

Colonel Coleman used to say something like this to the wives: 'Look, I am sorry, but I am going to demand much of your husband's time for the next two or three years.' So he did. For that matter, the wives, too, were involved, especially in the frequent social activities, these sometimes involving cadets, sometimes being confined to the officers' mess. Betty and I, a bit stunned by it all, I think, thought it all a great experience, just the same.

The principal subjects on which I instructed cadets were: Current Affairs; English; Military Law; Service Writing; Map Reading; Public Speaking and Debating. We had to involve ourselves in cadets' sporting activities; for some time I was the tennis officer, for example. When, periodically, the cadets went out for a couple of weeks on field training, all the officer instructors went, too. It was rugged at times, but the physical requirements did not trouble me. When, in November 1965, I was leaving for the Territory of Papua New Guinea, the Chief Instructor paid me a compliment on my ability to 'stick with it.'

For years now, I had been reading a good deal. I read, mainly, I can claim, what some may call good literature. Novels, mostly. Now, though, if I were going to be talking to cadets about Communism and democracy and whatever, then I would need to change my reading pattern somewhat. I did that. So I read JS Mill, Karl Marx,

GH Sabine, Joseph Schumpeter and others. JS Mill, who was Bertrand Russell's 'god father,' and whose father, James Mill, told him that the question, 'Who made God?' cannot be answered, impressed me very much, especially his *On Liberty*. I quote a passage from it:

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

I had to do much writing, also; and, as well, I had to set and mark tests and examinations. Some could well have argued that I was not qualified enough to teach some of the things that were my responsibility (but I do not mean military subjects.) There it was.

Early in 1963, Major PH Bennett arrived at the School. He replaced Major John Duff. He was to be the new Senior Instructor, later being promoted to lieutenant-colonel as Chief Instructor on a change of establishment. He was 35 at the time. About the age that some majors got to be lieutenant-colonels. He was a well-built man of middle height. His was a rounded face and his forehead was broad and high. Perhaps he lost his temper on occasions, but I did not ever see that happen. Phil Bennett was a very impressive officer; in my opinion, then, the best officer I had seen. I told him that one night when we were on the booze together. On one other occasion, in his presence, the quartermaster and I almost came to grips during an argument. He looked on in disdain, I thought. He had marvellous control over himself. It became obvious later that his superiors, too, thought very highly of him: he was appointed to command an infantry battalion in action in Vietnam. A Distinguished Service Order was one of his rewards for the job that he did. That appointment, I knew, was something he had much hoped to gain. I forecast that he would make brigadier. Indeed, he was finally to make general, the first Australian Army officer to do that since Blamey during the Second World War. He became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, later being knighted just before the Federal Labor Government, elected in 1983, ended Imperial Honours.

He and I were at a bivouac site in the mountains during a field exercise with cadets. The news came through on the radio that someone had assassinated President Kennedy. This was 22 November 1963. So began the big cover-up, the *Warren Report* being part of it, the authorities doing their best to place the entire blame on Oswald. Much was written about the assassination. I have in mind two books in particular that, if you read them, would make it difficult indeed for you to believe the official line on the killing. They are: *Rush to Judgement* by Mark Lane, and *Inquest* by Edward Jay Epstein.

We went together to the RAAF station at Point Cook, in 1964, to attend a cadet sporting competition. We had luncheon in the officers' mess with the senior RAAF officer, an air commodore, I think he was. He began to speak about the *Rip tragedy*. In the late fifties, a CMF Commando Company went on sea exercises off Queenscliff. There had been warnings of bad weather, but the exercise went ahead, and several soldiers lost their lives. I began to shrivel up inside. Phil Bennett looked as calm as could be. He, you see, was the officer-in-charge of that exercise. In the event, the air commodore made no criticisms. I suppose he never ever did realise that he was speaking to the former OC of the Commando Company. From 1987 to 1995, General Sir Philip Bennett AC, KBE, DSO, KStJ, was Governor of Tasmania. (I had forecast that appointment, by the way, when I read of the death of the incumbent.)

As a family, I think it's fair to say, that we had an enjoyable time over the years 1962-1965. I say that despite the pressures that, for one reason or another, were, I suppose, on us all. We bought a new Austin Freeway car. We spent much time on the Nepean Peninsula, as we were free to do because my work was there. We fished and bathed or simply explored, say, the ocean beach. (Harold Holt, the Prime Minister, whom we saw occasionally, disappeared at Cheviot beach in 1967.) Both the boys became good at tennis, playing for local teams. Robyn began training in ballet.

I wrote earlier about Annual Confidential Reports (AAF A26.) I mentioned that Colonel Coleman gave me my best report. I want to make it clear at once, however, that it was certainly not a superlative report. My reports while I was at OCS were the best I received as an officer; after that they were certainly no better than average. One report that I received later was certainly below average. There was, no doubt, a number of reasons for the backslide, including my presentation of myself to those in higher authority. (I was never one to push myself forward.) There was the fact of my humanism, my atheism and my belief in socialism. There was my attitude towards the war in Vietnam, which conflict I deplored. During my time at OCS, Australia began sending more and more participants to that war. An uneasiness about my position in the army began to increase. I suppose that I began going into my shell a bit. More of that and other related things in later pages. At this point I should like to provide a comment made by a CO of mine in his Confidential Report of 1974. That is, about 10 years later:

His unusual views on religion and his extreme political views are unsuited to a cadet and school environment.

I now intend to go into some detail about my Confidential Report for the year ending 31 July 1964. (It was the best, but only by a small margin, of my four reports at OCS.) Colonel STG Coleman signed the report on 10 February 1965. I do this not with any intention of boasting. I want to place on record some opinions of me, opinions that suggest that they thought well of me when I was an officer at the Officer Cadet School. My subsequent reports, as I have indicated above, declined in quality. Perhaps they would have in any case. Still I do believe, and I repeat, that my political and religious beliefs were sometimes important factors in my being regarded less favourably than formerly by those that judged me. I shall later deal in some detail with the worst report that I received as an officer in the ARA. That was in 1973.

In his Overall Opinion the reporting officer ticked 'Prefer him to most.' In his judgement about the 10 Characteristics, against each one he placed a tick on the line(s) marked S, in one case indicating the most marked degree. I should explain that I am referring to the S that reflected the reporting officer's most favourable (to me) judgement, not his least favourable. He strongly recommended me for promotion without regard to my qualifications by examination; he was prepared to make a recommendation for my accelerated promotion (even) if it involved the passing over of officers senior to me who were suitable for promotion in their turn. He (and his successor at OCS, Colonel HG Bates) considered that the service could employ me as a staff officer.

This was the 'pen picture' of me as I appeared to the reporting officer:

A kindly, sincere and a patiently persistent officer, Captain Rawson's interest in his work and his eagerness to help his students are readily obvious and unmistakable. He has displayed a capacity to contribute to the many aspects of life at OCS at both work and play and as such I valued him highly as a member of the staff. A first class officer and a good companion.

The Military Secretary's office gave my 1964 Confidential Report a Standard T Score of 60.

The Director of Army Education at the time, Colonel VL Green, agreed with the reporting officer's judgement. He wrote this:

I agree with the remarks of the reporting officer. Lt (T/Capt) Rawson is an efficient and hard working officer.

The previous year, Colonel Green wrote this:

Lt Rawson has good soldierly qualities. He works hard, is a capable instructor and is becoming a valuable RAAEC officer.

Colonel Green, I should mention, served as an infantry officer (as best I recall) during the Second World War.

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## Chapter 4 Covert accusations and later the Redress

On 24 November 1965, I was off to the Territory of Papua New Guinea, my new unit to be 1 Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment located at Taurama Barracks, just outside Port Moresby. I was to be the Unit Education Officer. TPNG was still an Australian colony. I flew first to Brisbane, from Essendon Airport, in a TAA Boeing 727 aircraft. (Melbourne Airport was to begin operations in 1970. Even now it is often mistakenly referred to as Tullamarine Airport.) After take off, I learned, with a feeling of wonderment, that we were flying at an altitude of so many feet, at a speed of 600 miles per hour. Never in my whole life had I flown at anything like that height, or at even half that speed. Service officers flew 1st class, by the way; and so did their families on approved movements. I spent a few hours in Brisbane, and then boarded a Douglas DC6 to Moresby, arriving there early in the morning.

To enter the tropics for the first time, perhaps many would agree, is to experience such thoughts as, 'Good heavens, is this what it's like? Will I be able to tolerate such a drastic change of climate?' For my part, I soon became used to it; I liked it, indeed. I think that the rest of the family did, too. Nana was up there with us for some of our stay, and I do not remember that she found it hard to cope with the climate.

### Taurama Barracks, TPNG

As I mentioned earlier, I was to be the Unit Education Officer, having two young, very intelligent RAAEC lieutenants, Bert Jordan and John Hoban to help me. Not long later, a group of National Servicemen, they were school teachers, all sergeants, were added to our teaching staff. The improvement of the educational standards of the Pacific Islands Regiment soldiers was our task.

The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce Hearn, MC, soon interviewed me. He was a man of 41, about average height, somewhat tubby in his build. He had thinning hair and he enjoyed mess life very much. He liked to smoke and to drink, both of which he did hardly in moderation. A year or two later they promoted him to colonel. He became acting Commander, TPNG Command, for a time. At times it was fairly plain that his health was under assault. He collapsed and died in 1969. Those days there were only a couple of black officers, and almost all the senior NCOs and warrant officers were white as well. I lived in the barracks until the family arrived, the accommodation being only fair, and the food, too. The CO made me treasurer of the 1PIR Officers' Mess.

The battalion second-in-command (2IC), Major RDF Lloyd, MC, was going on long leave to Australia with his family soon. The unit arranged for us to move into his house, it being thought, as well, that another house would become vacant before the 2IC came back. That's what happened. Back at Rye, there was a great flurry of activity to arrange everything, and Betty and the children had much to do. An officer at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, very capably arranged their move. Four weeks after I arrived in Port Moresby, the family (though not Nana) arrived also, travelling 1st class in a Lockheed Electra. The next day was Christmas Day, 1965. A few weeks later, we moved again, and then again before we left for Lae early in 1968. It was comfortable living. We even had a servant.

Richard, having matriculated, was accepted for the Victorian School of Forestry, Creswick, Victoria. He left us early in 1966, having worked in a Government department for a few weeks before leaving. John and Jennifer began correspondence courses with the Victorian Education Department. Robyn went to a Port Moresby primary school, and was receiving ballet lessons taped by her teacher, Sandra McKay, in Melbourne. Later she was to return to Melbourne to continue her ballet training, boarding with a woman in Frankston. Jennifer won a scholarship for secondary education while we were at Moresby. After a time, Betty began work with Island Products in Moresby, and the extra income was such a help. (My gross fortnightly pay at the beginning of 1966 was \$222.32.)

It was while we were in Port Moresby, in 1967, that Premier Bolte, in Victoria, went about making certain that Ronald Ryan, accused of murder, was hanged. No one since has been officially executed in Australia. I was an opponent of capital punishment. The hanging upset me. It upset many other Australians, as well. I find myself not to be so strong in opposition to capital punishment in more recent times. I do not believe in free will, so I think that I can understand how forces beyond the control of the individual may cause him or her to kill

someone. A few years ago, I should add, I heard on the news about some Russian who had murdered something like 40 people. I found myself thinking, damn the effects of heredity, the effects of the environment, it would be better if he were to be eliminated. He was. So I suppose that I am against capital punishment – most of the time. I am not proud of my attitude.

We are all the time, on wrong-doing, saying things like, ‘Oh, how could he do such a thing – why would someone be so cruel?’ The Christian religion taught that God made us in His image. The truth is that we are merely the products of evolution just like all the other animals. The chimpanzees, Richard Dawkins of Oxford University wrote:

...have 48 chromosomes compared to our 46 ...we share a common ancestor with chimpanzees ...Chimpanzees and we share more than 99 per cent of our genes.

It is not surprising that some of us turn away from ethical behaviour and do awful things. (I am not, I should stress to any chimp that may happen to read this, comparing the behaviour of chimpanzees unfavourably with the behaviour of *Homo sapiens*.) There seems to be no way, though, that society can avoid the act of punishment.

The primitiveness of the society, especially when one got away from Moresby, was of great interest. In our time there, we found no particular reason to be afraid. A flight in a ratty old DC3 to Wau for a few days’ break soon after arriving in TPNG was another very new experience for us all.

In some areas of my consciousness – perhaps that is not the right word – these were troubling times. Throughout my service in the ARA, as I explained earlier, some views that I held clashed sharply with the views of many of those with whom I associated. This was much more so the case at Taurama Barracks. I was now on the strength of an infantry battalion. Members of Royal Australian Infantry were playing an important part in the attempt to crush Leftism, in the form of Communism, in Vietnam. The Chaplains’ Department wielded a fair amount of influence. Its Roman Catholic members, certainly, were intensely anti-Communist: the experience of decades had shown that to be the world situation.

A right-wing point of view on, say, political matters, some asserted as though everyone within earshot agreed. And most of those present did agree. So, disagreement with such opinions, I continued to believe, was something that I should continue to avoid. I should say at once, however, that I often had discussions about politics and religion and other topics with members of the education group that worked with me. Avoiding disagreement outside my group was a difficult position to maintain, however, and I found it impossible, with one person particularly, always to keep my mouth shut. As an aside, and as I have suggested before, many did not regard RAAEC members as *real* soldiers. I shall have more to say about that a little later.

The waging of war by the USA against Vietnam, the former nation’s deliberate manufacturing of an excuse to wage that war, the huge suffering of the people of Vietnam under the French, the deliberate deceiving of the Australian people by the Menzies Government of the true nature of our involvement – these were some of the events that served to isolate me even further from the mainstream of army thinking, particularly in my new circumstances. There was no possibility at all that I could support the war against Vietnam.

All right, the reader may with some justification say, you were a hypocrite to stay in the army. You should have resigned and left. Perhaps I should have. On the other hand, I was doing my job to the best of my ability, not trying in any way to pass on to the soldiers my opinions on politics and religion. In any case, Australia was a democracy in which the holding of non-conformist opinions was an inalienable right, surely.

At Officer Cadet School, Portsea, there were occasions when, other than during actual training periods, I had discussions with cadets about this or that. A strongly right-wing cadet said to me on one occasion: ‘It’s good, Sir, that there are people like you in the army.’ I thought very seriously about resigning, and made inquiries about my financial position if I were to do so. Superannuation? Money back only. The family? From security to who knows what. I could summon up neither the courage, nor the mental acceptance of the family chaos that may ensue, to do what some would say was the moral thing to do: resign my appointment. As well, there were the other considerations that I have mentioned. Courage? Indeed, it could be argued that it would have been cowardly of me to capitulate to the strongly imbedded right-wing supremacy in the Australian Regular Army

Without doubt my troubled thoughts affected my demeanour, to some extent. As I suggested earlier, I was never one to make efforts to ingratiate myself with my superiors; perhaps I became even more stand-offish than was

my custom. In 1972, at Watsonia Barracks, a reporting officer wrote, 'He goes about his duties without any fuss.' The attitude of not bringing yourself to the attention of your superiors, may be deserving of criticism. That, I am afraid, was the way I was throughout my service. In TPNG, that attitude became even more noticed, I can hardly doubt. A troubled mind might have meant an even further withdrawal by me from contact with my superiors. In any event, Bruce Hearn wrote this in my Annual Confidential Report dated 31 July 1966:

I have not seen enough of him to call his retiring nature a weaker point as I believe this conceals some strong convictions.

There was at least one thing that happened that would have led to his opinions about my having strong convictions. A group from Moral Rearmament (MRA) were to visit the battalion to address unit members. (Remember them?) Any member of the battalion that did not wish to attend, had to gain the approval of the CO. I asked to see Bruce Hearn. He gave me permission not to attend. Was I the only one? I do not know. I think it quite likely that I was the only one, however. A book that I had read about the organization put me off them severely. Tom Driberg, a member of the British Labour Party, had written the book. Their 'absolute love,' their 'absolute honesty,' their 'absolute purity,' their 'absolute unselfishness' – as with the verities of the Sermon on the Mount, the practising of the maxims of the MRA seemed to me to be out of the reach of humankind. They stood against Communism. It would have been interesting to ask them if they loved communists. They promoted God. That was not for me either.

Bruce Hearn wrote two Annual Confidential Reports on me, in 1966 and 1967. My Standard T Scores were 47 and 46. Brigadier IM Hunter, Commander, TPNG Command, wrote this in my 1966 Report:

My DADAE is in complete agreement with this report and states that Rawson is a very sound officer.

Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Jones, the senior Education Corps officer in TPNG, seems surely to have had his doubts about me. He was a very tall, lanky, be-spectacled officer, aged 35 or 36. Some, at least, thought that he would become Director of the Corps later, but he did not. He arranged to meet the National Service education sergeants in their mess. He did not invite me. He must have thought such an action necessary, flagrant though his actions were. It was plain from what he said to me soon after, that the sergeants had spoken about me in a very complimentary way. At least some of the doubts that he might have had about the way I was carrying out my duties were dispelled, I thought. His manner and the things that he said to me later persuaded me of that. In my 1967 Annual Confidential Report Roger commented that, 'While he is not a spectacular operator...' Correct, and that was one of my problems.

There was what an observer might have described as a swarm of chaplains in the Port Moresby area. (We were *chalkies* – they were *god botherers*.) Naturally, they soon got to know that I was an atheist. They soon got to know, as well, that I regarded as not rational the policy of trying to prevent the black soldiers from viewing pictures of, say, scantily dressed women in magazines. A chaplain, the Lutheran, EO Riedel, born in 1929, although civil to me, said to a colleague that, 'Captain Rawson is not fit to be in New Guinea.'

Well, at least, when I was dealing with the soldiers in carrying out my teaching duties, I did my best to impart facts to them. I mean facts relating to the syllabus. Much of his time he spent imparting myths to the soldiers, although he would have dressed them up as facts, it follows. They no doubt did some useful work in welfare matters – that I do not dispute. Riedel was a wisp of a person. Perhaps he had done some training as a gymnast? At least, I smiled to myself about that possibility when I saw him throw his person around when conducting a marriage service at Taurama Barracks one day.

## **Enter Security**

Perhaps it was not surprising that one of the chaplains, Pat O'Connell, at Taurama Barracks, in 1967, without informing me, complained to the Commanding Officer that I was a subversive. I use that term advisedly. Now his main gripe about me, I am sure, was that I had made it plain to him that I was an atheist and, indeed, most of our disagreements were about religion. It would have been foolish of me to go on about Vietnam to him or to anybody else. I accept, however, that he could have drawn certain inferences from our sometimes heated conversations, about religion, principally, and about politics. More about that later. Security in the shape of the TPNG Special Branch entered the matter. They, however, would have found, for one thing, that I had never ever belonged to a political organization of any kind. I was, though, a strong supporter of the Australian Labor Party. That made me a bit of an oddity.

The CO, Security, the cleric or anyone else, never ever spoke to me about my now shaky standing as an ARA officer. I had now certainly begun my descent into an atmosphere in which thrived distrust, contempt, lies, pernicious gossip, prejudice and who knows what else. I said nothing at the time except to my wife. (In June 1973, back now in Australia, I brought the matter up with a visiting Military Secretary. He said little. But more about that later, too.) So, on the surface, things went on fairly normally. It was inevitable, though, that my situation would become widely known about and speculated upon. People spread all sorts of false and damaging opinions about me. I shall deal with them later.

Certainly those things affected my future service. A decision earlier to post me to an appointment in Adelaide took me by surprise. I did not go to Adelaide, however. The Chaplains' Department, to name just one entity, would have applied much pressure on my Directorate. I suspect, just the same, that the Directorate would not have needed much pressure to act in the matter. The point of view: we simply cannot have an education officer, an atheist and a suspected subversive, loose in a battalion of black soldiers. For one thing, religion is an integral part of our military system. And – perhaps I go just a little bit overboard here – on top of that, well, he votes for the Labor party and he supports trade unionism. For heaven's sake!

Back in Australia, in 1973, I wrote an account of the Security investigation by the Special Branch that I mentioned earlier. Since then, I have made some amendments and some amendments to it. Here it is:

### **A Brush with Security**

They were tall, well-built men, and neatly dressed, and their size seemed to be at odds with the size of the Morris 1100 car in which they arrived. They were just outside my front door. They spoke briefly with a battalion guard; then they eased themselves into the car and it moved along the road in the direction of Battalion Headquarters. This was the second half of 1967.

There was little doubt in my mind about their identity – people in their calling do have a certain air about them. At the same time, I must say that I was not anticipating something quite of this sort. The telephone rang minutes later, and the caller, as I felt it would be, was the Battalion Intelligence Officer, Captain Bryan Green: 'Oh, John, have you finished that personal particulars form yet?'

It is not easy to say when all this had its beginning – certainly a supporter of the Australian Labor Party is very much a member of a minority in the Australian Army. And it's not just a case of conservatism among the officers either: not too many other-ranks, especially the senior ones, are Labor supporters. But perhaps this particular episode could be said to have begun upon the arrival at the Barracks of a certain member of the Royal Australian Army Chaplains' Department. I speak of Chaplain Pat O'Connell of the Roman Catholic Church. He was a tall, dark individual, in his middle thirties, I should think. When he walked he rather plodded along. He had been kind enough to help my son with some problems with the school subject, economics.

On occasions we talked. We talked not at all only about politics. Censorship, pornography, and religion were part of our conversations, too, and I must say that there was some heat to these at times. (At this time strenuous efforts were being made by some to keep such publications as *Pix* out of the hands of New Guinean soldiers – because this practice seemed pointless to me and I had said so, a member of the Chaplains' Department (not the same one) told one of my colleagues that Captain Rawson was 'not fit to be in New Guinea.') And he was appalled, no doubt, that an atheist should be allowed to belong to the battalion. On one occasion, also, the Commanding Officer removed and screwed up a calendar with a naked woman on it from my office wall, giving it to me when I indicated that it was my property.

