

John Sheppard Recollections
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**An autobiography of the life and times
of
John Croxton Sheppard**

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PREFACE

John, in his 84th year, failing in health, and with a lot of time on his hands, decided that he should jot down his memories to leave for posterity. After many hours of thought and interrogation of family members, he presented