O'Connell was not at all the first one I had met over the years who could not stomach radical opinions – but he was, as far as I am aware, the first and only individual to report me for my 'subversive' opinions. Know? No, I do not *know* that he did. There was enough evidence as far as I was concerned, though, to confirm this opinion. Especially when I rang the Intelligence Officer back and Pat O'Connell answered the telephone. Then I felt I knew quite well what was happening at Battalion Headquarters: the two men from the Special Branch were with Bruce Hearn, the Commanding Officer; the Intelligence Officer had gone from his office to tell the visitors that Captain Rawson had not yet completed the Personal Particulars form; and the Chaplain was waiting to be called to give his 'evidence.' There may well have been others questioned, too, I suppose.

I had wondered a few weeks before why I was being returned (early) to Australia to a posting in Adelaide. The senior officer from my corps in New Guinea, Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Jones, had just returned from a visit to Canberra when he told me this. It is reasonable for me to think that my Security and other difficulties, such as my atheism, were the main reason for his visit to Canberra. He was a fine officer and an honest person and I sensed his embarrassment at the lack of prior information or explanation given to me. He agreed to do what he could to change the decision so we could remain in New Guinea for a further period. When, soon after that, the Intelligence Officer asked me to complete a Personal Particulars form, again I wondered. What for? 'Oh, it's just routine,' said Bryan Green. But it is not routine to

be asked to fill in another one of these forms unless one's circumstances change, for example, by marrying. I began to realise what was happening.

A Personal Particulars form is a document forming the basis for a check by the Attorney-General's Department into the background of the individual. It is the basis for a security check, the check normally done by ASIO. Details one must provide include such things as the ages and birthplace of parents and siblings, the places in which one has lived, the countries one has visited; and so on. I had not completed the form by that time because the necessary information about family birth-places and other details had not been forwarded to me by my father. (I did, however, complete it quite soon after the visit of the Security members.) It is worth mentioning at this point, that in later months when, as an adjutant of a unit, and at the direction of my Commanding Officer, I made an application to be cleared to 'Top Secret', this was refused and the 'Intermediate' grading that I had been given in 1962 was still dated 1962, not, it should be noted, 1967. What happened to the 'routine' form? Obviously it was not 'routine' at all – it was initiated because someone (in my opinion, Chaplain O'Connell) had complained that I held subversive opinions, as well as that I was an atheist.

There was no chance at all that even the most thorough investigation would reveal any association by me with any subversive organisations or individuals – unless you regard the publishers of the *New Statesman* and Bertrand Russell as fitting that description. (And I must say that some I have known would so regard them.)

I had jotted down the number of the car. Later that day my wife drove me in to Konedobu, a part of Port Moresby. We found the car where I had expected to find it – outside Police Headquarters, in which buildings were also the offices of the Special Branch. My wife and I still laugh about that episode. She called herself *Natasha* that day.

There was no doubt in the minds of my wife and myself by now: we knew beyond doubt that the views I held on many topics, views which agreed with those of many men in the then Federal Opposition were deemed so likely to be subversive that, on the complaint of a cleric, I should be moved out of New Guinea.

After their interview with the Commanding Officer, the men went to the headquarters of the company to which I was attached. No doubt they were seeking the opinions of the OC of Headquarters Company, Major Tony Trevarthan. We got on quite well together. Our favourite topic was football, however, not politics. I suspect that he may even have voted Labor. In any event, although he probably did consider me something of a radical, I think that he would not have considered my outlook subversive. But who knows?

A few days later, Bruce Hearn called at our house. It was late afternoon. My wife and I were both at home. We liked and respected him and he was most welcome to a book from the few we had. He had not done that before, though. And there he was, kneeling down in front of the bookcase carefully reading every title. When he left, *Natasha* said, 'You know what that was all about don't you?' Indeed, I did know. Bertrand Russell was the only controversial writer in the shelves, so I supposed that helped my case. (In fact there was a copy of *The Communist Manifesto* in the house somewhere. I shudder to think!) He knew many of my opinions; we had had brief discussions from time to time during social occasions. I think that he would have thought that I was pretty harmless, really, even if a bit misguided.

The adjutant of the unit was interested in books, too. As he passed my office one day he paused at the door to say a word or two. It happened that I was at that moment opening a small parcel, a book that I had had sent from Australia. He was most interested. He walked across the door to my table and looked carefully at the book. Bertrand Russell again! I used to wonder just how many knew what was going on. Things like that do get around. I came to realize that I was, so to speak, *the talk of the town*. The crisis passed. No one told me, of course, that I had been cleared, (if, indeed, I had been) but I learned that I was to stay in New Guinea for a further period, and that seemed to be some sort of proof that my innocence had been established. On the other hand, as it turned out, and as I found out years later, I was no longer to be employed as a teacher so that made me rather more *safe* as an army officer. In March 1968, we moved to a new camp near Lae.

But was it really the finish? Not really. The officer who wrote my Confidential Report in 1968 thought it necessary to write, 'There is no question of his loyalty' among his comments about me. I wondered if he knew that I knew what he meant. Why would he write that unless my loyalty was in question and unless he had been given the background? That document is (now in 1998) in my possession. (The first time I ever brought the matter up officially was with the visiting Military Secretary at Watsonia Barracks in June 1973 – I thought it about time that it be known that I knew.)

A later CO of mine, I am positive, had been briefed about me, too. I remember being amused in the Mess one day when a conversation began about a union strike that was occurring in Australia. On such occasions I almost invariably said nothing – in any case politics was supposed to be a subject not talked about in messes. The officer had eyes that might be unkindly described as shifty. He was not facing me but, no doubt to observe my reaction to what was being said, his eyes kept darting around to his left. It was quite a priceless performance. I had become accustomed over the years to remaining 'poker faced' in most circumstances, and so I remained on that occasion.

We left New Guinea in 1969. One day in July 1969, my unit received a signal from an officer in Australia inquiring about married quarters as he was to replace me as adjutant of the unit. This was news to my Commanding Officer and

to me. I realised later that the Area Commander had arranged this, probably because of a difference of opinion we had had over his charging and fining black soldiers for not wearing a tie when going on leave to Lae in civilian clothes at night. (Headquarters at Port Moresby put a stop to this later.) My posting was to be as QM (Captain) of a Melbourne unit. (This was changed later without any reason being given to me.)

Now the Government has changed. (It is 1973.) Now, on every hand, in Officers' Messes one hears the most vituperative, unfair, inaccurate and mindless criticism of that Government, its Ministers and its policies. It is almost always assumed that there is no dissent from anyone within earshot. Bring out the Personal Particulars forms!

## **Igam Barracks, TPNG**

We talked at home at Taurama Barracks about a move to Adelaide. We agreed that we would prefer to stay in the Territory. Even in normal circumstances, I would not have remained with 1PIR for longer than a few more months. So I spoke to Roger Jones about a non-corps appointment of some kind at Igam Barracks, a new barracks nearing completion at Lae. A non-corps appointment meant that I would not be an education officer, but that the army would give me an appointment outside RAAEC. I became the Adjutant of the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (a CMF unit) on 10 January 1968. The headquarters of that unit, and our family, moved from Port Moresby to Igam Barracks in March, 1968. Betty, John, Jennifer, Robyn and I flew to Lae.

Some weeks were to go by before our movement to Lae. The HQ of PNGVR was still at Murray Barracks, Port Moresby. It was necessary for me to travel to and from Taurama Barracks each work day. At the time, Lieutenant-Colonel Mal (*Wally*) Bishop, MM, was the CO. He was soon, however, to take up the appointment of Area Commander, Lae Area. He interviewed me. His manner was stern and not at all friendly. It was plain that he was rather less than delighted that I was to join the team in Lae.

I then found out that AHQ had posted me, or intended to post me, to the appointment of Administrative Officer, at HQ, Lae Area. From his point of view that was not a good idea, so he had my appointment changed to Adjutant, PNGVR. He expressed doubt about my ability to handle the job, a job that I later came to believe a competent sergeant could easily have handled. In passing, I make the point that both Colonel Coleman and Colonel Bates, at OCS, had recommended that staff work would suit me. They were not the only ones. Captain Barry Sullivan was Adjutant of PNGVR at the time. I got the impression that he was not too pleased about his change of jobs. He was to be the Administrative Officer. In 1997, Bill Harrington, (more about him later) in a letter, made these comments on my change of appointment:

I assume that you may also have been aware that your initial posting to Igam Barracks was as Adm Offr HQ, Lae Area. Bishop, whether rightly or wrongly, refused to have you and, with the backing of TPNG Command, arranged for Barry Sullivan the then Adj of PNGVR to be posted to Lae Area in lieu of yourself.

The family car was not available for me to use to travel each day to Murray Barracks. The transport sergeant at PNGVR said that he would send a car for me each morning. As well, he would have me transported home at the end of the day. After a couple of days, Mal Bishop put a stop to it: he told the sergeant – not me – that I was to make my own arrangements. I wondered if he would have done that had I have been an infantry officer.

Mal Bishop had won a Military Medal during the Second World War, at least, I think it was then. (Commissioned officers won the Military Cross.) Bill Harrington made these comments about him in a letter to me: '...an officer with an excellent record both in war and peace and who was one of a small percentage of non-Duntroon graduates who were in the Australian Staff Corps and who were promoted above the rank of major in the late 1960's.'

Bishop was about middle height – perhaps a little taller. His was a powerful physique on the lines of a middle-heavyweight boxer who was getting on in years a bit. He was almost 47. He was a tough-looking fellow whose ability to win an award for gallantry you could hardly doubt. He was one to rule with a firm hand. I came to think that he had a too heavy hand. He often carried a stick, and at Lae he liked members to refer to him as 'the Commander.' That title, though, I was under the impression, was reserved for formation commanders. His title was 'Area Commander.'

By the time I left Taurama Barracks, I have realized in more recent times, my Directorate was more than happy to agree to my request to be posted to a non-corps appointment at the new barracks at Lae. They certainly would have regarded me as an embarrassment to the corps by then. When they made the decision not to allow me to teach in the future, I do not know. I do know, though, that that decision was made. I have in my possession a

document, a Record of Interview. It is dated 6 July 1973. The Military Secretary, Brigadier JF White, interviewed me. It was a routine interview. I made a very brief reference to New Guinea. He did not respond to me. On the document he wrote: 'I want to see Dossier.' On the document also, my Directorate had made this comment: 'DAE would not see him returning to RAAEC duties in a professional role ...' So that was that.

Yes, they might have had other reasons for barring me as a teacher, but the principal reason seems to be obvious: my beliefs. I should explain that during my stay in Lae I did advise the Directorate that I would prefer my next posting also to be a non-corps one. I did this because I was uneasy about my standing in the corps. I was concerned, as well, about the fact that I was not a graduate. (Not that all RAAEC Officers were university graduates.)

I turn now to seeking the answers to two questions: did members of other corps regard the RAAEC with disdain, with contempt, even? What were some of the rumours and opinions about me in Papua New Guinea? In 1997, I had written a letter to ex-Lieutenant-Colonel WA Harrington, MBE. He had been my CO for some months in 1968. In a letter to him, I had asked if he would be prepared to comment about my difficulties with Security and the chaplains at Taurama Barracks. He replied in a letter dated 26 October 1997. I shall have more to say about our correspondence later; for the moment I shall quote just two extracts from his letter.

The refusal to employ you and to permit you to be foisted onto other units in non corps postings, reflected little credit on the education organization and was in fact a buck passing operation. The standards required for commissioning in the Education Corps were absurdly low, as was the level of promotion examinations. [I think that he is wrong about the promotion examinations, for one thing.] Attempts to willy nilly equate these standards to what, in many cases, were key non corps postings were doomed to failure. A far worse case placement in a specific corps posting such as Adjt PNGVR.

Whilst some degree of sympathy was no doubt appropriate it would appear that most of your difficulties were self inflicted. You were dogmatic with your views regardless of the opinions of others, you resented criticism, resented authority and quite often evidenced a state of mind bordering on paranoia. Indications were that ASIO maintained a liaison with the TPNG Police Special Branch. Most of the innuendo I heard came from Port Moresby. This included terms such as radical, a stirrer and a closet conscientious objector. It was also mooted that you supported the flock of individuals who were in the Territory for the express purpose of evading any involvement with the Vietnam draft. There was also quite some talk amongst PNGVR officers of whom several were police. Most comments I heard were opinionative and as far as I was concerned remained just that.

Bill Harrington was born on 6 November 1926. I met him the day he arrived at Lae airport, TPNG, to take over command of the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, in which appointment he was replacing Lieutenant-Colonel Ken Gallard. I was the Adjutant of PNGVR. At the end of the Second World War, he was a sergeant in 3 New Guinea Infantry Battalion. He was later commissioned. He was a tall, thin chap with dark hair. In those respects, he and I were alike. He always took care to salute in the approved manner. Many officers, particularly as they advanced in seniority, seemed to decide that they were not going to be bothered by such a detail – let the junior officers and the other-ranks salute correctly – officers of our standing should not have to be bothered with such things. Now back to the things Bill wrote to me in 1997.

Note 'The refusal to employ you' bit. I did not realize then that someone had decided to keep me away from teaching. In relation to the standing of the Education Corps and its members, it could hardly be expected that an ex-infantry officer would necessarily give a balanced assessment of the 'chalkies' and the corps to which they belonged. Just the same, I do not mean to dismiss all his opinions out of hand. There existed, however, a large reservoir of contempt in the ARA for RAAEC members. Indeed, among the officer corps rivalry was very strong. It would not be too much to say that Arms officers, generally, believed themselves to be superior to the officers in the Services. They were the *real* soldiers – they did the fighting. I must say that I can understand Bill's being annoyed that the army did not post a young infantry captain as his adjutant. I must also say that in the main we got on quite well together.

Now for the tough bit. I do not remember having an argument of anything approaching a passionate nature with anyone at Taurama Barracks other than Pat O'Connell and perhaps a supporter or two of his. Saying that is not to say that I *never* argue vehemently. I repeat: I was mostly very careful about what I said, time after time not entering conversations although I often felt strongly about what others were saying. In the same way as clerics have profound religious beliefs, I have profound beliefs against religion. Dogma is the basis of their beliefs. Certainly, I can be dogmatic at times. I deny emphatically, however, that it is a valid general description of me. Over the years, I have at times been criticized for being too tolerant.

'Resented criticism.' Who criticized me? My Commanding Officer? My corps superior? I can hardly remember

ever being criticized. I do not mean that I was above criticism – of course I was not. ‘Resented authority.’ Hogwash. ‘A state of mind bordering on paranoia.’ In a sense I *was* being persecuted. I *did* have a feeling of being isolated to a degree, I suppose. But Bill Harrington does not seem to have noticed the affliction during the time we served together in TPNG. He does not mention how the disease manifested itself in me. Except for this: he arrived at that diagnosis because I registered a letter that I sent to him last year. The letter contained material that I was particularly wanting him to receive. Sometimes letters do become lost in the post. Registration seemed to be a good idea in that case. I thought his reaction quite odd.

Of course I am something of a radical. But I am a do-nothing radical. I almost wish the term *stirrer* fitted me. It is not an apt description of me at all. It never has been. Except, perhaps, in very small amounts. The ‘conscientious objector’ tag is an interesting one to consider. I have explained that I did oppose the war in Vietnam. I have said all that. I suppose that you could fairly accurately describe me as a conscientious objector to it. I am not a pacifist.

As for the Vietnam draft story – hogwash again. I can say, as well, with absolute certainty, that the Special Branch in Moresby, the Police themselves, or Military Intelligence would never have seen me in the company of any Australian who was in TPNG to dodge the draft. So now, after all those 30 years, I realize fairly well to what extent my stay at Taurama Barracks blackened my name. It does seem certain that a chaplain (or chaplains) began the process. The false rumour machine, gossip – you name it – propelled the process along.

One last thing. Bill Harrington called me a coward in his letter of 26 October 1997. In a letter to him, I had drawn an analogy. On one side of the analogy, I had portrayed him as a hero for his part in a (fictional) battle in TPNG in the closing months of the Second World War. For his reasons he did not like the analogy: ‘downright sick,’ he called it. He also wrote: ‘Coming from someone who had evaded heroism for 34 years...’

We had a new house at Igam Barracks. It was high off the ground, furnished comfortably enough, with ceiling fans and louvered ventilation access in lower walls and windows. Housing for the black soldiers and their families was in a separate area from the white soldiers. The housing for the whites was of a higher standard. The yearly average rainfall was about 180 inches. Earth tremors occurred from time to time, being sometimes severe enough to scare, and to tip items off shelves and tables. We were some 10 miles out of Lae, an attractive enough town, smaller than Moresby.

It was at Igam Barracks that we began to call Betty Liz; and so I shall call her Liz from now on in this narrative – except when I call her Elizabeth. She began work in Lae with John Lysaght’s steel works. John finished his Leaving, worked for Burns Philp for a time, and then with Ansett Airlines. Jennifer finished her correspondence course in 1969, completing her matriculation studies. Robyn went off to Frankston in Victoria in the second half of 1968. She wished to continue with her training in ballet.

PNGVR was, as I have said, a CMF Unit, that is, most members were part-time soldiers. A minority, including the CO and me, was Regular Army. There were sub-units in Moresby, Mount Hagen, Goroka, Wewak, Madang, Banz and Rabaul. I was at its headquarters. The new CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Ken Gallard had joined the unit at about the same time as I did. All the more senior people were white, including the officers commanding the sub-units. The major at Madang was an airline executive; the major at Goroka was a coffee planter. It was necessary for me to visit the sub-units, and this I did by Land Rover (to Goroka only) *Sioux* helicopters *Pilatus Porter* army aircraft or commercial aircraft. Other units in the area included a hygiene training unit, a company of the Pacific Islands Regiment, a helicopter reconnaissance flight, and a school cadet unit.

At this point, I shall go on to reproduce some of Ken Gallard’s comments in my Confidential Report of 1968. (My Standard T Score was 45.) I do so because I believe that, although it is only an ‘average’ report, it is a fair and fairly accurate one:

Captain Rawson is a more mature officer than normal for his particular appointment as Adjt of a CMF Battalion. He has a quiet, confident manner and at all times is pleasant to seniors and subordinates alike. He has experienced some difficulties in absorbing all the detail required of his appointment but is willing to learn and is improving daily in efficiency. As a former Education officer he has had to cope with problems quite new to him and has done so in a satisfactory manner. He should improve to become a very capable staff officer in due course. An apparent weakness is that he gives the impression of not being forceful enough although he has proved capable of supervising and enforcing his orders. He needs to improve his image as adjt. His strongest points are his diligent application to his duties and a willingness to work hard to achieve results. His loyalty is not in question. [Particularly note this last remark.]

Ken Gallard – of course, I never ever called him Ken – was a fairly short, very reasonable, decent, person. He smiled often. Not at all was he a martinet, yet he was very capable of imposing firm discipline. He was born in 1921. In recent times I have learned that he did not want me as adjutant, but Bishop's demands prevailed. The Area Commander was a day junior to Ken Gallard although, of course, he was senior in appointment. This seniority allowed Ken Gallard, on occasions, to question Mal Bishop's authority if he so chose. I feel sure that Bishop, on one of his fairly frequent visits to Canberra, asked for Ken Gallard's removal after the latter had been with PNGVR for only a year or so.

The five of us flew to Sydney in April 1968, having arranged a place to stay at King's Cross. Richard and a friend stayed with us for a few days. It was crowded living but we all enjoyed their visit. We travelled back to Moresby on the MS *Taiyuan*, stopping at Brisbane on the way. It was a great trip all round.

The CO authorized me to drive a Land Rover to the Goroka Show in 1968, and to take the family with me. It was all very interesting and exciting. This was up in the highlands, and the scenery was splendid as, indeed, it was in much of TPNG. The TPNG people vary a great deal in appearance, including in colour and dress, and in language. A Papuan, for example, or a New Guinean, say, or a Buka, could readily be picked out in a crowd by some of the older hands there. A document specially written for the guidance of Australian officers and other-ranks, included this comment: 'Since their stage of evolution and advancement is not as forward as ours their reliance on our counsel is the greater.'

Goroka and Mount Hagen alternated their shows, and in 1969 I flew to Hagen in an RAAF *Caribou*. (I learned from him, in later years, that Sapper ((later Sergeant)) Patrick Miller, Royal Australian Survey Corps, who was to marry Robyn in 1989, was at the Mount Hagen show that year.) On one occasion, we drove to Goroka and back in the unit Holden station wagon. I was driving. We were close to losing our lives when a tyre burst at 60 miles an hour some miles out of Lae on the way home.

The adjutant's job at PNGVR was not particularly demanding. In my case, though, there was a fair bit to learn. An adjutant is the Commanding Officer's right-hand man in 'A' matters, which are to do with personnel, their pay, health, etc, and 'G' matters, which are to do with operations, training, intelligence, etc. There was a good deal I did not know about 'G' matters, especially. (In a letter to me in 1997, Bill Harrington wrote that I performed my 'A' duties very well.)

Richard was due to complete his course at Creswick Forestry School at the end of 1968. I decided that I would do my best to be there when he graduated. Months before, Military Board Instructions had asked for applicants to attend a Unit Emplaning Officers' course at the RAAF base at Richmond, NSW. I put it to Ken Gallard that I should attend, although I should have found it difficult to provide a good reason why he should approve my application. He did give his approval. One of his considerations was that I could do the job of providing some help and guidance to two, young, recently commissioned (from OCS) black officers, who were to do the course. One was Ken Noga, in recent times the Papua New Guinea High Commissioner to Australia.

The aim of the course at Richmond, in November 1968, was to make the student familiar with the troop and cargo carrying capabilities of *Hercules* and *Caribou* aircraft. There were many formulas and calculations involved, all of this being fairly demanding. We did much flying, including a low flying trip along the coast to Sydney's north. The RAAF called it the *bikini run*. Whoever wrote my course report was very generous, even though I finished only a little above the middle of the class. I got an 'A' and two 'B's which wasn't too bad for me. They got me away a few hours early so I could get a certain flight from Sydney to Melbourne.

Dad, and I forget who else, drove with me to Creswick for Richard's graduation. He had done very well, and we were all very proud of him. After a few days, I returned to Igam Barracks, it being good to have seen my parents and other members of the family. Dad had retired at Fitzroy in 1956. After that, he and mother and Jess and Bryan lived at Alphington, Victoria. Poor Jess was a huge problem for them, being afflicted, as I said earlier, with schizophrenia. Peter married twice. He had two daughters, Lillian and Lana, from his first marriage. Lillian married Eric Graham and they have two sons. Peter married Irene in 1979.

Early in 1969, Lieutenant-Colonel Gallard moved out as CO, and Lieutenant-Colonel Bill Harrington, MBE, whom I have already introduced, came in from Canberra. We got on reasonably well, and he seemed to be genuinely pleased when he read my report from Richmond. The Standard T Score relating to my 1969 Confidential Report, however, continued its decline – it had dropped to 40. I did not make an issue of the report with my CO. The Director of Education, Colonel EC Gould, from Britain, had these things to say: 'A very

pleasant, cooperative officer whose performance does not seem to tally fully with his promise.’ He probably wondered how I ever got a score of 60.

Much later in the year there was to be a very nasty turn in my relationship with my CO. Before I get to that, however, I want to say something about an incident that was, I am sure, one of the things behind my earlier-than-expected departure from TPNG. (I had, as I said earlier, indicated to the Director of RAAEC that I would like to continue in non-corps postings.)

## The tyrant

I was chatting one day with a couple of other officers. One was Captain Barry Sullivan, the officer who occupied the appointment that I was at first to take: Administrative Officer on HQ, Lae Area. Captain John Finn, RAAEC, was the other officer. I learned, and I thought it appalling, that black private soldiers from Igam Barracks were being charged at Bishop’s direction and then fined by him for contravening his Orders: some were not wearing ties when they went on leave to Lae at night wearing civilian clothes. Can you believe that? Lae’s latitude is 6.45 degrees South. It gets very hot there. He believed in ‘high standards.’ Was this the military mind at work?

I expressed doubt to Barry and John about the legality of the order and the punishment. Anyone reading the definition of a lawful order in the *Manual of Military Law* would surely have doubts, too. Barry Sullivan told Bishop, it seemed obvious to me from what happened a few days later. The latter came to my office and brought up the matter. He did not make a fuss. He referred to an Australian Military Order that states that a ‘CO’s authority is paramount.’ Surely, though, the CO’s authority must have bounds, I suggested. Perhaps he would be able to order me to wear yellow singlets, say?

He came to my office to discuss the matter of the orders about the wearing of ties. There is no doubt at all about that. So it seems odd to me that Bill Harrington, who was still in Australia at the time, insists that it all never happened. (After Bishop left, he became Area Commander.) His objections and explanations are too many to recount here. Just let me say this: Bill belonged to the Australian Staff Corps, whose motto, events persuade me to believe was, ‘Never admit that you are wrong.’ Certainly in the many pages of a couple of letters to me he has not admitted being wrong even once. He wrote this: ‘These comments still stand without apology or amendment.’

Not long after, I learned, HQ at Moresby suggested that it would be best if Bishop stopped charging the soldiers. Now I do not know who it was that made the ‘suggestions.’ I do not say that it was a written order. Perhaps some senior officer at Moresby, as he should have done in my opinion, mentioned the matter, perhaps on the telephone. Perhaps a legal officer considered what was happening to be not quite lawful, not to mention other considerations. It might have been that he had other reasons, as well, for wanting me out, but on another trip to Canberra, he asked AHQ to replace me, of that I feel sure. I do not dispute his right to take that action. I should like now to get back to the *Manual of Military Law*. It was a British manual and it contained the *Army Act*, which act the British Parliament passed each year. We had our *Defence Act*, which was contained in our manual, *Australian Military Regulations and Orders*. Australian soldiers were subject to the *Army Act* rather than the *Defence Act* while on war service or while deemed to be on war service. I hope that I got those things right. In a foot-note to the *Army Act*, the idea of a ‘lawful command’ is discussed. Here is an extract:

The command must be one relating to duty, that is to say, the disobedience of it must tend to impede, delay, or prevent a military proceeding. Thus a command given by an officer to his soldier servant to perform some domestic office not relating to military duty is not a command within the meaning of this section.

I think that to read the foregoing is to think it quite possible that Bishop’s order relating to ties was perhaps not lawful, quite apart from any other objection one might have to it.

There is little doubt that Bishop was something of a tyrant. Major Gary Ghent was the OC of a Company of 1PIR, Taurama Barracks. The Company was stationed at Igam Barracks for the time being. He was tall, slim, 30 and fair-haired. He was recently promoted to temporary major. He wore a pilot’s badge. He and Lois and their young children lived across the road from us. One Saturday he and Lois came to visit us in the last minutes of the Carlton–Essendon Grand Final in 1968. The *Blues* won. But only just. Some of Gary’s soldiers got into some kind of problem at the airport. A report on the matter treated Gary so harshly that he felt sure that the army

would never promote him. He might as well leave the army. He told me this. He did leave. An army career ruined. From what he told me, I believed that Mal Bishop played the major part in the ruining of his career.

Major Len Brown was 34. He was a Medical Corps officer, the OC of the Hygiene Training Unit. He did something to upset Bishop, too. He went back to Australia very, very quickly. The incident probably ruined his career, too. To be fair, though, I did not know all the circumstances of the trouble – perhaps it was a serious matter. I wonder, though, if it was serious enough for Bishop to take that kind of action. I have no doubt, either, that later Bishop made comments to an officer who was to become my CO in Melbourne, causing that officer to be prejudiced against me before we even met in 1973. But more about that later.

We had been on leave to Australia, but I had nevertheless accrued many days of leave entitlement. We decided that Liz and I would visit Japan by boat later, and we arranged all that with some difficulty. One day, in July 1969, a signal about married quarters arrived at the headquarters. It was from an officer who, we realized, was to take my place as adjutant of PNGVR. Bill Harrington said that he knew nothing about the change-over, and of course I believed him. Bishop had not told him, obviously. The decision disappointed us at home. It was to be September before I left the unit.

We now had to rethink our plans for leave, etc. It seemed reasonable to me that I should go on leave from my unit in September, and to have all the leave in Japan and New Guinea. That appealed to us, especially because we could retain our married quarter. This would have meant that Jennifer could finish her correspondence matriculation study and the necessary examinations in Lae, a couple of months later. Imagine the complications if she had had to go back to Victoria almost at the end of the school year. We had no idea at all where we would be living. There was John to consider, as well, but he, now that he had decided to keep working for Ansett, could live at their hostel in Lae.

### **Almost an early exit**

Much to my surprise, Bill Harrington would not agree to the proposal, even though my leave application had been approved. I am unable to remember who approved it. It was not Bill Harrington. Perhaps I applied in Ken Gallard's time at PNGVR. Perhaps it went to TPNG Command for approval. He insisted that when the new officer arrived our married quarter was to be immediately available to him. I thought his demand most unreasonable. Soldiers, in most places, had to wait for a time before a married quarter became available. I had gone to TPNG without my family. When we did go back to Australia we waited for weeks and weeks for a quarter. At Healesville we waited for over four years. Except when we moved to Lae, we had always had to wait for a quarter.

As for Jen, he said, 'Jennifer's education is of no importance.' But what about our arranged leave in Japan? Bad luck. It was a hell of a row, and I was close to following Len Brown to Australia. Bill Harrington has claimed in a letter to me that he simply would never have said such a thing about Jennifer's education. He did though. My wife, too, remembers. I told her when I got home that day. He also went into some detail about the other side of the question of my leave. I do not dispute that his arguments had some validity.

I have to admit that that day in Bill's office was one occasion when critics might well have accused me of arguing passionately. They might reasonably have accused me of being dogmatic, as well. I thought, and I still think that I was right in thinking, that I was being treated most unfairly. Had the authorities not earlier approved my leave, had I not made all those arrangements, I would not have felt so outraged. In a sense, someone had broken a promise to me. I felt betrayed. This treatment of my family and myself, I felt sure, had very much to do with my newly-acquired but false reputation. A chaplain back at Taurama Barracks had much to do with the creation of that reputation as I have explained.

Why did the opinions of a chaplain count so much against me in an army belonging to all Australians, not just the religious and the conservative ones? As an officer, I think that I can say, I was fairly well thought of before. Those events at Taurama Barracks had sullied my reputation. If ever I believed that the ARA was an example of stultifying conservatism, I believed it now. I had no intention of packing up and leaving, though. I do not take readily to being pushed around.

We arranged for Jennifer to board with her tutor until after the exams. We booked a passage to Sydney on the Swedish ship *Delos*. I began leave, and although I met Bill Harrington in Lae before we left, I did not go near

the Area Commander. Liz and I flew to Madang on 30 September 1969, to board the *Delos*. We had a couple of days in Rabaul – such a beautiful harbour! Then we sailed to Lae, where a strike caused us to remain for nine days. Our car was put on board at Lae. We were on the *Delos* for 18 days instead of nine. There was only a handful of passengers. We had a huge cabin. The weather was marvellous. The food was good. The drinks were cheap. We had a simply lovely time. Talk about a second honeymoon!

## Back in Aussie

We disembarked in Sydney on 18 October 1969. We had left John and Jennifer behind in Lae. Jennifer was to complete her correspondence school year and return home by year's end. John was to continue with Ansett. It was saddening to realise that he was no longer to be part of our household. I had, though, encouraged him to remain in Lae, and in later years he assured me that he had a wonderful time there. He came back to Australia to stay late in 1972.

We drove in the Freeway through Canberra and Lakes Entrance to Melbourne, where again Alan and Vera put us up for a short time. At Canberra, I drove to the Directorate, my intention being mainly to have a chat with Peter Shekelton. He was going out as I arrived so we managed just a couple of words. I formed the distinct impression that he was not especially pleased to see me. He was Assistant Director at the time. We rented a place at Seaford for a few weeks, then moved into a brick veneer married quarter at 63 Medina Road, Glen Waverley.

Our personal effects from Lae took weeks and weeks to reach us but, at least, our furniture came out of storage quickly enough. We needed a new refrigerator, washing machine and television set badly. A credit company enabled us to buy them straight away. We needed more space, and a bungalow, which became Jennifer's, was erected in the back yard later. Jennifer went on to Melbourne University, gained a couple of degrees, and then joined the Commonwealth Public Service. We remained in that house until December 1975, after I had left the army.

Carlton had lost to Richmond in the 1969 Grand Final, and Arthur Calwell's Labor Party had very narrowly lost to Menzies in the Federal election. Calwell, although a Roman Catholic, and to his eternal credit, had not become part of the DLP after the Labor Party split in 1954. Catholics had formed a significant part of the ALP. Many of them now joined in the task of fighting Communism wherever it seemed to be raising its head, but especially, perhaps, in the union movement.

They were an obnoxious lot, the DLP, managing for years to keep Labor out of power by taking votes from them, but not themselves having any real success electorally. Back in 1963, an editorial of *The Anglican* in Brisbane (Frances James?) got it pretty right: The DLP 'was a disgrace and a serious threat to democracy in Australia.' It wrote of 'dirty fighting,' the 'despicable lies and misrepresentations.' 'This is a party, in our view, whose tactics are utterly beneath contempt.' 'It is a party of the blackest reaction, sustained by an unholy alliance between clericalism and large-state capitalism, indistinguishable in any respect from the Italian Fascist or German Nazi parties of the 30's.'

The Catholic intellectual, BA Santamaria, was a principal architect of the DLP. He died in Melbourne in 1998, the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, visiting him on his death bed. How grateful he must have been for past favours from the DLP! The collapse of the Soviet Union must have pleased Santamaria enormously. His formidable intellectual capacities, in the service of the Roman Catholic Church had, since he was quite a young person, been employed relentlessly in the campaign against 'God-less Communism.' He seems to have been, indeed, a curious mixture of the Right and the Left, some of his writings in recent years being strongly Leftist. The church, however, as history shows us, was much less concerned about the ravages of Nazism and Fascism, or the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. So-called Christians, for centuries, treated the Jewish people shamefully.

The State gave Santamaria a funeral in Victoria. He was a strong supporter of General Franco, the Fascist Spanish dictator, the survival of the church in that country being one of his principal concerns, I understand. Had he been a supporter of Lenin, it would have been reasonable to describe him as a communist. Since Franco was a Fascist, it seems to follow that Santamaria himself earned, at one time, at least, the description of Fascist. Perhaps we will have a State funeral for a communist one day?

Robyn was home now and off to high school. She won a university scholarship, and enrolled at Monash, later

deferring her degree course, however. Later she gained an Arts Degree (majoring in dance) at the Victorian College of the Arts. Richard began staying with us while doing a science (in forestry) degree at Melbourne, his diploma from Creswick counting towards the degree. In more recent times, he has advanced to the position of Deputy Secretary (Operations) in the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment. Nana had rooms at a place in Ashwood. Richard and Paula Redenbach married in 1971. They had two children, Ashley and Fiona.

I had weeks and weeks of leave to take. Almost to the end of March 1970, I think. The Military Secretary's office posted me to Melbourne University Regiment as quartermaster. That would have suited us very well in some ways, especially as we would have probably lived in Grattan Street, Carlton. The Military Secretary's office altered the posting not, by the way, ever consulting me. A piece of paper arrived saying that I was to be QM, HQ, Watsonia Area, instead. I did not mind, too much. (I mentioned earlier, that a psychologist told me years before that I had a well-adjusted personality, something that influenced him to say that being, I thought, my statement that I had never been unhappy in a job.)

### **The taxi driver**

So we knew where I was to go, but not for a while yet. We needed money. I decided to drive taxis, something that Regulations did not allow at the time, as I remember. (Later, I think, Service members could gain approval to take up work under certain conditions.) I had to get a licence, and that turned out to be not so easy to do. Without going into detail, I will just say that you had to know Melbourne very well then. I failed twice, all of this taking up precious time. When, finally, I did get it, I had only a week or two to go before I was to report for duty at Watsonia Barracks.

If I were to write all that I could write about my experiences as a taxi driver, I would need much more time available than I have. I drove for *Astoria* taxis. In 1970, I drove for some months at weekends. Early Saturday morning, Liz would drive me up Swanston Street Melbourne, where *Astoria* would give me a cab. I would wash it, and then off I would go. The hours for taxi drivers are necessarily long, twelve hour days not being at all unusual. Otherwise a driver would reach a level of income that would provide him or her only with life's basic necessities. One weekend, I remember I earned \$19 on the Saturday and \$18 on the Sunday. That was one of my best results.

During this period, I picked up in the city one day our sergeant cook from Watsonia Barracks and drove him to the races. He did not seem to notice. On another occasion, at night, thank goodness, a corporal jumped in the taxi at Flinders Street Station and directed me to Watsonia Barracks – of all places! I got away with that, as well. One day, during this period, I went for a drink at the Canada Hotel in Carlton just near the *Astoria* base. One of the (owner) Gange brothers was there. He said, 'Oh, here's my best driver.' Apart from my industry, I did not steal petrol or give them money troubles either, so that helped my reputation.

A few weeks before I was to leave the army, in December 1975, I took some resettlement leave to drive taxis. I did consider going into the business. I went back to base one day to pay in and to get petrol, when I heard someone say, 'The Governor-General has sacked Whitlam.' That was 11 November 1975. I could hardly believe what I heard.

I mentioned earlier that the Whitlam Labor Party won power when John and I were in Los Angeles. After so many years of the Right being in Government, the three years or so during which Labor took over was a very exciting, if sometimes worrying, period for their supporters. They did some very worthwhile things, including ending Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam. Kerr, the Governor-General, using powers hardly anyone would have thought he would use, dismissed the Labor Government in November 1975, having connived, I have no doubt, with opposition leader Fraser before-hand. The Whitlam Government's being a big worry to the USA, I am deeply suspicious that their agents played a part in Whitlam's downfall. I have often marvelled that bloodshed did not occur. Sometimes I think that we were a gutless lot to accept so meekly such a rotten manoeuvre by the Right. Subsequently, though, the people did vote Fraser in, and that fact reduced the strength of arguments against the momentous events that had occurred. As for Kerr, well, there were many Australians who from that time on held him in the deepest contempt.

From April 1977, to August 1978, I drove full-time, my aim being to reach total earnings of \$10,000, which I managed to do. We needed the money particularly so that we could visit Jennifer in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Taxi driving can be boring, but it is rarely so when you have a fare in the cab. One night at the International section at Melbourne Airport, I waited for two and a quarter hours for a fare to arrive. That was boring. And when a fare did turn up, all he wanted was for me to drive him to a nearby suburb: \$2.50. In Toorak Road, South Yarra, one evening in 1977, I decided that it was time I finished for the day. A fellow asked me, however, to drive him to the Canada Hotel in Carlton. That suited me very well: I had arranged to meet Liz and Jennifer there. Again, in Toorak Road one day, in the morning, I took someone to St. Kilda. Hours and hours later I was back in St. Kilda again. I picked up the same chap and took him back to South Yarra.

There is hardly an end to the tales that a taxi driver is able to tell. I found that, in the main, if you treated people fairly and decently they tended to respond in kind. That is not to say that relationships were always friendly: sometimes nastiness, and danger, indeed, was present. My rule was, usually, not to start conversations. I drove a brigadier (I was a major, but he did not know that) out to the airport one evening. Not one word passed between us. Sometimes people said, 'You Greek?' Once a woman insisted that I *was* Greek. I have always been glad that I experienced the taxi driving world. It was a worthwhile experience despite the long hours, the very poor pay, the element of danger and the unhealthy nature of the work. People can be buggars. They can also display some fine human qualities. Taxi drivers know that as well as anyone else does.

## Family losses

The early seventies were to see the end of the lives of my dear father and mother. Dad had a slight stroke, his condition deteriorating over 18 months or so. He died peacefully, at 79, on 11 April 1971, at a private hospital in East Brunswick. Mother suffered a heart attack, was admitted to the Austin Hospital, Heidelberg, in December 1972, and died a day or two later. She was 80. Mother used to say, 'John's the only one who calls me mother' Their deaths saddened me, but I was not devastated. Perhaps, as I suggested earlier, I am lacking in emotional depth. Perhaps, in trying to view my mortality as a matter not to be concerned about, there is a carry-over affecting my reaction to the deaths of others. If so, in some ways that may be a good thing. I know, though, that if Elizabeth does go before me, I will be devastated: 'Death, be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.' I have for years liked that bit from John Donne. It has been one of my ways of trying to treat death as unimportant.

My parents were both cremated, religious ceremonies being performed at the funeral parlour. In Dad's case, that upset me. Dad was an atheist, so I should have thought that he would have made it plain that he would not want religion brought into the matter. Perhaps he did not. If he did, I consider that Mother and Bryan betrayed a trust. The excuse, not that I heard an excuse offered, of 'Oh, he does not know,' I could not accept. I thought it best not to voice my opinions, not wanting to upset my mother.

Jessie and Bryan now occupied together the house at Ross Street, Alphington. Bryan believed strongly that it was his duty as a son to care for his parents, and in such matters he was loving and dedicated. Mother was clearly his favourite parent. Now, too, the burden of caring for Jessie fell on his shoulders almost alone, and he carried that burden with admirable solicitude. A leucotomy was performed on Jess in 1954, or so. Her conduct did improve, and in later years she became more quiescent, but she was a huge problem in the household in the last years of my parents' lives. Snow Wilson had been her lover over the years, being very kind to her, but they never married. Bryan fell in love with Norma, in Boort, back in the forties, but she was promiscuous, and that disappointed him enormously, I have reason to believe. He never married. I think, myself, that Bryan was bisexual, but he took neither direction in a sustained, emphatic or revealing enough manner for one to be quite sure just what his sexual preferences were. Jessie died in 1988. She had been eating very little, and I understand that the doctor believed that malnutrition was the cause of her death.

Frankston Hospital admitted Bryan in January 1994. He was very ill with a flu virus. His appearance in the months beforehand suggested that he was a cancer victim, and examination revealed that he had leukaemia. He died of heart failure within hours of his admission. In later years, he simply would not go to a doctor, this attitude being quite contrary to his routine of earlier times when head pains troubled him a great deal. The army discharged him on medical grounds. He was, again on medical grounds, granted early retirement from the Commonwealth Public Service

Alan and Vera were in Ruby Street, Balwyn. Their daughters, Nola and Karyn, both married, Nola to John Allen who was in the RAAF, and Karyn to Graham Ward, who was to reach a senior executive position in the

business world. Nola split with John in the early seventies, later marrying Phillip Duncan whom, in about 1992, she divorced. Nola has four children, Karyn two.

In 1990, Alan and Vera moved to the Gold Coast in Queensland. Vera's mental condition had been deteriorating for some time; a massive heart attack took her life at a nursing home in July 1994. A little time before, Alan had had surgery for cancer of the bowel and liver, but his early death was inevitable. He died in August 1994, a month after Vera. They were both cremated. In June 1994, I flew to the Gold Coast to see them both. When I went to see Vera at the nursing home, she simply would not look at me. We had always, I thought, been good friends. Perhaps she had come to dislike me. Her poor, sick mind was a factor in her rejection of me, I suppose. I like to think so.

Alan was never one to whimper. He did not whimper now. He knew that he had little time left. He faced his end with courage. Alan, once on the Left, had swung to the Right years before. He and I had many bitter arguments. We agreed about one thing, however – we were both atheists. His belief in atheism, though, was a much milder belief than mine.

## **Watsonia Barracks**

I spent two and a half years at Watsonia Barracks. I was promoted to major in February 1972. The promotion was automatic after an officer had been six years a captain, and after passing the necessary promotion examinations. Unlike most other captains of the time, I did not receive temporary promotion to major. The main reason was, I suppose, that the army posted me to appointments where the rank of captain applied. Considering the problems that I had had and that I had opted for non-corps postings, I could hardly expect that the authorities would be much concerned about my advancement.

Colonel KC O'Brien, formerly a signals' officer, became Area Commander soon after I arrived at Watsonia Barracks. Before him Lieutenant-Colonel Conder, CO of 6 Signals Regiment, acted as Area Commander. Later, the Labor Government, elected in 1972, had the colonel's appointment removed from the establishment, I seem to recall. Someone must have realized that the colonel's appointment was a sinecure. Once an officer was promoted to colonel he lost his corps identity. Knowing that I was soon to be promoted, Ken O'Brien introduced the appointment of Camp Commandant, and I took up that appointment. It was another non-corps appointment for me. The next Area Commander delineated my duties in my 1973 Confidential Report:

Carries out full duties of a camp commandant with respect HQ, Watsonia Area/Signal Depot. He commands and administers approximately 60 civilians and 60 soldiers and is the account holder of all accommodation stores and area maintenance equipment. His staff operate the three messes in the Area and control and operate all common facilities.

Ken O'Brien was a big man of easy manner who looked good. He was well into his forties. He wrote my Confidential Report in 1972. The Standard T Score was 45. That meant that the army regarded me an average officer, I would think. When I was still a captain, and quartermaster, I was appointed to carry out a stocktake of the Southern Command Personnel Depot's unit's stores account. The ledgers were in a mess as they applied to the stores held. My intention, and duty, to arrive at an accurate count some people did not welcome. The responsible officer decided to take me off the task. My replacement, like me, did his best to arrive at the true state of affairs. I found the unit account to be in a bad state, this circumstance reflecting badly on those responsible.

Things did not always run smoothly between the officers' mess committee and me, either. There was some dissatisfaction with the meals over a period. Someone demanded that the mess catering staff get exactly what they should get in the way of rations; according to the ration scales, that is. I tried to explain that they were doing very well the way things were, but the President of the Mess Committee, Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Mudd, the CO of 2 Signals Regiment, rejected my explanations. 'It's not acceptable,' he said. So I ordered the NCO controlling the issue of rations to the several kitchens to give the officers' mess its strict entitlement of supplies. The standard of the meals fell away badly. Peter and others agreed that we should return to the earlier way of dividing the food supply. In an area with several kitchens, a kitchen feeding smaller numbers, in this case the officers' mess, could be given a little more than its strict entitlement.

Officers' and sergeants' messes, in the main, operated what members knew as a President's Card. There was a Military Board Instruction that dealt specifically with the proper operation of those messes. There was no mention of such a card in it. There was provision for the entertainment of official visitors, but not for the way that many Presidents of the Mess Committee in various messes went about things. For a time I was President of

the Regimental Audit Board. I found that the President of the Mess Committee of the officers' mess (not Peter Mudd), when he, and perhaps a colleague, entertained a visitor, put the total cost of all the drinks consumed on the card. That is, the rest of the mess members paid for their drinks as well as for the drinks of the visitors. I do not think that Ken O'Brien welcomed my report. He did not ban the practice. He did suggest in his written comments that responsible officers should exercise care in the matter of the use of the President's Card.

A few months after my promotion to major, in 1972, Colonel RA Clark took over as Area Commander, Watsonia Barracks. (Later it became Simpson Barracks. Several important signals' units were based there.) He was 42, fairly recently promoted, and his manner suggested that he was very much 'on the job.' There is no doubt that it did not please him to have me in the appointment of Camp Commandant. My corps, my age – I was six years his senior – and that he would have rather, much rather, had a signals' officer in the job were factors in his dissatisfaction, I believe. I can only guess at how much he knew of my opinions and of my Security, etc, problems in Papua New Guinea. I think that he would have found out those things. Even so, his attitude toward me at the beginning of our relationship was not hostile as far as I could see.

He was a pernickety individual. It irritated him, it was plain to the observer if, say, he walked into the mess after afternoon tea and the staff had not yet cleared the dishes away. It was a good idea not to strew newspapers around. He was good at the sharp rebuke, although I can think of only one or two occasions when he rebuked me. He did not, even once, take me into his office and point out to me where he believed I was performing poorly. I could, however, detect irritation from time to time. Perhaps he could have justified that irritation. He was working on a second university degree. He was something of a small-minded man, I am afraid, despite his excellent progress in the officer corps. As we shall see.

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His was the only Confidential Report, it was for the year 1973, about which I felt I had to make representations. To much of its detail, I found no reason to state my objections. His 'pen picture' of me, I found hardly flattering. As I promised earlier that I would include my worst 'pen picture,' here it is:

Major Rawson carries out his duties in a generally satisfactory manner, but tends to lack military experience and knowledge especially in command situations. He could be more forceful in his handling of subordinates and demand a higher performance from them. My impression is that he performs his duties by reacting to situations rather than by producing the drive and initiative to get things started. On the other hand he is punctual, cooperative and interested in his work and has organized and administered the civilian and military personnel in the barracks staff to enable them to perform their duties in a satisfactory manner.

He did not recommend my promotion to lieutenant-colonel. He wrote: 'Age and experience preclude consideration for further promotion.' I did not like the 'experience' bit, but I was too old, I would have agreed. Under the JUDGEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORTING OFFICER he placed his ticks against the several characteristics that I mentioned much earlier. I had no real quarrel with most of his ticks. There were two ticks to which I objected. I shall deal with just one. It is this one: 'Overall Opinion.' He ticked, 'Take a chance on him.' It seemed to me – and it did later to others, as well – that that did not tally well with the rest of the report. I thought it a harsh and very unfair judgement. So after I had read the report, I had to decide about making representations. My Standard T Score had dropped to 36, although I did not know that then. That probably represented a rating of below average.

On 11 April 1973, I first wrote, 'No,' but then I struck it out and wrote, 'Yes' about representations. I wrote a long document addressed to the Military Secretary. I took the document to the Colonel's office and placed it on his desk. He was not there at the time. After a time, having obviously read my representations, he spoke to me in the passageway. His face was very flushed. All he said, though, was, 'I don't know about experience, John.' I asked him later why he had made such a harsh judgement, a judgement that described me as 'chancy.' His reply: 'When I go on inspections with you, I find things wrong. At a conference, you could not remember the names of two of the civilian groundsmen. Your soldiers have longer hair than soldiers in the other units.' Believe me – that is what he said! There is much that I could say. I shall simply repeat an assertion that I made before: he was small-minded – despite his no doubt cleverness. I should have asked for my document back so that I could have included those things that he said in it. I have always regretted that serious error of omission on my part.

Peter Shekelton was by then the Director of Education. We had cooperated well at OCS. I feel sure that by now he regarded me as an embarrassment to the corps, something of a disgrace, indeed. I did not know what his opinions on the war in Vietnam were, nor did I know whether he was a religious believer or not. That he had reached the rank of colonel suggests that he might well have been a willing enough proponent of right-wing values. Given his distaste for me, it was hardly likely that, in this or following reports, he was likely to write

anything in praise of me. He wrote this on the report:

It does seem to me that there is an inconsistency with the reporting officer's ratings in the first ten serials of para 14 and the last. In only one case, Knowledge of the Work, has Major Rawson been rated below par. I can't see that this should reasonably produce an overall and final 'Take a chance on him.'

A couple more of Peter's comments, though, were by no means complimentary: 'My impression of him is that he will do what he knows must be done but is not inclined to extend himself...' That remark shows that Peter was lacking in a very important piece of knowledge about me: I am a hard worker and I always have been – and some reporting officers had said so. Over the years I had expressed the opinion many times that 'There is always something to be done.' I had plenty of energy and initiative; it was just that I worked without bustling or fussing. Colonel Clark, himself, appeared to have little of much substance to do – except for his university studies. In passing, I should like to mention that I heard my brother say about me at a social gathering one day, 'He's the best worker I have ever seen.'

Major-General CAE Fraser, GOC, Southern Command, had his say:

I believe this report may be somewhat more critical than earlier reports under other CO's. I believe some benefits may accrue from a change of appointment for which this officer is due in any case.

(I include this not to claim that the general was on my side, but to give further information on how the *system* worked.)

It was no doubt a good idea of the General's that I be moved to a new appointment. I had been at Watsonia Barracks for over three years. My being posted would certainly please my CO. In October 1973, I moved to the Westgarth drill hall to take up my new appointment of Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General at HQ, 3 Cadet Brigade. A brigade in our army would normally have as its commander a brigadier. Lieutenant-colonels commanded cadet brigades then. Do not be fooled by the grand-sounding title I was assuming; it was a relatively unimportant job. It was a recognized circumstance of army life that the Military Secretary did not post highly thought of officers to the Cadet Corps. Although I was hoping for a certain other appointment, I did not really mind at all.

I began playing squash in 1970, at Watsonia Barracks. Over a period of five years, the game was a dominant feature of my recreational activities. I recall that I played every day – for longish periods – for nine days in a row in 1974. There was an army competition and a pennant competition out Glen Waverley way. In those years, particularly when I was at Watsonia, I played very often against Bob Maguire, a Catholic priest who for a few years was a chaplain in the Australian Regular Army.

On one occasion he brought Arthur Calwell, formerly Leader of the Australian Labor Party to the officers' mess. I was not there that day. I heard later that Major Fred Anderson dressed down a loud-mouthed young officer for comments he made about Mr Calwell. I very much doubt that Fred voted Labor, but 'Good on you,' I thought. Bob brought with him, and I had the pleasure of having luncheon with him, Clyde Holding, who at the time was leader of the Opposition in the Parliament of Victoria. Of course, conservative politicians would be much more welcome in officers' messes than Labor ones. I noticed that neither the Area Commander nor the President of the Mess Committee joined Clyde at the buffet lunch.

Bob did not take kindly to being beaten at squash, and occasionally things became rather unpleasant. In more recent times, as the parish priest in South Melbourne, he has done wonderful work with an organisation engaged in promoting the welfare of street children. I am sure, too, that he involves himself in many other worthy activities, as well.

The war in Vietnam was still going on in the early seventies. It was my hope that Australia would soon be out of it. There was never any suggestion that my directorate would send me there; I must admit being glad about that. Big anti-war rallies were held in the streets of Melbourne, Richard, Jennifer and Robyn attending at least one of them.

Doctor Jim Cairns was a leading anti-Vietnam-war figure. Since before then, and up to now, he has been someone whose outlook on life has seemed to me to be admirable. I mustered up the nerve to approach him in 1997 at the Camberwell market where he was selling copies of his books. I persuaded him to take a copy of my book, asking for one of his in exchange. He agreed.

## **A trip overseas**

In October 1972, as we had much earlier agreed we would do, my son John and I went on an overseas trip. I was able to take six weeks' leave from Watsonia. Because he worked for Ansett, John was able to get us cheap round-the-world fares. As I recall, the air fare cost me about \$140. We went first to Hong Kong in a Boeing 707. We left Hong Kong in a 747, soon to hear a frightening explosion somewhere outside. After a time, the pilot explained that a motor had surged, so we had another night in Hong Kong. Instead of Rome next, we ended up in Istanbul for a night. We flew to Rome, got on a train and went by rail to Naples, Berne, Zurich, Paris, Madrid, Lisbon, Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Copenhagen and back to Amsterdam. We caught a ferry from the Hook of Holland to England, stayed in London for a week, and then flew to Los Angeles, where we spent another week. On the radio, in bed at a motel, we heard that the people had elected the Labor Party to office back home in Australia. Marvellous news! John did not go back to New Guinea, but went off to live and work in Sydney.

Carlton were premiers in both 1970 and 1972. Richard, Jennifer and I stood in the crowd of 121,696 in 1970 to watch what has gone down in football history as a remarkable game. Liz went on her own and Jennifer and I went together to see the 1972 victory.

## LETTER

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### Text of my letter to the Military Secretary dated 31 May 1973

1. Before dealing in detail with my reasons for making these representations, I think it would be appropriate for me to make general mention of my stay in Watsonia Barracks.
2. For two years from Feb 70 I was QM, HQ, Watsonia Area/Signals Depot. It is in context, I believe, for me to mention that, in 1971, the Area Commander of the time described me as a “very good QM” in his Confidential Report.
3. In Feb 72, I was promoted to Major. The Area Commander, considering it desirable to establish a Camp Comdt organization, had me appointed to the Staff Captain position on the HQ, the intention being, however, to employ me as Camp Comdt.
4. The early months were difficult in some ways. Although I knew the role the Area Commander meant me to play, some others did not, and there was some friction. However, the situation was eased when written clarification of the matter was issued.
5. About the middle of 1972, it became known that the Area Staff Officer was to receive a new appointment. The Area Commander advised me that he would be arranging for me to take over that appointment if higher authority would agree – hardly an appointment to which a “chancy” officer should be recommended.
6. Soon after this a new Area Commander (the reporting officer) was appointed. He told me that he wanted a Signals officer as Area Staff Officer. I was not disappointed as I regarded the work of Camp Comdt as most rewarding, especially because of the close contact one has with unit members. (It is worth noting, and I believe it most relevant to this representation, that there was widespread disappointment among senior Signals officers that a RA Sigs officer was not appointed as Area Staff Officer.)
7. It seems fairly certain that by the end of Oct 73 a new unit, District Support Unit, Watsonia, will be commanded by a major. The officer who would be first be considered for the appointment would, I should imagine, be the Area Staff Officer. If for some reason he were not to be appointed then I believe that I should be at least considered for the position.
8. I say that for the following reasons:
  - a. As Camp Comdt I have in fact commanded a large part of what will be the new unit for about fifteen months, and have an intimate knowledge of the area.
  - b. I am the account holder for the quite large Q account.
  - c. It seems to me that a command of this sort is suited to an older officer with limited career prospects rather than a young career officer whose talents and abilities to some extent would be wasted here.
  - d. In my time at Watsonia Barracks, I have never ever been accused of a serious error of judgement. My general conduct has never been questioned. I have never failed in my duties to the extent that a severe rebuke was issued. Indeed, I can recall only very few mild rebukes.
  - e. I believe that my ability to co-operate with other people at many levels has done much to create goodwill towards and within this unit, and that the morale of unit members is for this, among other reasons, higher than it may otherwise be. I believe, too, that despite all kinds of pressures, including staff shortages, very heavy Q commitments for activities such as QWG Conferences, Officer Promotion examinations, etc, the unit has functioned at a level that should be described as “at least satisfactory.”
9. This Confidential Report, however, almost certainly removes me from any consideration for the appointment. And note that the Question has not even arisen – in conversation with the Reporting Officer nor in the report itself – even though the appointment would seem to have a certain logic to it. Certainly, more than one senior officer in Watsonia Barracks has spoken of it as being a logical step.
10. In turning now to the representations and, before dealing with them in detail, there are one or two things I wish to make clear: I know I am no world beater; I accept that it may be reasonable to grade me as an average officer. But I reject, as extremely harsh, unfair and grossly inconsistent with the history of my stay here, a grading of “below average” which, surely, “Take a chance on him” implies.

11. The Reporting Officer, when discussing the report with me on, Fri 11 May 73, made what seems to me to be significant and revealing comments. He opened the discussion by remarking (not unkindly) that (I use my own words, not being able to recall his exactly) “Of course, this is not very important to you.”

12. In view of my age, for one thing, this seems reasonable, and indeed from some points of view I accept it. But might not this attitude adversely affect the Reporting Officer’s objectivity? Might not it indicate a state of mind, a point of view, an indifference, that goes something like this: the subject officer is over fifty; he has no chance of being promoted – both quite true, of course; he is a RAAEC officer anyway who is really out of his place in this kind of work – he is not, after all, “one of us.” (And although this latter may well not be the attitude of the Reporting Officer, let no one doubt that such views are widely held.)

13. Perhaps another aspect of this view is the point made on three occasions of my lack of military experience. Certainly I do lack some experience, some of them most desirable for an officer to have had. But many officers are similarly placed.

14. However, I strongly doubt that the Reporting Officer, in any case, knows much about my background. After all, I have been in the army over 31 years, serving in three different corps in that time. I have held most ranks from signalman to major. I have served in a war-time armoured division, infantry division and independent motor brigade group, my units including an artillery regiment.

15. I have been a Camp Comdt, a QM, an Adjt, I have carried out the duties of SC Q on this HQ. I was an officer instructor at OCS for three and three quarter years, and an education officer in IPIR for over two years. The experience gained at OCS was varied indeed, and was by no means restricted to education work. For example, I taught Military Law, Service Writing and Public Speaking among other subjects, and was regularly involved in field exercises.

16. Over the years I have attended many courses, including QM, Unit Emplaning Officer and Weapon Instructor courses, and I was, myself, for several years, a WO Instructor at an AHQ School.

17. Then there were the words, “You will think I’m hard, but I have to be honest.” Certainly I think his “Take a chance on him” is hard. One must assume he thought it rather hard himself, or why mention it? As for being honest, well it seems to me that he should have been honest months before if he really has such a bad opinion of me. The Reporting Officer is very straightforward in his dealings with his subordinates, seeming never to hesitate if he considers that an admonitory word or two should be spoken.

18. How is it, then, that I have escaped the remonstrations and guidance that should be given to an officer whose performance is below average? Could it be that my performance has been reasonably good and not below average at all? Perhaps it has not been easy to point to serious faults in my work?

19. On the other hand, does “Take a chance on him” follow from the assessment of my personal characteristics as ticked by the Reporting Officer? I think not. The way the report reads to me, the only assessment that may indicate below average performance related to the command aspects of the appointment and no doubt one is always learning in that field. And I ask this question: if I do not at least have “sufficient knowledge to cope with my work”, how have I, as it were, managed to escape unscathed over all these months?

20. Of course, it is always possible that one will be let down by someone else, someone who seems to be reliable in all respects. But I strongly assert that neither the general contents of this report nor any aspect of my conduct or character as might have been observed during these last few months in Watsonia Barracks gives any serious basis for me to be assessed as “chancy.”

21. In summary, then, my position is this: I believe that I am the subject of a Confidential Report that:

- a. quite unfairly rates me (finally) as a below average officer;
- b. quite effectively removes me from consideration for a particular appointment and does serious harm to my future prospects;
- c. is unbalanced, in that the final assessment of “Take a chance on him” does not follow from the earlier sections of the report;
- d. is perhaps indicative of a prejudice which exists against RAAEC members in non-corps appointments, and against my general background;
- e. contains or, more so, implies, criticisms which, if they are valid, should have been brought to my notice much earlier in view of their seriousness;

f. emphasizes a lack of military experience, when in fact I have had over 31 years of quite varied experience, much of which most officers will NEVER have.

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## Another tyrant

Before I left Watsonia, I met, in the officers' mess, the officer who was to take up command of 3 Cadet Brigade, the unit to which the Military Secretary had also posted me. Lieutenant-Colonel Ken Bladen was a West Australian, a big individual of good appearance. His was a powerful looking physique. A graduate of OCS, he was now 39. He had recently done a tour in Vietnam. He belonged to Royal Australian Infantry. That he had been posted to Cadets, suggested that he would not be promoted any further. Straight away he revealed a strong contempt for me. I mean, he was curt in the extreme, making his contempt plain to the other officers in the group. I simply could not understand why he would behave in such a manner. We had never met before. Surely he did not hate RAAEC officers as much as that? I had to think that he hated me before he had even met me; my life will surely be miserable if he continues in this way; how will I explain this to my wife and family?; what must others think? A dental officer that I knew had met him before. He told me that my new CO was an unusual chap. That helped a bit. How right that officer was!

When, on 1 October 1973, I arrived at Westgarth drill hall, he happened to be near the entrance door. Not a word of welcome, not a smile; only a curt remark that indicated that I should see another major inside the building. Bloody hell, I thought. What's this guy all about? (The Westgarth drill hall was the very place I reported to on 3 December 1941. Now, it seemed, it would probably be the last place from which I would leave the army, 30-something years later.) It appeared almost certain that at last I would be unhappy about the sort of job I had. I grinned to myself when I thought of my remark to the psychologist years before that I had never been unhappy in a job. I began to realize: this fellow is a born bully. He has knowledge of my political and religious opinions. It is not only that I am RAAEC. He means to give me a hard time. Well, we shall see.

So, from the very start of our relationship, it was plain to me that we would reach a crisis point some time soon. The situation was so bad that I began to make notes in a small army note book:

3 Oct 1973

A couple of days in the place have convinced me that Bladen had made his mind up against me. I spoke to him saying that it was normal for officers to assume that RAAEC officers knew nothing and had no military background. I gave him a brief written account of my army service, suggesting that this knowledge may be of assistance to him. He made little comment.

4 Oct 73

We were in my office. He next closed the door. He then began to be 'straight' with me. He said that he had done his utmost to have my posting as DAA and QMG cancelled. He said that someone, Lieutenant-Colonel Bishop, I feel sure, had made criticisms of me. It is very likely that Bishop told Bladen about my being investigated by Security, for one thing. He said that he wanted a young officer to work to him, and he agreed that most officers regarded education officers with disdain/con-tempt. [There were other revealing entries for 4 October, but I shall move on to 5 October.]

5 Oct 73

Bladen's manner much more friendly today. I think he was disconcerted by the way I stood up to him, his realization that I am not an easy mark, the realization that I just may know a few things after all and won't take injustice lying down. [Bladen was a chameleon if ever there was one. A final extract from my note book now. There is lots more, but I think that's enough.]

17 Oct 73

The comd has stressed the importance of using minutes. I did so to advise him of my movements next Mon: to Watsonia for periodical med, influenza injections and have a chart prepared at 2 Sig Regt. He read the minute in my presence in a jeering tone, laying emphasis on my use of 'I'(which I used several times – and later in the day he corrected me for not using 'I' in another minute) screwed up the minute and threw it in the waste-paper basket. He said it would be better for me to tell him. (Yet later that day he wrote me a minute telling me that I was to go to Adelaide next week to do an investigation – no details were yet avail. He could have told me in a sentence.)

Bladen was, as I have said, a Royal Australian Infantry officer. I had known some fine fellows who were infantry officers. He was, to say the least, a strange fellow. His opinions of me, even if some of them did have some legitimacy, should not have caused him to behave as he was behaving. Soon after we had both arrived at the unit he decided to address all the staff. He spoke of his disappointment at being posted to a cadet brigade. He spoke of his staff, leaving me out altogether. He then spoke most disparagingly about the quality of the senior

NCOs and warrant officers posted as instructors to cadets. In the main, they were the very men in the room listening to him. As I said, he was a strange fellow. By now, I regarded him as something of an enigma.

A very odd thing about our relationship was that, now and again, he would, so to speak, relent and be very friendly and polite towards me. We managed not to have any heated arguments about politics or religion, although those topics did come up on a couple of occasions. I have already described him as a chameleon. (I use the word pejoratively, but indeed that is a very polite description of the person that he was.) Indeed, at times he said, or wrote in a minute, quite complimentary things about some job I had done.

It was close to sickening how polite and friendly he was on one occasion: ‘John this...’ and ‘John that...’ I felt like throwing up. This was during a visit by a colonel from HQ Training Command who no doubt knew about the situation. A group of us went to eat at a pub one day. Bladen’s intention in showing friendliness towards me was, I feel sure, to have the colonel go back to his HQ saying something like, ‘Look, I saw Ken Bladen with that major. He treated him in a very friendly way.’ What a bloody hypocrite! He might have been a brave infantry officer. He very likely was. I had contempt for him even so.

## The Complaint

The crisis I spoke of did arrive. HQ sent me to Adelaide to investigate a large loss of stores during the annual camp of 4 Cadet Brigade. I stayed at Keswick Barracks. I worked at a furious rate over about a week, producing a fat report that, I learned later, they thought at HQ Training Command to be very good. (As an army officer I was certainly around the average mark, but I was reasonably good at such tasks. An officer at Watsonia, after I had investigated something or other, used the words ‘his forte,’ and even my *bête noire* wrote, ‘I have concurred in this – well done’ on a minute paper.)

I had an experience in the officers’ mess at Keswick Barracks that prompted me to write a letter to the *Army* newspaper. It was not printed. I include it now as evidence to support what I contend: that most officers bitterly opposed the recently elected Labor Government. Many of them, believing that they were expressing the opinion of all present, and obviously being ready to ignore any restriction on the discussing of politics in the mess, would not hesitate to engage in bitter condemnation of the Government. This, a number of officers at Keswick Barracks did at a breakfast table one morning. They made particularly venomous criticisms. Here is my letter:

I have for many years been under the impression that the topics of politics, women and religion are taboo in officers’ and sergeants’ messes.

Religion, I must say, is not discussed very much at all. Probably because most officers, although they say they are Christians of one sort or another, take very little interest in religion. As for women – well, that subject is not taken up very much either – as neither it should be. But what about politics? That is another matter altogether.

For years and years, as a member of one or other of the Messes, I have listened to politics being discussed, and naturally enough have taken part in some of the discussions. But only in some – rarely in fact. For you see, over all the years that the present Federal Government was in opposition, it was taken for granted that every right-thinking officer, warrant officer or sergeant supported the Conservative Government of the day, and had nothing but contempt for the Opposition and its members.

My problem was that I supported the Opposition; and apart from the fact that the serviceman’s responsibility is to serve the Government of the day, regardless of his own beliefs, and having, too, been subjected to the kinds of comments that some on the extreme Right reserve for liberals, it seemed sensible most of the time to keep my mouth shut.

You would think now, though, that it would be our turn. The turn, I mean, of the five to ten percent or so of army officers who voted for the present Government. [I think that the percentage would have been a bit higher than that.] But no, that would be too much to hope for. Those who felt free to vilify the former Opposition, now feel free to vilify them now that they are the Government, assuming, incredibly, as they always have, that everyone within earshot agrees with them.

And so, some time ago, in a mess in which I was a visitor, at a dining table at which nine or ten officers sat, four or five of them (one a female officer) brought out the same old sickening tirade of abuse of the Government and its Ministers. They were vicious, most inaccurate – to a large degree they were mindless.

Comments of that sort should never be made in a Mess; if they are made, they should be stopped by the senior officer present. I said nothing – I should have. But such remarks are so general, and there are so few who disagree with them,

that it is difficult to know how to handle the situation.

Is it not about time these loud-mouthed opponents of the Federal Government tempered their antagonism a little? Who is to tell them?

When I got back to Westgarth drill hall on 2 November 1973, I found that Bladen had instituted a, quite unauthorized, change in the establishment of the unit, with my standing both altered and lowered. I would now be responsible to a major who was not ARA and who was junior to me.

Apart from any other consideration, he might well have broken the law. I shall include now the last paragraph from a minute written in the office of the Military Secretary on 6 March 1974:

Rawson has been posted as DAA & QMG by the Military Board (delegate) and the provisions of AMR 77(4) applies. There could be a legal technicality here which could re-act to the officer's advantage.

I made a formal complaint under the provisions of the *Australian Military Regulations and Orders* of the time: specifically, Australian Military Regulation 194. This was a rare step for an ARA officer to take. I knew of no other instance of an officer having done that. I would agree, though, that I had much less to lose than, say, a young officer with a career ahead of him. My experience was that other-ranks were much more likely to go for a redress of wrongs than were officers.

My thoughts on the matter, on this step that I was taking, occupied my mind in a great flurry of activity. I felt entirely justified in using the democratic process within the military code to make the complaint. There was an inherent problem in the army, I had thought for years. A minority of officers were poorly developed individuals. Among their character defects were included a misconception of their own importance, and a disinclination to adhere to a just treatment in their handling of others. In some cases, certainly, they were not properly acquainted with the relevant Regulations, Orders and Instructions. (The minute from which I quoted (above) supports my assertion.) In any event, that minority chose to ignore Regulations, etc, when it suited them to do so.

I shall now quote a couple of extracts from AMR 194 – probably not exactly as the wording occurs in that Regulation – that relate to officers:

If an officer thinks himself wronged he may complain in succession to –

- (a) his CO if any;
- (b) his Brigade Commander, if any;
- (c) his Formation, etc, Commander, if any;
- (d) his Force Commander, if any;
- (e) the Military Board.

If an officer is dissatisfied with the decision of the Military Board he may require that his complaint be referred to the Governor-General in Council.

I felt confident that I would win in the end. I would have gone to the Governor-General in Council had that been necessary. Week after harrowing week after harrowing week ensued. Bladen rejected my complaints. At Christmas, 1974, he went off on leave to Western Australia. I knew that he was to go, perhaps he told me himself. He said nothing to me, however, about the requirement for me to administer command of the Cadet Brigade in his absence. There was no notification of my assuming command placed in Routine Orders Part 2 until after he arrived back from leave. Very sloppy stuff, that. As sloppy, I came to think, as bare feet on a scullery floor.

I had asked that my complaints be referred to the next higher authority: the general officer commanding Training Command, Major-General WG Henderson, OBE. Although initially, I understand, I had his sympathy in the matter, he became furious with me because I had written what he described as an impertinent letter. In the letter, I made certain demands, demands that would have to be agreed to by higher authority if I were to consider myself to be propitiated. That letter follows later, with others. I did go about it rather rashly. These were very difficult times for me. I had been experiencing a state of considerable apprehension – to say the least – for more than six years by then. It was the General's responsibility, surely, not to allow his quarrel with what I had written to interfere with his duty to investigate my complaints quickly and without prejudice. That he did not do.

It took the GOC 11 weeks to get around to interviewing me. A letter that I shall include later gives details of that interview and other matters. In the Westgarth drill hall, when the telephone rang, everybody could hear it. Waiting anxiously as I was for higher authority to complete the matter, every time the phone rang, I thought, 'Perhaps this call will relate to my problem.' No luck! On and on it went. The anxious waiting, I mean. That waiting, I believe, laid the basis for the duodenal ulcer that a physician diagnosed a couple of years later. Eventually, Major-General Henderson rejected my complaints, so I asked that they be referred to the Australian Military Board. The board upheld them:

The redress of wrongs submitted by Maj Rawson has been upheld on both counts and his re-posting has been approved.

The Military Board had decided that Lieutenant-Colonel Bladen had shown prejudice against me and that he had treated me unfairly. Bladen served for about a further 18 months, to reach his 20 years' service, and then resigned. Major-General Henderson – other major-generals had decided that he was in the wrong – left not so long after, as well. Perhaps he would have left in any case.

I had a meeting in Melbourne with a representative of the Australian Military Board, the Chief of Personnel, Major-General CM (*Sandy*) Pearson, OBE. He advised me that the Board had upheld my complaints. The Military Secretary posted me to Central Army Records Office at Albert Park Barracks as a projects' officer. In the event, I became Staff Officer, 2nd Grade, Personnel and Logistics, in charge of Information Services. That was the job that they wanted me to do. That was all right by me.

## LETTERS

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### **Text of my letter to the Commander of 3 Cadet Brigade dated 19 November 1973**

1. I, 31254, Major J.J. Rawson, RAAEC, believe that I have been grievously wronged, and I seek urgent redress of that wrong in accordance with the provisions of AMR 194.
2. My complaint is based on the unjust manner in which I have been treated since taking up the appointment of DAA and QMG, HQ 3 Cadet Bde, on Mon, 1 Oct 73.
3. My specific complaints are these:
  - a. The Commander of 3 Cadet Bde, who admitted on the fourth day after I had taken up my appointment that he was prejudiced against me and had tried very hard to have my appointment cancelled, and whose hostile attitude towards me from the first day reflected that prejudice, took the opportunity when I was interstate on duty for nine days (leaving on 23 Oct 73) to change the authorised structure of the Brigade establishment. I found on reporting back for duty on Fri, 2 Nov 73, that I had been moved out of the office of DAA and QMG (where the GSO3, now to be known as Adjutant, was installed) and indeed, completely out of Brigade Headquarters; I was now to occupy what was formerly the Brigade Sergeant Major's office.
  - b. From being the Senior Staff Officer on Brigade Headquarters, I was relegated to the (non-existent) position of Administrative Officer (Q) in the Melbourne Area Cadet Group (a grouping of two Cadet Battalions), and was to be responsible to the Commander of that Group.
  - c. All this, despite the fact that the very day before I left to visit Adelaide, that is, on Mon, 22 Oct 73, I had, with the Commander's concurrence and indeed, at his direction, begun the preparation of a diagram of the Brigade organisation, a diagram which he had authorised and which showed my appointment as SO2 (Pers and Log). He had begun to use this title in reference to me. During my absence, the diagram was produced but the drastic changes in relation to my status, the changes already mentioned, had been made to it.
4. These actions, I believe, executed in an underhand way, have had the inevitable effect of harming my military reputation, of seriously reducing my status and, too, of inducing contempt, disdain or pity into the attitudes of those, of all ranks, with whom I am serving or with whom I am likely to serve in the future.
5. My own situation aside, I believe that there is an issue of considerable importance involved here and it is this: when Army Headquarters sees fit to post an officer to a specific appointment on an authorised establishment, it seems to be quite wrong that a junior commander in a lower formation is free to ignore that posting and, without reference to higher authority, without making formal application for a change of establishment, alter the structure of the approved establishment, in the process (as in this case) relegating an officer to a position of inferior status. I believe that the present situation at 3 Cadet Bde illustrates the dangers inherent in allowing an individual such scope: "Justice is [not] the will of the stronger."
6. I have been deliberately brief - but that does not mean that I have nothing more to say. I ask that this complaint be dealt with promptly.

### **Text of my follow-up letter to the Headquarters of Training Command dated 6 January 1974**

References:

- A. A written complaint by Maj J.J. Rawson dated 19 Nov 73.
- B. AMR 77 (4) (a) and (b).

1. In paragraph five of Reference A, I expressed a strong concern that commanding officers should be permitted to arrogate to themselves the right to ignore decisions made by the Military Board; specifically, decisions which result in the appointment of officers to positions on the establishments of units. What had happened to me, I believed, was an injustice unworthy of the Australian Military code, or, for that matter, any code based on the concept of justice as understood in a democratic society.
2. I have considerable confidence in and respect for the Australian Military code, believing it to be a just code. My feelings of confidence and respect have been completely justified by the existence of Reference B: the Australian

Parliament felt so strongly that such freedom of action must not be given to commanding officers that it passed a law aimed at preventing them from abusing their authority in the manner that I have described in my written complaint.

3. The provisions of that Law are:

“Where the Military Board posts an officer to an appointment on the establishment of a unit, the commanding officer shall not, without the approval of the formation commander –

- (a) direct the officer to perform the duties of another appointment on the establishment of the unit; or
- (b) direct another officer to perform the duties of that appointment.”

4. One must believe that the existence of the Regulation would be known to at least one officer among those concerned with the processing of the complaint. Yet the situation is allowed to continue. A law of the land, a law aimed at the protection of the individual has been broken, and nothing concrete has been done to correct the situation. From any point of view, this failure quickly to redress the effects of a flagrant contravention of an Australian Military Regulation must surely increase the gravity of the injustice that I have suffered.

5. Leaving aside the legal considerations involved in a law being thus infringed, I wish to make it known that I would not regard the wrongs I have suffered as being anything like fully redressed unless the following were to occur:

- a. That Headquarters Training Command issue a letter of severe reproof to the Commander of 3 Cadet Brigade, an information copy being forwarded to Maj J.J. Rawson.
- b. The letter to state that recent unauthorized changes to the 3 Cadet Brigade organisation involving the appointment of SO2 Personnel and Logistics are a clear contravention of AMR 77 (4) (a) and (b), and that a complete reinstatement of 31254, Maj J.J. Rawson to that appointment is to be made, reinstatement to be effected during the second week of Feb 74.
- c. Additionally, the letter should direct the following action:

(1) Maj Rawson is to reoccupy the office of the SO2 Personnel and Logistics. (The office he occupied as DAA and QMG.)

(2) Headquarters 3 Cadet Brigade is to distribute on its Lists C and D, advice that certain changes made in Nov 73 to the staffing of Headquarters 3 Cadet Brigade are now seen to be inappropriate, and that Maj J.J. Rawson is to reassume the appointment of DAA and QMG (in future to be known as SO2 Personnel and Logistics.)

(3) All charts/diagrams of the organisation of 3 Cadet Brigade that do not accord with the foregoing are to be amended accordingly.

(4) The Commander of 3 Cadet Brigade is to notify Headquarters Training Command in writing (copy to Maj J.J. Rawson) when all the foregoing instructions have been complied with.

6. There is, too, the question of my continuing in the appointment of SO2 Personnel and Logistics, Headquarters, 3 Cadet Brigade. (The Commander said that he would seek my reposting once I had submitted the complaint.) Some time during the early months of 1974, but not earlier than two weeks after being fully reinstated, I would like a posting to an appointment at least equal in status to this one, and one which is acceptable to me in regard to my family situation.

**Text of a letter signed by the General Officer Commanding Training Command, Major General WG Henderson, to the Commander of 3 Cadet Brigade dated 14 February 1974**

- References:
- A. HQ 3 Cadet Bde letter 42-R-106 of 27 Nov 73
  - B. Maj Rawson's letter to HQ Trg Comd 6 Jan 74 (not to 3 Cadet Bde)

- 1. Following receipt of Reference A. you were advised by GOC Trg Comd to inform Maj Rawson that GOC would interview him as early as practical in 1974.
- 2. D Cadets had already interviewed Maj Rawson and had advised him generally the situation within 3 Cadet Bde.
- 3. Subsequently Reference B. was received within this headquarters. This was an impertinent letter which in effect directed GOC Trg Comd on Maj Rawson's requirements for the redress of the alleged wrong.
- 4. Maj Rawson was interviewed by GOC Trg Comd on 12 Feb 74 at which time it was ascertained that the officer considered he had been wronged on two counts:
  - a. The attitude of Comd 3 Cadet Bde towards him on taking up his appointment and,

- b. His appointment to a position within the Establishment other than that of DAA & QMG.
5. With regard to the first of these complaints, Maj Rawson advised that the attitude within the Headquarters towards him changed after he submitted his first redress and since that time the attitude to him had been friendly and helpful. In view of this I advised Maj Rawson that it seemed that despite the early attitude that he had been accepted, and that Comd 3 Cadet Bde had advised me that his work had been satisfactory in his current appointment. In view of this I consider the original wrong had in fact been redressed.
  6. With regard to the second complaint, GOC Trg Comd advised the officer that every effort was being made within units of the Australian Cadet Corps to improve the organisation, and in particular to improve the Army's image in relation to cadet activities in the eyes of the public. He was further informed of the experimental organisation within 3 Cadet Bde whereby the metropolitan units, i.e. 20 Cadet Battalion and 22 Cadet Battalion would be grouped as Melbourne Area Group for increased effectiveness. Consequently this led to the removal of the appointment of DAA & QMG from the Headquarters and the creation of a new position, Admin Officer (Major) under Melbourne Area Group. The officer was further informed by GOC Trg Comd that he viewed the new position as being a more responsible one than the original position, consequently he did not believe that the officer had lost any status as suggested.
  7. With regard to Reference B., when questioned why it had been sent in view of the previous assurances given to him, he stated that he had discussed the information concerning the provisions of the AMR with his daughter who suggested to him that "he should tell somebody about it."
  8. In addition, Maj Rawson has been advised that the new trial organisation was brought into existence with the knowledge and approval of GOC Trg Comd and in fact when the result of the Miller Committee concerning cadets is known, a recommendation will be made to the Dept of Defence (Army) for the implementation of the new organisation.
  9. Comd 3 Cadet Bde is to advise Maj Rawson of the decision of GOC Trg Comd in this regard and is to give a copy of this letter to Maj Rawson for his retention.
  10. If the officer does not accept the decision of GOC Trg Comd he is to be advised of his rights in accordance with the provisions of AMR 194.

### **Text of my letter to the Australian Military Board dated 28 February 1974**

- References:
- |    |  |
|----|--|
| A. | A written complaint by Maj J.J. Rawson dated 19 Nov 73.              |
| B. | A letter from Maj J.J. Rawson to HQ Trg Comd dated 6 Jan 74.         |
| C. | HQ Trg Comd letter to Comd, 3 Cadet Bde, dated 14 Feb 74.            |
| D. | A letter from Maj J.J. Rawson to Comd, 3 Cadet Bde, dated 20 Feb 74. |
| E. | AMR 77 (4) (a) and (b).  |

1. On Tue, 12 Feb 74, approximately eleven weeks after my written complaint (Reference A) was forwarded by the Comd 3 Cadet Bde to HQ Trg Comd, I was interviewed by the General Officer Commanding Trg Comd in relation to that issue.
2. On Mon, 17 Feb 74, the Comd 3 Cadet Bde received 2 copies of a letter from the GOC (Reference C), a letter which informed him of the decisions arrived at by the GOC. I considered it odd that the letter was not addressed to me, but I must accept that I was wrong in expecting that that would be the appropriate procedure.
3. It is my intention in this submission, not only to reply to the GOC's letter to the Comd (which really does seem an odd situation to find oneself in - I mean, having to reply to a letter that was written to another officer), but to present evidence which will, I contend, point to serious defects in the way that the Australian Army's Military Code is sometimes interpreted.
4. On 31 Dec 73, approximately three weeks after my complaint had reached HQ Trg Comd, I was informed by the Comd that the GOC had rung him with instructions to advise me that it was too late at that stage to do anything about the complaint; the GOC would be visiting Melbourne in late Jan or early Feb and he would see us both then.
5. I have always understood that official complaints, especially those of such a serious nature as this one, should be dealt with all due speed. Obviously this was not to be so in this case. The Comd was leaving the unit to begin leave that day and the GOC was to begin leave on 4 Jan 74, so I supposed that that was at least part of the reason for the delay.
6. Now I turn to the contents of the GOC's letter. Paragraph two stated that "D Cadets had already interviewed Maj Rawson and had advised him generally the situation within 3 Cadet Bde". The only occasion on which I have had

any kind of interview with the Director was on 4 Feb 74. He spoke to me very briefly. It was obvious to me that his main purpose was to impress upon me how very angry the GOC was on receiving Reference B. As he had done before during a telephone conversation on 12 Dec 73, he spoke of my relegation as being a not unusual happening; so I must infer that the contravention of Reference E is commonplace. I spoke to him on the telephone on 3 Jan 74, 16 Jan 74 and 30 Jan 74, but not once did he even hint that the GOC or he himself had given even oral approval to remove me from my appointment and relegate me to the non-existent (on the approved establishment) position of Admin Offr Q.

7. It was not my intention to write an "impertinent" letter. At the time of writing I was administering command of 3 Cadet Bde so of course the letter was addressed to HQ Trg Comd and not to HQ 3 Cadet Bde.
8. At the beginning of my interview with the GOC, I did my very best to explain my reasons for writing the letter, this issue being obviously uppermost in the GOCs mind. (That he was most angry was apparent ((perhaps to all present)) when we met in the Sergeants' Mess earlier in the morning. I said: "Maj Rawson, sir." He said: "Yes I know. I'll see you later".) Through being persistent, and on several occasions finding it necessary to request that I be allowed to continue, I gave the following explanation:
  - a. Shortly before Christmas, 1973, I found Reference E.
  - b. I thought: "If what has been done to me is forbidden by a Regulation, then a formal complaint from me should not have been necessary."
  - c. I was puzzled as to what I should do. I reasoned that the Comd could not have been aware of the Regulation otherwise surely he would not have infringed it. From what he had said to me, I had to assume that the Director did not know of it either.
  - d. I discussed the matter with my elder daughter. She is an Arts graduate and is about to begin her final year Law. She considered that it would be improper for me not to advise higher authority that I knew of the Law - it would be as though I were intending to "hold an ace up my sleeve", as she expressed it. I believed her opinion to be sound.
  - e. I expressed regret that the remainder of my letter had been construed as "an impertinent letter which in effect directed the GOC Trg Comd on Maj Rawson's requirements for the redress of the alleged wrong." The simple fact was that it seemed reasonable and sensible to me that I should state clearly in writing those things that I considered should be done to redress the wrongs I had suffered. This, I reasoned, would assist the GOC in his consideration of the matter.
9. So there was rather more to my explanation than is suggested by paragraph seven of the GOCs letter, which states that my daughter suggested that "he should tell somebody about it." It is quite true that the attitude towards me of the Comd has, in recent times, been good. But what is one to make of that change? Is it not odd indeed that the change in attitude took place immediately after he had read the details of my complaint? Did he suddenly decide that he must eschew all prejudice against me for reasons unconnected with the complaint I had lodged? Did he suddenly come to believe that he should treat me in accordance with Australian Military Order 301 which states that "officers of all ranks will adopt towards subordinates such methods of command and treatment as will not only ensure respect for authority, but also foster the feelings of self-respect and personal honour essential for military efficiency?" Had he read in the Notes to Army Act Section 40 which, in discussing the offence of conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline, state that "... Military discipline requires a certain standard of honour and reasonable care on the part of officers in their dealings with all persons, and if such standard is not observed it will not only lower the status of the service generally but, by diminishing the prestige and authority of those concerned, prejudicially affect their power of administering discipline"? (The emphasis is mine. Having read the notes to Section 40 of the Army Act very carefully, I believe that, even if there were no such Regulation as AMR 77, it is strongly arguable that an offence had been committed).
10. I believe that when he read the complaints he saw straight away that he would be shown to have acted dishonourably, unfairly and precipitately, and that he had better try to retrieve the situation at least to the extent of behaving in a civilized manner towards me. But the damage had been done. The prejudice and the strong dislike had done their work, and only a full reinstatement and a continuation of the decent treatment would provide any kind of solution to the problem.
11. But in a minute to me dated 24 Nov 73, the Comd wrote, "I am not in a position to redress your complaints". Not in a position? If he thought he had erred, and his manner has indicated that he did indeed think so, who was in a better position than he to effect the redress? Surely to admit an error is not to undermine the system of military authority.
12. At a later date, on Thu, 7 Feb 74, five days before the visit of the GOC, events occurred that gave the Comd a

chance to reinstate me. It was learned that the Capt who had taken over the “A” aspects of my proper duties (the AMR forbids this being done, too, of course) was due to be posted in about a week. The Comd told me, in the company of two other officers, that he had decided that I should take up the “A” duties (presumably I would continue with the “Q” duties, too) from the departing officer, and that I should move back into my old office that day. He stated that he would ring the Director to obtain approval for the move.

13. A little over half an hour later he came to my office. He said he had received a direction from HQ Trg Comd that in no circumstances was Maj Rawson to be given “A” duties to do. He was obviously surprised and puzzled, and expressed the opinion that the direction might have resulted from the GOCs being very angry about the second letter I had written. He implied that the GOCs attitude towards the complaint was in my favour before he had received that letter. He also said that it was a pity that he was not allowed to do it as that would have solved the problem.
14. So here was a situation where the Comd, having made a decision which was tantamount to an admission that he had acted wrongly in removing me from my proper appointment, being overridden by the next authority to whom my complaint had been referred, even before that authority had interviewed me to hear what I had to say.
15. Why? It could hardly be the quality of my work, for although in his letter, in paragraph five, the word “satisfactory” is used, the GOC in my interview with him said that the Comd had told him that my work was “good”. It seems obvious to me that Reference B was one reason. It seems obvious that the questions of whether I wrote an impertinent letter and whether I had been wronged were not, as surely they should have been, considered separately, but that the former created a bias that was quite apparent in his attitude towards me, and was perhaps reflected in his decision.
16. Again, I have not been shown the covering letter the Comd wrote in forwarding my complaint to higher authority, so I have had no chance to refute any criticisms he might have made. When I spoke of this to the GOC he said that there was very little in the letter.
17. In paragraph four b, mention is made of my “appointment to a position within the establishment other than that of DAA & QMG”. Unit Routine Order No 54, dated 2 Nov 73, appointed me to the position of Admin Offr (Q), Melbourne Area Cadet Group. But AHQ MS25944 dated 2 Aug 73, appointed me as DAA & QMG (497Y) HQ 3 Cadet Bde vice Maj J. Welch. And HQ 1 Div 73/GH/125 (Pers MS), dated 7 Aug 73, stated in paragraph four that “Maj Rawson is to assume duty Sep 73 and it is expected that he will remain in his new appointment for a period of not less than one year.” The fact is that I was removed out of it in a shameful manner in less than five weeks. How is it that the former authority could override the latter, especially when there is a law which all senior officers, anyway, should be presumed to be aware of that forbids such an action?
18. The GOC adverts to the establishment of HQ 3 Cadet Bde. The establishment quite obviously still included a DAA & QMG according to the records of AHQ (MS) on 2 Aug 73 and HQ 1 Div on 7 Aug 73, otherwise how could I have been posted to the appointment? And a search of the relevant files at HQ 3 Cadet Bde reveals no evidence whatsoever that any action has ever been taken under the provisions of MBI 82-1, or any other authority, to delete the position of DAA & QMG. On the other hand, the establishment does not, other than by arrangements outside the laid down procedures of MBI 82-1, have an appointment of Admin Offr Q, so how can it be “within the establishment?” In any case I have had several titles since I was relegated:” Admin Offr (Q), SO (Q), “Q” Officer and SO2 Log.
19. I have already written at some length about the attitude of the Comd towards myself. The point that is ignored in paragraph five of the GOCs letter is this: certainly the “attitude” had changed, but how much damage was done before it changed? Again I bring notice to the notes from Section 40 of the Army Act that I have already quoted in paragraph nine.
20. On 4 Oct 73, three days after I had taken up my appointment, the Comd admitted to me that he was prejudiced against me before even meeting me; admitted that he had attempted to have my appointment to HQ 3 Cadet Bde cancelled; agreed that RAAEC officers were widely held in contempt; repeated to my face a crude and uncomplimentary — and untrue — remark made about me by some person (I know who it was) he had met; said that he wanted a young officer to work with him: it seems some officers are “career” officers and others are not; removed me from my proper appointment and office whilst I was absent on duty. But I could go on and on. Is this sort of thing commonly done?
21. I have already commented on most of what is said in paragraph six of the GOCs letter. As the officer who has occupied both positions it is certainly not my opinion that my present position is the more important one. And as for loss of status - it is interesting to hear the opinions of other officers and civilians who know of what has happened. What of those who do not know the facts? What do they think?
22. Paragraph eight states that “Maj Rawson has been advised that the new trial organisation was brought into existence with the knowledge and approval of GOC Trg Comd.” It should be noted that no mention is made of the Comd

seeking and gaining approval to remove me from the appointment of DAA & QMG as Reference E stated must be done. It was not done in writing. Was it done over the telephone? If it was, how odd that neither the Comd nor the Director at any time ever mentioned the fact? (I have, by the way, a fairly complete record of all of importance that happened.) And even if approval had been given to remove me, should it have been done in this way? I wonder how many majors of two years' seniority, and having a satisfactory record, would have received that sort of treatment.

23. I regret the necessity for all this. I am not a vindictive person. I do sincerely believe in the democratic process and the right of the individual to just treatment. It seems to me that the safeguards as they exist in the various repositories of the military code of justice have been wisely and fairly drafted. The basis of my complaint is that the principles of this code have in this case been disregarded.

#### Addendum

1. In Reference A. I expressed the opinion that the treatment I had received must have the inevitable effect of harming my military reputation.

2. I reproduce without comment the Military Board's own definition (MBI 129-6) of that expression:

“Military Reputation’ may be expressed as an officer’s or soldier’s character, credit, respectability, good name or standing as a member of the Profession of Arms.”

### **Text of a letter signed by the Military Secretary, Colonel JA Hooper, to the Headquarters of Training Command dated 31 July 1974**

Reference:       A.       HQ Trg Comd 73/GR/202 of 28 Feb 74  
                      B.       Army Office (MS) 11415 of 27 May 74  
                      C.       Army Office 72/R/68 of 15 Jun 74

1. The redress of wrongs submitted by Maj Rawson has been upheld on both counts and his reposting has been approved vide Reference C.

2. The above decision has been conveyed to Maj Rawson during an interview with the Chief of Personnel in 3MD on 12 Jun 74. The Comd 3 Cdt Bde and Col (Trg Doctrine) HQ Trg Comd were present during the interview.

3. Please have the officer advised of the decision.

#### **Central Army Records Office**

The officer-in-charge at CARO was Colonel KJ O'Neill. In age, he was four years my junior. He interviewed me. I thought that he looked at me as though I were some kind of curiosity. It was something of an irony that the unit did not want me to remain in the job that I was posted to. He thought that I may complain. I was quite prepared, however, to fit in with the unit's wish to re-arrange the staff when he talked to me about it. He particularly asked me to improve the quality of the English used in the correspondence that left my area with his signature block on it. Someone, not O'Neill, later expressed satisfaction about that. Just the same, my record of receiving rather ordinary Confidential Reports continued.

A little more now about a further problem I had with Bladen. A little time before my interview with *Sandy* Pearson, Bladen had interviewed me about my Annual Confidential Report. He asked, among other things, how I thought I had gone in the job. I said that I thought I had done as well as most would have. He agreed (!) He did not ask me to read and initial the report before I left for my new posting at Central Army Records Office; his chief clerk sent it to me after I had been there for a while. Commanding officers did not do that sort of thing. I mean, a CO having his clerk handle Confidential Reports.

Perhaps I can sum up the report by saying that it was extremely uncomplimentary. There was no likelihood at all that I would initial it without also writing hundreds of words, as was my right, to comment on it. I sent Bladen a minute about it:

For more than one reason, I was surprised to receive the Confidential Report that you forwarded to me recently. For example, so many weeks had gone by since it was first initiated that I thought you had decided against completing it. (That it reached me after I left 3 Cadet Brigade should not have surprised me.) [I am referring here to his sloppy administration, for one thing. It may sound a bit ridiculous I know, but I suspect, too, that he did not relish the thought

of facing me on the question of that report.]

But there was one over-riding reason why I was surprised: it seems incredible to me that you would regard yourself as qualified to write a Confidential Report on me. After all, it was only a few short weeks ago that a Military Board decision found you guilty of holding prejudice against me. (And certain remarks you make in the report about my beliefs reveal a prejudice going far beyond anything that had come clearly to the surface previously – at least in the differences between you and me.)

Perhaps there is no legal issue involved here, but surely there must be a moral one. This seems to me so obvious that it requires no elaboration.

Could I suggest that you give further consideration to the matter? I think it unlikely that the Army Office, in the circumstances, would think it proper that you should write the report.

Of course if it is decided that the report should proceed, I shall have to decide upon the action I shall take.

I spoke to Colonel O'Neill and explained my position in the matter. Not long after a direction came from the Military Secretary at Army Headquarters: CARO was to shred the Confidential Report. I gave it to a lieutenant-colonel and watched him do it. I had photocopied one small section of the report. (That's all, it turned out, I had time to do – the lieutenant-colonel was about to arrive at my office, and I thought that he would not approve of my actions.) I included this quote earlier, but it is such a gem that I shall use it again. Here it is:

His unusual views on religion and his extreme political views are unsuited to a cadet and school environment.

It is apposite now to consider the last Annual Confidential Report that I received as an officer of the ARA. My score was 38. Although Colonel KJ O'Neill was officer-in-charge at Central Army Records Office (he also had another job in Canberra), another officer acted as the CO. He was Lieutenant-Colonel SJ Bryan, whose initials I may be wrong about. He wrote the Confidential Reports. AHQ sent a signal to CARO in February asking for a report on me to be sent as soon as possible. He knew me for five and a half months before he wrote my report. I worked in one building; he and most of the other more senior officers were in another building. He rarely came to my office. I had very little reason to visit him. I worked hard as I always did. Most lunch times I played squash with another officer. The CO and I hardly knew each other at all.

He wrote: 'At present' against Not recommended in the promotion section. It would have surprised me had he recommended me for promotion. In explanation, he wrote, 'Insufficient knowledge of this officer.' I found the work interesting and not at all difficult. My work included research on the records of soldiers. I liked having to write up the information that followed from the research. What knowledge was he talking about? Perhaps he was referring to his knowledge of me. Now for his 'pen picture':

A quiet and cheerful personality. He has completed his work in his area of interest. In the period available he has not had sufficient time to acquire the full detailed knowledge of every sub-section. (This would apply to any other officer posted to the same appointment.) For this reason it is difficult to give a more vivid picture. Satisfactory.

I really do think that, since the officer hardly knew me, he dispensed his ticks and comments in an understandably circumspect way. As for my background, it is difficult for me to believe that Colonel O'Neill, for one, did not know about it. They would all certainly have known about my very recent formal complaint. I should not have hoped, and I did not hope, for anything like a good report considering my history. Colonel O'Neill described me as '...a diffident personality. He lacks presence.' He, of course, would not recommend me for promotion.

Finally, a few words from Peter Shekelton:

I concur generally with the judgements expressed in this report. Maj Rawson should do well in the type of job he is presently filling; he can move comfortably at that level. ['... do well? I thought that I was regarded only as satisfactory. Move comfortably at that level? If he thought that, would one step higher be beyond me?'] In my opinion he is not cut out to move at higher levels. I agree therefore with the remarks of his superior reporting officer recorded in Part V.

Just what he meant by his 'not cut out' I can only manage a guess. Perhaps he was referring to my beliefs.

Perhaps he did not consider me bright enough to be a lieutenant-colonel. The fact is, though, given that I had been investigated by Security, given that I disagreed with chaplains, and given that I had made a formal complaint against a more senior officer, there was almost no chance that any of my seniors would have recommended me for promotion – even had I been deserving of that elevation in rank. They would not have dared, I believe. I believe, as well, that my RAAEC seniors would very likely have decided against recommending it anyway, because of my lack of a university degree. I accept that attitude. There are other possibilities, I suppose.

After most officers had been substantive majors for about three years, it seems to have been, they appeared before a promotion committee. (I do not remember the official title.) Being, for one thing, almost certainly, too old to be promoted, I did not expect the committee to call me before it. They did call me – in the middle of 1975, a few months before I was to resign my appointment. I thought the whole thing pointless in my case but decided not to ‘rock the boat.’

Major-General *Sandy* Pearson, whom we met earlier, was running proceedings. He said straight off, ‘John, you know that you are too old to be promoted don’t you?’ I said, ‘Yes Sir, I do.’ He then spoke very briefly of the formal complaint, asking me how I felt about the result, etc. I told him how pleased I was to see that the democratic rights contained in the Australian Military Regulations had been shown to be not just empty words. He smiled. In his smile, I thought that I detected at least a small glimpse of sympathy.

On 3 December 1975, I became a civilian for the first time in 34 years. All those years in the army and I had not seen any action. I held no real bitterness about the events of the last 10 years or so. I was a bit of a misfit, I suppose. Still, above all, I had much to remember, to cherish, about the many fine men and women with whom I had served in the Australian Army. The retiring age for majors in the RAAEC was 55, so I had not retired – I had resigned my appointment to the ARA. Until I was 55, I was an ARA Reservist. I performed no duties in that time.

The regulations of the time gave me the right to use the military title of major but I have not done so until now (on the title page of this book.) Twenty years’ service as an officer was required, except that the years of service as an other-rank counted as half. So I easily reached the twenty years. Had I finished a year or two earlier, the regulations would have entitled me to use the title of lieutenant-colonel. The Whitlam Labor Government put a stop to that practice, a decision that seemed to me to be a proper one. As for the future, I decided not to seek employment, at least for some time to come. We now owned a small house, and I had the intention of doing as much as I could myself to establish our new surroundings. There was also our desire to see more of the world.

The day after my discharge, I returned to the officers’ mess at Albert Park Barracks to attend a farewell gathering for several of us. I sat beside Colonel O’Neill. He said, ‘You are leaving soon, aren’t you?’ I had a feeling that he was not going to miss me very much. Before I left the army, however, and while I was still at CARO, a couple of other things of importance happened that I should like now to mention.

## **Security again**

Considering that Security had investigated me, it surprised me when my CO at CARO appointed me as Unit Security Officer. The officer whose place I had taken had been Security Officer; all the records were in my office. Are the authorities satisfied now that I am not a security risk? I wondered. Perhaps in that area, at least, the wounding criticisms of me by that chaplain have been shown to have been unfounded. I knew that they would be found baseless if his assertions had been thoroughly and fairly investigated. I need to stress, too, that the records in my office contained really nothing much except documents that showed the security classifications of unit members.

It was my job to obtain and record, through military intelligence, a new member’s classification. There was very little to do as Unit Security Officer. But suddenly I was no longer to be Unit Security Officer. One day, either in 1974 or 1975, two representatives from military intelligence arrived without notice in my office. One was a warrant officer whose name I forget. The other was a young Hungarian, a graduate from OCS whom I remembered quite well and who had graduated high up on the list. He gave no sign, however, that he recognized me. Was that because he knew of the chaplain’s complaints? Had he been given the task of investigating me and now chose to ignore our earlier (not close) relationship at OCS? He was Major Zagon. I think that his

Was this a routine checkup? Perhaps military intelligence was continuing the task of looking into my Security status? Zagon subsequently recommended that the appointment of Unit Security Officer be given to someone else. I worked too much 'in isolation.' It was true, as I said earlier, that I was in a different building from the CO and most other officers. Was I, or was I not, still under suspicion as a security risk? That was the question for which I still had no answer.

I think that it was before Zagon's visit that I made application to be cleared to TOP SECRET. (Security classifications were always to appear in block capitals and they had their abbreviated forms. Example: TOPSEC. The others, in descending order, were: SECRET, CONFIDENTIAL, RESTRICTED and UNCLASSIFIED.) It was a reasonable request, since I was Unit Security Officer. That was not my reason for applying, however. Would they refuse me a clearance to TOP SECRET as they had in New Guinea? A successful application would do much to ease my mind; to clear up perhaps any questioning the authorities might have about my loyalty to my country.

On 2 September 1974, I made application. These things take time. Much time. The application first went to military intelligence. Then it went to the Australian Security Intelligence Organization. On 24 March 1975, as Unit Security Officer, I received a document dated 18 Mar 75 from Int, HQ 3 MD, Victoria Barracks, MELBOURNE, VIC 3004. Among its comments it said that I had been cleared to TOP SECRET on 18 Nov 74. Had I not been Unit Security Officer, I would not have known of the document's contents: 'It is not to be communicated to the individual nor is it to be entered in the member's personal documents.'

The clearance was good news for me. What, I thought later, if the file came down from New Guinea after that country had gained its independence in 1975? Would it not follow that my file would very likely be sent to ASIO? Mind you, the Security Branch might have destroyed any file that they might have had on me. Perhaps they ended up thinking that his fury at my being an atheist was what drove the chaplain. Again, I suppose that there are those other than chaplains who would like to see atheism outlawed. More about ASIO later.

Among the things that the 1972-1975 Labor Government did was to improve the conditions of service of members of the armed forces. They changed the regulations that applied to superannuation, for one thing. The new regulations ensured that members discharged from that time would be much better off financially than was the case beforehand. In my case, I began to pay much, much less towards the scheme than I was paying before, even receiving back the sum of \$4,000. When I joined the ARA in 1948, I had not 'bought back' service to 1941. Now the Government gave some the chance to do so at 5.5% of our pay during those years. As a corporal (for example), I used to get about seven shillings a day, so I did not have to pay much to buy back. As well, as I have said, the 'retirement pay,' as it was called, became considerably more generous. Obviously the pay of a retired major was much better than the pay of a warrant officer, at which rank I would very likely have remained had I not 'gone to school,' for one thing, in those earlier years. At the end of my service, my military salary was \$16,709 per annum.

About the middle of August 1975, I was sitting at my desk in my office at Albert Park Barracks. I had just drunk some black coffee and taken a pain killer for a knee injury I had sustained while playing squash. Suddenly, there was such an awful pain just below and slightly to the rear of my right armpit. I felt sure that I was not having a heart attack; I had really no idea at all what it was.

Six hours later, attendants wheeled me into an operating theatre at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. For my part, I could not get in there quickly enough. For hours, a couple of junior medical officers had been trying to find out what was wrong; when a surgeon, Mr Penfold, examined me, he diagnosed the problem straight away. What a relief! Perforated ulcers cause terrible pain. Acids from the stomach escape through the hole in the wall of the stomach into the abdominal cavity. As a result, peritonitis may well set in, killing the patient unless the necessary surgery is carried out fairly promptly.

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## Chapter 5     25 years in 'civvy street'

### Thoona Grove, Greensborough

Soon after we returned from New Guinea in late 1969, Liz began experiencing worrying health lapses. A physician soon diagnosed that she had a problem with blood pressure. The condition has been a continuing problem, but it seems now to be under control. In 1977, she underwent surgery at Austin Hospital, her left carotid artery requiring a 'clean out.' Her heart, too, having a couple of unsound valves, has caused her some worry. Nonetheless, she has always been indefatigable in her determination to care for those close to her.

Vic Edwards, a warrant officer who worked for me at Watsonia Barracks lived with his wife, Ann, in a one bedroom weatherboard house at 16 Thoona Grove, Greensborough. Vic, a Welshman, had moved from the British Army to the Australian Regular Army during the war in Korea. We got on well together, and when he was to move to Tasmania, in 1974, he agreed to sell the small house to us. \$18,000 was the price. With a Defence Services loan (they used to be known as War Service loans) of \$12,000, and money we somehow managed to scrape together, we bought the property, taking possession on 25 June 1974. We rented it to a young couple for a time.

Having only one bedroom, the house in Thoona Grove was rather too small, we considered. Liz and I had all kinds of ideas about what we should do about the problem. I had plans drawn up to have the house added to, but was unable to raise the \$9,000 required to pay for it. This difficulty arose, even though, in a few months, I would easily have been able to repay the loan. One day, Liz had a brilliant idea: why don't we move the house on the block, thus making room for a second house? We made enquiries at the Shire of Diamond Valley. Yes, they told us, the block is (just) large enough for that proposal to be approved.

Early in the second half of 1975, a group of workers did the job at a cost of \$2,025. (There were many associated costs such as the creation of a stone fence and a driveway.) Defence Services Homes would not give me approval to move the house unless I arranged insurance coverage. On one very harrowing day, I made phone call after phone call to insurance companies, but none was willing to insure the move. I had the place moved without insurance, escaping any penalty for my transgression.

Before they could move the house, I had to remove a number of trees. With a hired chainsaw, I spent a weekend on the job, and the next weekend we made a huge bonfire of the fallen trees. Around this time we inspected some western red cedar log houses at a display, deciding at last what we would erect on the newly available space on the block. The house kits were imported from Canada. Some very worrying times and a great deal of hard work were to follow for more than two years. One way or another there was so much to do.

Because there was so much to do on the block at Greensborough, and it would have cost so much to pay someone else to do it, I had decided not to seek employment, at least for the time being, as I intimated earlier. There was so much worry and there were so many difficulties associated with the project (I, for a start, had few odd-jobber skills), that I later came to the conclusion that it would have been better if I had gone away and let someone else do the job.

Within a week of discharge, Liz and I flew off for 10 days with some friends to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Hong Kong. For probably the first time in our marriage, we had no reason to worry about money. I remember that the money I had received for the leave I had not taken was more than enough to pay for the holiday. I was to receive, also, a cheque for over \$14,000 in place of furlough, and a cheque for over \$40,000 for part commutation of my retirement pay. Perhaps some will consider it crass of me to mention such details of our financial situation, but I do not regard the matter as particularly confidential. I suppose that I should be a more secretive person than I am. I might add that the money did not last too long. We spent a fairly big sum on housing (\$15,000 for the house kit), and a Leyland Mini car for Liz. By now I did not have a car. The old Freeway packed up in 1975.

We were still living in the married quarter at Glen Waverley when I resigned, but the army needed the quarter. We moved out quickly. We decided to buy a house. Liz and I searched for one close to Thoona Grove where, before too long, we meant to put up the log house. We were to place it about where, on the bloc, the moved house had been located. So we bought a two-bedroom brick-veneer place at 109 Nell Street, Greensborough.

One day in January or February 1976 we moved into the house. Nana moved in with us. So did Ben the dog. The place at Nell Street cost \$32,000, of which we contributed about \$16,000, borrowing the rest on a five-year personal loan. After we moved out later that year, we rented the place for \$50 a week for a couple of years. Foolishly, in 1980, we sold it for about the same price as we bought it.

As I mentioned earlier, Liz and I had decided that we would go about putting up the log house ourselves. We had decided to have a concrete slab in which we arranged the inclusion of electric heating cables. The tradesman that did the brickwork along the foundations, although I gave him the plans, did not get all the measurements right. A day before the pouring of the slab, and three or four days before the log house was to arrive, I discovered the blunder. I should have insisted on the brickwork being done again (it was 17 bricks high at the north-east corner.) But the slab was to be poured and the logs were to arrive, so I agreed to accept some 'adjustments' to the wall. The house arrived on a huge semi-trailer in April 1976. A year passed before we were able to move in. Even then we still had much to do. With my brother Alan helping, we got the logs up to about top-of-window level. The remainder of the work, the roof, for example, was beyond our capabilities. We paid someone to finish the walls and roof.

All the work we had done ourselves, by the way, saved us very little in money. We might as well have paid someone in the first place. The problems that arose seemed endless. There were times when our enthusiasm fell away badly. We were stuck with the task. We had to continue as best we could. Liz, although she did not speak of it then, had experienced loss of vision, this resulting in the need for the carotid artery operation in 1977 that I have already mentioned. She stood up to things admirably. Much had been done, and was to be done, on the other house, too.

We gave it, for example, a new roof. We added an extra room, carport and driveway. We took steps to arrange for strata titles for the two places. Liz and I became the Body Corporate. Our money soon ran out, and personal loans became almost a way of life for us. In the end, we became outright owners of the log house, our Defence Services loan applying to the 'little house' in its new position. For a time, the address of the other house was 19 Patterson Crescent. Once the strata title arrangement was made its address became Unit 2, 16 Thoona Grove. My ulcer problem recurred, and doctors told me that I had duodenal ulcer disease.

When we moved from Nell Street to the small house, we brought with us Ben, our dog. (Strictly, Ben was Jennifer's and Robyn's dog.) He was not easy to control, and unless we kept him chained there was no way, because of a lack of fencing, from preventing him from racing out onto the streets. I drove him, in Liz's Mini, to the RSPCA station in Burwood. They destroyed him. I do not think that, in all my life, I have ever been so emotionally upset. He slobbered all over me all the way. I blubbered a bit. Did I have to do that? Why did I not take him to a dog's home? These and other questions assailed me for a time. In the manner of things, the problem subsided.

After Liz and I moved out of the small house early in 1977, it became Nana's home until she died in October 1980. It was so pleasing for us that we were able to provide her with a place of her own. We charged her a moderate rental. She had always been of quite marvellous assistance to us as a family. She was a wonderful cook, excellent at sewing and watched over the children with loving care whenever we needed her help. She had what seems to have been an unhappy life overall. She did not speak of her failed marriage; indeed, Liz knows very little about her father or what became of him. Nan was born in 1892. Her grave is in Eltham cemetery.

## **To the East**

We visited Singapore, Sri Lanka and India for about eight weeks. Later, Sri Lanka became a place of deadly civil unrest, but it was fairly peaceful while we were there. The three of us — Liz, Jennifer and I — visited India for a couple of weeks, our stopovers including Madras, Agra, New Delhi and the State of Kashmir. We stayed for a time on a houseboat on Lake Dahl. It was exciting to see the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort in Delhi and other places. The thing that I most disliked was a generally poor observance of the guidelines of hygiene. At meal times, for example, I tended to concentrate my thoughts more on the likelihood of grubby kitchens than on the food itself. *Delhi belly?*

When we got back to Colombo, a lawyer told us of something that had happened while we were away. At a small school, not far from Kandy, in Central Sri Lanka, a small boy had been naughty in the classroom. The

teacher, to punish him, locked him in a small room contiguous to the classroom. It seems that the teacher ignored some cries from the boy. When the teacher did open the door, he found, not the boy, but a huge python. A grief-stricken father arrived and knifed the teacher to death. They killed the python and cut it open, but the boy, of course, had not survived.

An evening or two before we left Sri Lanka, we attended a farewell social gathering. Our flat was the upstairs one of two flats. An Indian bank manager and his spouse and attractive young daughter lived in the lower flat. There were 30-40 people at the party, and a fair amount of noise ensued. The next morning we learned that the daughter had committed suicide by chewing the flowers (leaves?) of the oleander shrub. She was found at her parents' bedroom door. Some believed that her parents had not heard her (probable) cries for help because of the noise we were making.

A doctor discovered in Colombo that I had a heart problem that, later in Australia, was diagnosed as extra ventricular systoles. Medical people do not normally regard the ailment as a serious one. In Colombo, though, the doctor intimated that it was, indeed, serious, and he left me with the impression that I may pop off anytime. I found myself able to handle the situation calmly enough. It was a relief, just the same, to be told later that it was a fairly common complaint, not usually dangerous to life. I had a blood pressure problem, too, but drugs have been able to control it.

So 1980 arrived with Malcolm Fraser's coalition Government in power federally. In Victoria, too, a conservative Government remained in control. In the USA, late that year, to the amazement of many Australians, at least, someone named Ronald Reagan won the Presidency of that nation, taking up office in early 1981. Perhaps, because he had been Governor of California, his elevation should not have surprised us. Still, what was the place coming to? Capitalism, I believe, has helped markedly to reduce American society to its present far from admirable state. In 1980, Liz and I spent a few weeks in New Zealand.

### **The parking attendant**

On 2 April 1979 (my 57th birthday), I went into the city to be interviewed for a parking attendant's job with Adams' Parking. I began work on the north-east corner of Victoria and Swanston Streets Carlton. Except for a very small brick building, the block was vacant. If you really squeezed them in you could admit about 60 cars: \$2.00 each.

At first, the arrangement was that I should work from 7am to 11am, the pay to be \$3.50 an hour. (The park was left unattended after I left.) They made no mention at all about conditions such as sick pay, annual holidays, public holidays. For my part, I assumed that I was simply a casual employee, and that they were entitled not to consider such things. My ignorance of such matters was inexcusable, even though I was in the army all those years. It was only later, that I found out that people in my position were subject to the provisions of the Motor Drivers' Award, and that I certainly did have entitlements that were conveniently (for them) disregarded by Adams' Parking.

For four years, five days a week, (I missed very few days through illness, although I was not at all well, often) I got out of bed at about 5:10am, to be in there in Liz's Mini about 6:45am. There was no power or water, no proper toilet facilities. Just the same, as with taxi driving, one met a variety of people. Some were likable to know; some were odious, to say the least. One morning in 1980, I said to Harry, an Italian who parked there often, and with whom I used to chat, 'Harry, my daughter is coming home from overseas today.' As I said it a KLM airliner passed overhead. Jennifer was in it.

As the weeks passed, extra parking space was obtained in contiguous derelict buildings, total spaces reaching about 140. The supervision of it all was not at all an easy task, and there was much trouble with non-paying car owners. My relationship with the two men who managed Adams' Parking was cordial, and on more than one occasion they said thanks for the work that I did. (One of them was a bankrupt. He was now illegally in business.) They were a couple of flint-hard operators, whose main concern was the making of money, outlaying as little of it as they could manage.

In October 1982, they asked me to start up the operation of a car park in St Kilda Road, in a new building. This was where, finally, things went wrong between us. It was, I believe, the cleaning of the two floors of the car park that became a big issue. I swept the entrance and exit ramps and the area around my car, which was my

office (they provided no furniture), but the rest of the two floors was never swept or cleaned during my time there—to 18 July 1983, that is. Near the end they asked me if I would be willing to do the cleaning, perhaps on a Saturday morning. I said no to that, but told them that someone that I knew would take on the job.

On what was to be my final day there, the manager arrived, bringing with him a chap whose car park one of their competitors had taken over. They had worked out the solution to the cleaning tasks. They had no job for the other employee. (He probably needed a job more than I did, I would agree.) He would do the cleaning as well as his normal work. Believe me, Adams' Parking would be intending that he would not expect them to pay him any extra. The manager did not hesitate: 'We want you to take a few days off.' He made some sort of apology about not advising me earlier. We had a huge argument, during which the proprietor arrived, then I got myself paid, jumped in my car, and drove home. I reckoned that they had treated me most unfairly. When that happens, I get going. The notion of fairness is, I believe, a part of the makeup of those who believe in socialism. I do not mean, of course, that believers in capitalism are necessarily against fairness in human dealings.

I made enquiries at the Department of Industrial Affairs and obtained, too, a copy of the Motor Drivers' Award. What I learned made it quite certain that Adams' Parking had been cheating other employees and me over a period of several years. To take the matter up with the Department seemed to be a good idea as they investigate and prosecute. I finally learned, to my frustration, that they investigate only a period of one year. It seemed best to turn to the legal system. Jack Meadows, a former member of 3 Squadron Signals, and now a solicitor in the city of Melbourne, agreed to act for me.

Because of the bankruptcy matter, and because of the fear of a taxation investigation, Adams' Parking was in a very precarious position. They offered me \$2,200 in cash, which sum I refused. I was able to draw up a very detailed statement of all the money they owed me, covering wages, annual holiday pay, public holiday pay and a handling money allowance. (There is a file on all this among my possessions.) It all came to \$7,333.89.

The legal process was very lengthy and very slow. Jack thought that I was a bit impatient, but he really was taking his time about things. At last the matter came up at the County Court. An affidavit from the proprietor was so weak in the eyes of his barrister that the latter asked the judge for permission to have a fresh affidavit sworn. In effect: 'Our defence is terribly weak. Could we please try again?' I gathered from my barrister that a judge would not normally allow that. The judge adjourned the case, the second affidavit sworn, by the way, containing perjury on a grand scale.

It was either late 1985 or early 1986 before the legal battle finished. My solicitor and theirs got together with some senior legal person, this method only recently being introduced. On the advice of Jack Meadows, I agreed to a settlement of \$6,000. (His bill was \$2,000.) Jack died from lung cancer a few years later.

Jack assured me once that, of course, he did not believe in God, but he believed it best to conform with custom. Many people hold that view: they do not themselves believe, but they think it best that others, especially the masses, do. The eminent American psychologist and philosopher, and pragmatist, William James, who died early in the 20th century, held that kind of opinion. Bertrand Russell, who admired James enormously, but not at all always agreed with him, made this comment:

He wants people to be happy, and if belief in god makes them happy let them believe in him.  
(From *History of Western Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell, p 772, 1946)

## **Overseas again**

A decision to visit Jennifer in Damascus in 1988 developed into something rather more than that. I wanted to visit the USA again. Liz had said that she did not want to go there. My brother Peter decided to travel with me for part of the trip. Our friend, Merry Wickes, was a First Secretary at the Australian Mission to the United Nations in New York. She had said that we could stay with her for 10 days in Manhattan. We left on 10 April. I was not to arrive home again, with Liz, until 10 October.

Liz was home by herself until June, arriving in Damascus in the middle of the month. I had arrived there on the 6th. She was not altogether alone at home. John had married Cheryl Mann and they had a son, Adam. They had divorced and John, in 1986, married Shirley Birch. Since the early eighties, they have lived in the small house. That is, the original house on the block. For a long time, their being near has been a great comfort and help for Liz and me.

## **The USA**

We spent a short time in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas and New Orleans. During our last 10 days in the USA, we stayed at Merry's apartment at 120 East 54th Street, Manhattan. The apartment, on the 22nd floor, was very comfortable, costing the Australian Government US\$4,000 a month. I learned from Liz on the telephone that my sister, Jess, had died. Since 1950 or thereabouts, hers had been a sad and miserable existence. That misery impinged on others, too, particularly Dad, Mother and Bryan, as I wrote earlier.

New York is, no doubt, in many ways, a rotten place. Just the same, I found it very interesting indeed. Through Merry's influence, we were able to attend the Anzac Day Commemoration Service at the British Empire Building, Fifth Avenue. The host was Chris Hurford, Consul-General of Australia. We had to put up with a fair amount of religious ceremony, but it was a great occasion (for people like me), even so.

After the Anzac Day Service, we made our way down to near the northern end of Central Park to see an Australian Rules football match. Mike Fitzpatrick, a former captain of Carlton, was playing and, no doubt, was an organizer. I had a chat with him and with Jack Hamilton, a former Collingwood player and VFL official, who was a visitor to New York, too. (He was to die in a motor accident back in Victoria a few short years later.) Easily the most memorable of my experiences, though, was a trip in a large ferry around Manhattan Island. The fellow describing things as we travelled was superb. One did not wish to miss one word, even though a cold wind was something of a distraction.

From the JF Kennedy Airport, we flew to Munich, where we spent a few days. Then to London where we stayed with Peter Willis and Eleneth Woolley, an Australian married couple, for the time being living and working in London. My brother then returned to Australia. Peter is a lawyer and Eleneth was working as a Chartered Financial Accountant. They have been back in Australia for several years now and live in Eaglemont, Victoria. Liz and I, knowing they were back and living in Eaglemont, were travelling in a train towards that railway station one day. I said to Liz, 'This is the station where Peter will catch the train to go to his office in the city.' There he was on the platform. He entered our carriage. (End of diversion.)

I had arranged and paid for, through the Intourist organisation of the USSR, a visit to Moscow, Kharkov and Leningrad. During our stay in Munich, I had arranged, with no little difficulty, to travel by train from Frankfurt to Moscow by way of Hanover. (The air fare was far too expensive.)

## **The Soviet Union**

On 23 May 1988, I flew from London to Frankfurt where, in the evening, I caught a train to Hanover. German trains were very clean and comfortable. I waited several hours on a railway platform at Hanover, the Soviet Paris to Moscow train arriving at about two in the morning. The journey to Moscow through Berlin, Warsaw and Brest Litovsk, took about 36 hours. Eleneth had advised me to take some food with me, so I had bought some nuts and dried fruit. The conductor gave me a cup of tea. I had a sleeping compartment to myself. I went for two days without a meal.

At Brest, on the Polish-Soviet border, they had to modify the undercarriages of the trains because of the different gauges. This took some time. An official found something to concern him about my documents, and went about searching my compartment, including in the ceiling. If you looked at my passport photograph and the visa photograph you might well have thought that they were not of the same person. Perhaps that was what concerned him. I spoke to a young Intourist official who came along to meet me. His English was good, and I think that he spoke to the official. The dropped their intention of interrogating me. A rather mortified looking official gave me back my documents.

At the Moscow railway station, I had to search for an Intourist official. In no time, he had me in a car and on my way down Gorky Street, at first, to the Hotel Belgrad where I was to spend three nights. (I had arrived a day early.) The car, by the way, had seat belts fitted, but when I went to fit them on the driver said 'No, no, no,' so I decided not to argue. (Perhaps he said '*Nyet, nyet nyet*')

It was, for me, a very exciting thing to be in Moscow. For years and years it had been my intention to visit

there if possible. It would have been great to have Liz with me. A city of about 9 million people, its most imposing feature was, I thought, the Metro underground, costing virtually nothing to travel on. Some of the rail stations were real showpieces, and there was almost no litter on the tracks that I saw. To travel in the train you simply tossed a five kopeck coin into a receptacle and then you passed through the barrier. The main thoroughfares, in the main, were wide, pedestrians moving underground at intersections.

In New York and London there were beggars everywhere, and one felt menaced in Manhattan. These conditions did not seem to apply in Moscow. I saw no obvious signs of poverty. There was, though, a certain lack of colour. To a large extent this was perhaps due to an absence of advertising and the rather drab apparel most seemed to wear. I saw no graffiti. Sirens did not shriek all day as they did, especially, in San Francisco. There seemed to be fewer attractive women about than in the West. Tighter budgets might well have made it difficult for most women to dress attractively. (In any case, the ethos of a socialist society would be different from a capitalist society.)

Generally, there seemed to be no attempt to brighten up the shop windows. Indeed, they usually contained very little, that scarcity being evident in the shop itself. (But I do not mean to imply that the people were short of food.) I went into a florist shop in the suburbs and it really was a pitiable sight, having hardly any stock at all. I found it to be true, indeed, that queues were plentiful.

Every tourist, I suppose, goes to see Red Square, St Basil's, the Kremlin, Lenin's Tomb, etc, and it was all (from the outside of course) very impressive. The Bolshoi was not operating at the time, but I saw it from the outside.

The Hotel Belgrad was, I should think, a three or four star hotel in our terms. It was so noticeable at reception that office technology was a long way behind that which we saw, for example, at the Hilton in Las Vegas. The staff used pen or pencil rather than a machine. (The USSR was recognized as a world leader in high-tech, however.) The food was fairly good, although toast was not available at breakfasts. Perhaps the authorities had decided that factories would not make toasters? The dining room was huge, virtually all the staff being well set-up, rather surly looking males.

There was not much opportunity during my short stay to converse with many people, although I understood that many spoke English. The education system, from the little I learned, was an impressive one. Perhaps Harold Laski, English political scientist, knew what he was talking about years ago when he said this: 'Nothing in modern times even approximates to the scale or the rapidity of the Soviet advance in the field of education.' A woman told me that the problem of men drinking too much vodka was a huge one.

Kharkov is an industrial city about an hour's flight east of Moscow. The USA President, Ronald Reagan, and his wife, arrived in the USSR that weekend. I viewed his arrival on television at the Intourist Hotel where I stayed. I rang Liz, the call costing, for about five minutes, 77 dollars (seven roubles a minute). That evening, in the dining room, a huge party was in progress. I was at quite a large table, all alone. A chap with a woman came in, patting me on the shoulder as he walked by. Sometime later, on his way out again, he grabbed me and kissed me on both cheeks. I was flattered, I suppose, but puzzled. I had noticed a tiny red flag on my table. He must have thought that I was Polish. Perhaps he was a Pole. It took about two hours to fly from Kharkov to Leningrad, west of Moscow, again in a Tupalov R134 aircraft.

My baggage travelled with the pilot. When the aircraft landed at Leningrad and stopped, a tall official entered the passenger section and indicated to me that I should approach her. Everyone else remained seated. She put my baggage and me into a huge bus, no one else, and over we went to the terminal buildings. They then dispatched me, without delay, by taxi, to the Hotel Leningrad. This seemed to me, and surely it was, a curious procedure. To explain it, I thought that a young man, who had acted as a guide on my tour of Kharkov, had asked that I be treated well. He had high hopes for the Soviets under Gorbachev. He told me that his family with an income of 750 roubles a month paid 25 a month for their apartment, this including all services. (At the time, an Australian dollar was worth 0.46 roubles, 46 kopecks, that is.)

From my hotel room I looked down on the warship *Aurora* on the Neva River. It was there as a monument, having fired the first shot, it was said, of the 1917 Revolution. If the reader perhaps thinks that the revolution was not justified, then perhaps the words of the Australian, Alan Moorehead, may serve to modify his or her opinion:

The ruling group owned all the wealth, enjoyed all the privileges and monopolized all the political power, and it did not intend to give up any of its prerogatives. It considered the peasants (some 95% of the population) to be little better than animals who could not be trusted with the slightest responsibility.

(From *The Russian Revolution* by Alan Moorhead)

I spent three nights in Leningrad, and had what may be described as a seating problem each night. The first night, I found the concert hall at the hotel. There were very few people about, but there was obviously to be entertainment of some sort. I saw no one selling tickets. In I went. I sat down. A woman came in making it plain that I had taken her seat. I moved along a couple, but more women came in and I had to move again. I moved down about three rows, but again I had to move. I then left, but not before they all giggled at me.

There were no ushers that I could see at the Moscow Circus the next night, but after a while a gentleman showed me to my seat. At the Kirov Theatre, the next night, a lady who, with her daughter, was there to see quite marvellous ballet, found my seat for me. We communicated mainly through a gentleman who acted as a translator. The lady, from Siberia, was interested to meet an Australian. She said that she would like to write. We exchanged addresses and when I arrived home in October 1988, there was a letter waiting. I liked the idea of having a pen-friend from Novosibirsk. We corresponded for a couple of years. As is plain from what I have said we were never alone together. It does seem possible from some of the contents of a letter that she wrote to me, that Faina regarded me as rather more than simply a pen-friend. I had the letter translated, and I think that that gave the reader a wrong impression.

Leningrad (they have renamed it St Petersburg) is a beautiful city, with not a skyscraper, not even what a visitor may describe as a tall building, to be seen. Perhaps I did not look carefully enough? Probably the Winter Palace, which contains the Hermitage, one could regard as the focal point of the city. The Hermitage art collection is world famous.

The next morning, 2 June 1988, a taxi took me to the Leningrad airport from where I was to fly back to Moscow to catch a train back to Germany that evening. The driver of the taxi thought Ronald Reagan 'A good man. Gorbachev talks a lot, but gets nothing done.' I had about eight hours to fill in before boarding the train at one end of Gorky Street. Much of this time I walked about Moscow. Where was I? I did not really know.

At the railway station, I entered my sleeping compartment just before the arrival of a young woman with, I supposed, her father. She was to share my compartment (lower bunk) and was going to Paris. Her father seemed to be a little uneasy about the arrangement, although one has to think that such co-mingling is normal enough on Russian (and other European?) train services. Just then a woman came running along the platform waving a piece of notepaper. She gave it to me. I think it was from the Intourist chap at the railway station. It said, 'I am afraid that you will have to pay for the extra night at the Hotel Belgrad: 117 dollars US.' I paid the money without demur.

As I explained earlier, I arrived in Moscow a day early, but when I spoke about payment for the extra night the clerk indicated that I would pay later. I was at Reception several times, but they said nothing about the tariff. I thought, perhaps they have decided to waive the matter; in any case I'll let them take the initiative. I had to watch my spending, of course. Morally I was in the wrong, there is no doubt about that.

I had paid for a sleeping compartment both ways because I worried that my snoring would be an irritation to people. I strongly suspect that I disturbed the young woman's sleep (by snoring, I mean.) The next day I spent most of the time in the carriage corridor looking out the window. An American, Dennis Duke, helped me finish off the remains of a bottle of Johnny Walker *Black Label* whisky. He had been with Reagan's mission and, with his mother and aunt, was travelling to London to catch the *QE2* – for the fifth time. He did not approve of my failure to volunteer the money for my extra night. He was entitled to have that opinion. His conversation revealed a heavy prejudice against the Soviet system. Aneurin Bevan had this to say in *In Place of Fear* about such prejudice:

The opponents of Marxism are usually so deeply prejudiced that they are shut off from reality by a wall of their own making. Their unscholarly bias renders them as unfit guides to political conduct as the Marxist dogmatists. A sympathetic understanding of what Marxists are trying to say to the world is a prerequisite to learning where the Marxist practitioners are likely to go wrong.

(From *In Place of Fear*, by Aneurin Bevan)

## To Syria

The train to Frankfurt, West Germany (there is a Frankfurt in what was then known as East Germany, too), left Hanover at about 6.15 am on 4 June 1988. An Airbus A310 took me from Frankfurt to Damascus. It was evening and Jennifer met me at the airport. I learned from her that Liz would not join us until the following weekend.

There was a permanent armed guard (Kalashnikovs) at the front entrance to the apartment building. A Syrian politician lived there. Jennifer's was a large apartment, occupying the entire top floor. There was a mosque close by equipped with loud speakers high up on the turret. One was to endure loud wailings several times a day. Sometimes, I must admit, the sounds were not so displeasing to the ears.

Damascus is a somewhat grubby city, but not at all uninteresting. One noted that men and women usually moved about in separate groups, it being unusual, say, for two men and two women to walk along a footpath together. It was not unusual to see (usually) youngish men holding hands as they walked along. It is a mainly Muslim society; so women have an inferior position in the social strata.

Many people say that Syria is a police state. Perhaps it is. It had, and perhaps it still has, its problems with Muslim fundamentalists. President Assad took some very strong action against them including, someone told me, the shelling of the town of Hama. Thousands perished. I went to the famous Ommayod mosque with a Syrian lady. I admired the hundreds of small carpets spread over the huge floor area. She agreed that they were attractive, but said that the ones they replaced were even more attractive. They, however, were used to wrap up and to take away the bodies of 300 men who had been massacred as they prayed. (Which says something, does it not, about the efficacy of prayer?)

Still, we did not feel menaced as we moved about the city. I suspect that the streets of Manhattan are more dangerous than the streets of Damascus. Assad, when he first drew up the constitution did not mention religion. There was an outcry, so he included in it that the requirements of being a Muslim applied to the country's leader. Who knows, he may be an atheist.

We had the use of a small car, and a driver on long trips. We visited many places including Palmyra, across the Syrian desert, Aleppo, Hama, the Assad dam and other places. The ancient ruins that we saw, including some constructed by the Crusaders, and some by the Arabs themselves, were a cause of some wonder to us. (The Crusaders, I suppose, were Christian fanatics, as every bit as cruel as the Muslim ones.)

A special trip we did was to Jordan, passing through the capital, Amman, and on to the ancient city of Petra. Another special trip was to the Golan Heights. A young Australian Regular Army captain, who was serving with the UN, showed me over the feature. Perhaps a piece that I wrote about Petra may be of some interest:

### **PETRA: THE CITY OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS**

Our world has travel wonders in abundance, but few of them, perhaps, have a stronger claim to uniqueness than Petra, Jordan, has. Its out-of-the-way location means, one supposes, that many fewer tourists than its truly astonishing attractions would warrant visit there. (This tourist, with his wife and a Syrian guide, drove there from Damascus in 1988.)

Petra was the capital of the Nabataeans, a people long settled in Jordan; for centuries, indeed, before and after the birth of Christ. The visitor needs to be prepared to walk fairly long distances or, alternatively, to hire a guide and horse, to engage thoroughly in the sight-seeing. (Good accommodation is available nearby.)

Petra, it has been written, is a city of ancient monuments, monuments carved out of rocks in what is a mountainous area. How, you wonder, could people of those times, with the limited variety of tools that were available to them, how could they have created such beauty in the form of facades, of tombs, that appear before your eyes as you explore? And, oh, the colours!

It would, to many, at least, be worth making the trip to Petra even if only to see the Khazneh. A facade, some 30 metres wide and 43 metres high, its appearance first strikes the visitor when he or she walks through a crevice in a wall of rock about 100 metres from it. It is such a wondrous sight! It has been described as 'the most perfect two-storied facade which has been preserved in the East from antiquity until now'. Another of the facades, the stunning Ad-Deir, is even larger than the Khazneh, it being reached after a walk up hundreds of steps. (Bob Hawke, we were told, was taken up there by helicopter.) And there are all the other monuments to see.

Some say that a visit of three days is needed for one to explore Petra thoroughly. That may be so. A visit of just one day, however, we found to be a quite marvellous, touching on spiritual, experience.

Liz and I flew out of Damascus twice before our final departure. We had more than a week in Cyprus, and

later visited Hungary and Austria. Perhaps we preferred Budapest to Vienna, but they are both charming cities. Innsbruck, with mountains on all sides, is just about breathtaking.

So ended, on 10 October 1988, our longest and, for me, at least, most interesting, overseas trip. It was lovely to see everyone again, and Australia really is such a great country. (There is room for improvement of course.) Each month, too, I would again be able to meet with a dozen or so of my comrades from 3 Squadron Signals, the Second World War unit that I was with in the early forties. These meetings are in addition to our yearly reunions.

## **The Soviet Union dissolves**

Within a year or so of our return to Australia, events of great moment began to occur overseas. I mean the breakup of the Soviet Union. I have no hesitation in saying that this failure of socialism was a great disappointment to me, even though I was well aware that the system possessed many deficiencies. Bertrand Russell visited the Soviet Union in 1920 and talked with Lenin. He came away disappointed with what he had seen. Perhaps he put his finger on at least part of the problem when he wrote this:

The whole theory of Communism is that you give an enormous amount of power to people who are adherents to a certain creed, and you hope that they will exercise that enormous power benevolently. Whereas it seems to me that everybody – with few exceptions – misuses power, and therefore the important thing is to spread power as evenly as you can, and not give immense power to some small clique.

(From *Communism and Capitalism* by Bertrand Russell)

There was no chance at all that Western capitalism would do other than what it did do right from the beginning of the Revolution: oppose Communism everywhere in every way possible, including armed intervention by 14 (?) European nations after the Revolution, and a blockade.

When people came out in the streets in so many places, it seemed to me that the movement must have leadership. Straight away, I believed that the most bitter opponents of 'Godless Communism,' the Catholic Church, were heavily involved. Even today, the influence of the Pope is enormous. It must have been most demeaning for Gorbachev to have to visit him on two occasions. Gorbachev later commented in his newspaper column: 'All that has happened in East Europe over the last few years would not have been possible without the presence of the Pope.' I much prefer Communism to Catholicism.

Things might have turned out very differently if capitalism had not so bitterly opposed the experiment. Of course, there was no chance that capitalism would react except to oppose Communism. (Capitalist nations like Germany and Japan received huge assistance; they, too, would become bulwarks against Communism.) Ultimately, the Soviet Union, it seems, could not compete with the economic prowess of its opponents, to mention just one thing. Karl Marx (and Engels) knew all about the capacities of capitalism:

The bourgeoisie [as Marx described capitalists of the time] during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.

(From the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, 1848)

For someone that believes in socialism, it is not at all encouraging to consider the future. Even in Australia, where the Australian Labor Party used to be a Democratic Socialist Party, the situation has changed. Most Labor politicians now seem to describe themselves as Social Democrats. Certainly they never, as far as I am aware, use the term 'socialist' about themselves publicly. They seem to embrace capitalism very readily being, though, much preferable to the conservatives from my point of view.

In my opinion, the collapse of the Soviet Union has caused less than subtle changes in attitude towards capitalism among many who were on the Left. Capitalism is on a roll, to say the least. There is not much choice anymore – socialism is finished, they judge. As for, say, the United States and the United Kingdom, it may be that their economic systems have had much to do with their decline as much as their rise as societies in the world of nations. That the type of economic system in operation does hugely affect societies' formation, has been widely recognized. This extract from GH Sabine is an example of that recognition:

The importance of Marx's interpretation of history can hardly be exaggerated. It brought to light the enormous weight of economic forces such as technology, transportation, the supply of raw materials, the distribution of wealth, finance,

and the formation of social classes, in past and present politics, in law, and in the formation of moral and social ideals. Whether he exaggerated the importance of economic factors is of little moment, for their importance is certainly great. (From *A History of Political Theory* by GH Sabine, p 742)

(Are we not, most of us, well aware that North Korea, a Communist society, is very different in its composition from, say, the Philippines?)

For me it is depressing to think that capitalism may well continue to determine the future of our world. Almost without doubt, China, before the middle of the 21st Century, will become an economic colossus in this world. Will it be a Communist or will it be a capitalist, power? Perhaps it will combine the best of both systems. Our country, in world terms, is in many ways worthy of admiration. I have little doubt, however, that had not the Left shared some of the power over the years, it would not be anything like as egalitarian a country as it is. To mention just a few things, the aged and the underprivileged and the sick and the educational requirements of our young people lose priority under conservatism. Greedy people seek priority with success. Germane to those remarks, and having in mind a comparison of our society with the society of the USA, I include the last paragraph of a letter of mine that the *Bulletin* published in 1988:

Perhaps, too, US society may well be more compassionate, better educated, receive better health care and be less crime-ridden and poverty-stricken were the holders of political power not almost always from the ranks of those representing wealth and privilege.

Liz and I, three years in a row, 1990, 1991 and 1992, travelled by car to NSW and Queensland. In 1990, we visited the Darling Downs, meeting with relatives of Liz, many of whom had not seen her for something like 50 years. In 1993, we were overseas again for a couple of months, spending a week in Hawaii, and the rest of the time in Tonga. We flew to Honolulu on the 2 November, and had the experience of being able to celebrate our 47th wedding anniversary in both Melbourne and Honolulu. On two successive days, that is.

## To Tonga

Tonga is a kingdom – it is far from being a democracy. Reading has convinced me that corruption is endemic. The place has churches galore. A number of denominations go about propagating their myths. The Methodists have, numerically, the strongest, unhealthy, grip on the people. (It was Marx, of course, who said that ‘Religion is the opiate of the people’.) The Catholic Church is very influential, too. I have forgotten who it was that wrote: ‘Everywhere that Catholics are in the majority, negative social developments make themselves felt.’ Consider the Philippines.

One has to regard it as highly probable, that the backwardness of Tonga may be more than a little attributed to the heavy religious influence that it suffers. It is hard to believe that, though I understand the relevant law has been repealed, in Tonga on Sunday, the people were not permitted to engage in sporting activities, nor were aeroplanes allowed to fly in or out. No doubt the law affected other activities as well. Perhaps it says something about the hygiene standards in Tonga, that I was unable to buy a fly swat in any of the several shops that I visited in Nuku’alofa; the shop assistants did not even seem to know what they were. Robyn had married Patrick Miller, the union resulting in the arrival of Josiah in 1989 and Mollie in 1993. The family visited Tonga, too, then.

After I had a three-year tussle with the Veterans’ Affairs Department, I was, in 1994, granted a small pension and free treatment for my duodenal ulcer. These days, Veterans’ Affairs are very hard to beat, and there is little doubt that I would not have won the argument (I lost my argument about a spinal problem) if I had been less determined (read stubborn) and less capable of stating my case in writing.

In 1992, I submitted a short story to *The Age* competition with, predictably, no success. I mention it, though, so that I can describe a rather odd experience that I had. In the story, the main character, on a walk along a river bank, found himself confronted by a waiting younger man, an ex-soldier. The latter, because the older man was carrying a short stick, and wearing an army hat, deduced correctly that he was an ex-army officer. I quote from the story some of the thoughts of the ex-soldier: ‘And that silly bloody stick he’s carrying; what’s he think it is, a swagger stick?’

A few days after I wrote those words, I was walking along Grimshaw Street, Greensborough, when I saw that a man along the footpath to my front had stopped and was obviously waiting for me. He was an ex-soldier. I

knew him years before. He said, ‘Is that a swagger stick you are carrying?’ It was, as I said, an odd experience.

It is the spring of 1998 as I go about putting together the final passages of this narrative. For the last five years or so, I have spent much of my time either using a pen or a keyboard. My dear Elizabeth has been very patient with me. She and I are now old. Tending to our garden is not as easy as it once was. Our shared existence, in our rather odd, but dear to us, small house in Greensborough, is one of comfort, if not of luxury. Our neighbours are friendly, kind and helpful. We both have friends of whom we are very fond. We are, I believe, closer to each other than we have ever been. She is quite marvellous in the way that she manages the household, showing me much kindness, part of which is the excellence of the fare that she provides for us both.

We both read a good deal. Music is important, especially to her. We bought a computer last year. It has changed our lives markedly. Having a computer has meant that I have been able to work on this book – so many hours! – without having to rely almost entirely on my son-in-law, Patrick Miller. Liz and I enjoy very much playing computer games. Poker has a grip on us just now. She tries more games than I do. She looks at more TV than I do, but she chooses programmes with care. Cable TV we consider very much worth the couple of dollars a day it costs us. She sleeps badly and listens to the radio and reads during her sleepless hours. She reads lots of good quality books. She does crosswords. Neither of us has smoked for many years. We enjoy some drinking, which we do almost entirely at home. We do not often overdo it. A couple of years ago, we bought a caravan and annexe at Shallow Inlet Caravan Park. Shallow Inlet is located on the west side of Wilson’s promontory. We regard our purchase as a holiday home. I very much enjoy fishing.

Both of us have health problems, but we are fairly mobile. I walk more than Elizabeth does. Delivering *Neighbourhood Watch* documents is one walk that I do. Sometimes we go to the football together. I usually see Carlton play, even if only on TV. We are very fond of the cinema. We would attend many more live entertainment shows than we do were more funds available and if driving at night were not a concern. We ‘play the pokies’ from time to time.

We take an earnest interest in politics and current affairs generally. Australia is now more than ever firmly in the grip of capitalism. Acquisitiveness is the prime actuator of many people. There seems to be no likelihood at all of a left-wing government gaining power in Australia. There is, obviously, always a chance that a Labor Government may be elected again before too long. This prospective happening appeals to me considerably more than if the people show preference for the conservatives. Elizabeth and I do our best to be kind and considerate with each other. These are precious days in many ways.

John and Shirley live next to us in the *other* house. To have them near is a great comfort to us. We have a warm relationship with members of Shirley’s other family. Liz often stays for a day or two with Robyn and Patrick and their two children, Josiah and Mollie, deriving much pleasure from being with them. We see Richard and Jennifer from time to time.

I find that I have become even more sceptical as I negotiate the last few steps of my existence. Given my family history, there is every reason to believe that my finish up will occur before very long. I am not a Christian. The thought of entering eternity does not prey on my mind. I believe that I have no illusions about mortality. An atheist does not have hopes of immortality. A Christian, I am persuaded, particularly in old age, must sometimes have doubts about the truth of much of the religious teaching that he or she has imbibed. Surely those doubts are a source of anxiety? Some atheists, worried by their approaching end, do turn back to religion. I should scorn to do that.

I have mentioned my scepticism. If only more people could bring themselves to be more sceptical. The world would be so different. It is sad, I think, that so many people are fooled so easily. I should like to conclude by recording Bertrand Russell’s opinion on scepticism:

The scepticism that I advocate amounts only to this: (1) that when the experts are agreed, the opposite opinion cannot be held to be certain; (2) that when they are not agreed, no opinion can be regarded as certain by a non-expert; (3) that when they all hold that no sufficient grounds for a positive opinion exists, the ordinary man would do well to suspend his judgement.

(From *Sceptical Essays*, by Bertrand Russell, p 10, 1961)

## Addenda

In 1997, it was 30 years since a complaint by a chaplain (perhaps that should be plural, and perhaps there were non-clerics involved, too) singled me out as a threat to Security. Not only that. Being an atheist, I was deemed not to be a fit person to be employed as a teacher in The Territory of Papua and New Guinea where – as far as I am aware – it all began. The Police Special Branch was called in to do the investigation, as I earlier recounted. As TPNG at the time was an Australian colony, I thought that it would follow that there would be a strong operating relationship between the Police Special Branch and the Australian Security Intelligence Organization. I can hardly doubt that there was such a relationship. I turn now to my efforts to obtain from the relevant authorities copies of the files that I thought would have been raised on me.

I believed from things that I had read, that a period of 30 years must have elapsed from the time a file on an individual was opened by ASIO, before a person had any chance at all of ASIO complying with a request for copies of his or her file. The *open period* arrives once 30 years have passed. Early in 1997, I rang the ASIO office in Melbourne. They told me that if I were seeking to obtain copies of a file held by that organization, I would need to contact Australian Archives in Canberra.

## Some more correspondence

I made application by letter and soon received a reply. Archives told me over the telephone, however, that I was a year or so too early, and that I should apply again early in 1998. I shall now include a paragraph of their reply in 1997, thinking that the contents may be of some interest to some readers:

Under section 40 of the *Archives Act 1983*, you may apply for access to any record (usually a file) which is in the 'open period' ie more than 30 years old. Currently this includes material created up to 31 December 1965. If ASIO holds any relevant open period records they will be sent to Australian Archives. The records will be examined for subsequent release to the general public subject to the exemption (under section 33 of the *Archives Act*) of any material of continuing sensitivity. Any information that is not held to be exempt will be released to you. If you are dissatisfied with any exemptions that may be applied, the enclosed Fact Sheet explains your rights of appeal.

I took the matter up again with Australian Archives early in 1998. I sent them this letter, some small detail of which I have omitted:

This is an application by me, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, for copies of a file, with me as the subject, held by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization. [I assumed, not altogether correctly, that there was such a file.] This is my second application.

In 1967, as a member of the Australian Regular Army, I was an education officer with the 1st Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment at Taurama Barracks Port Moresby, in the (then) Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

During the second half of 1967, members of the TPNG Special Branch began an investigation into my beliefs, opinions and associations (so I presume.) That this took place was widely known especially, I am sure, by commissioned officers serving in TPNG and, too, by some at Army Headquarters, Canberra. Many things happened that made it plain to me that I was being investigated although, as would be expected, I was never spoken to about the matter by my seniors or by Special Branch members.

The Archives wrote to me in January and February 1998. First, a paragraph from the January letter:

The organization [ASIO] has indicated that a search of their indices failed to locate any records currently in the open period but that open period records may become available in 2005[when there is very little likelihood of my being still in existence.]

Now to some of the contents of the February letter from Archives:

ASIO have conducted another search of their indices and have confirmed that they are unable to locate any open period records. The closed period record they have does not refer to any earlier events in your life.

We passed on to ASIO your particular request for access to the closed period ASIO record which they hold. Because the record is less than 30 years old and falls outside the Archives Act, any decision to give access to it is entirely at the discretion of ASIO.

ASIO has indicated that, because of your special circumstances, they have decided to release the material to you. The

record is a routine vetting file, ie a file raised when a security clearance is required, usually relating to employment. The files generally consist of a form that you would have filled out, as well as reports from referees.[I later found that to be the case.] They are preparing the file now and have asked us to then pass a copy to you. We shall do so as soon as we receive it. I believe they may decide to hold back the referee reports because, although they indicated the reports are quite flattering, they were given to ASIO in confidence.

Although the record does not cover your experiences in TPNG, I trust that ASIO's decision to release it before time will set your mind at rest that this avenue of research has been thoroughly researched.

In April 1998, Archives wrote to me again, forwarding with their letter copies of the 23 pages that constituted my ASIO file. The relevant material in the letter follows:

ASIO have asked the National Archives to pass on to you a copy of the material that they located in response to your request.

Because the material is less than 30 years old, it has not been publicly released under the *Archives Act 1983*, but has been released to you at ASIO's discretion. Therefore, the rights of appeal contained in the Archives Act do not apply to this material. A copy is enclosed on ASIO's behalf.

I have a good deal to say about my ASIO file. I have always fairly strongly believed, in my opinion it was a rational belief, that ASIO would have a file on me because of the Security events in New Guinea. I reasoned that the file in New Guinea, even if it had not been passed to ASIO at the time, would very likely have been moved to ASIO when Papua New Guinea received its independence in 1975. I always thought it to be a possibility, too, that the Special Branch, finding nothing of any significance against my security status, might have destroyed the file as being of no substance. The Branch members, perhaps, might well have decided that my religious opinions were the things that most upset the clerics, and that any claims they might have had about my being a security risk appeared to be unfounded. Unfounded they certainly were.

Well, I know now, at least, that my ASIO file is free from any allegations or suspicions of certain others, who decided that they had perceived in me a proclivity, at least, for treacherous conduct. I no longer have the concern that any of my family members may be disadvantaged in any way by the file's existence. That the file was ever raised, it is now plain, was due to an application in 1974 by me, when I was at Central Army Records Office, for a clearance to TOP SECRET. (I wrote about this earlier.) It took almost five months to be processed. In TPNG I had been refused a TOP SECRET clearance in 1968. I thought that that would probably happen again. But no – I quote from a Directorate of Military Intelligence document dated 14 Feb 1975: 'TOP SECRET Check No TS 74/2485 has been completed. No information of a security nature has resulted.' I have to admit that I was puzzled at the time that I was given that clearance. Later I thought that the file probably reached ASIO only after Australia granted TPNG its independence. I was wrong about that.

Although the file contains 23 pages there is much duplication. The comments made by the referees, as Archives explained in a letter, were blotted out. Names and signatures and some other details were also blotted out. (I knew that that was part of the procedure.) At this point, I must say that the courtesy shown towards me, and the assistance given to me by the responsible officers at Australian Archives, I received with gratitude. I thought, too, it very commendable of ASIO to use their discretion in the way that they did towards satisfying the wishes of, and solving some of the long-time and worrying problems before, an old Australian citizen. I thank both organizations.

ASIO does not have the original file. So, if there is one, where is it? I wrote to National Archives in Papua New Guinea. They do not keep any records for soldiers, they explained. They advised me to write to their Department of Defence, which I have done three times. I sent a letter to the Police Department, too. I wrote to an ex-officer of the TPNG Army whom I knew all those years ago. He is now a senior public servant. Many months later there have been no replies. Is it reasonable to think that such discourtesy would not normally be expected from those organizations? Does their ignoring of my letters suggest that Papua New Guinea does hold a file on me? I think so.

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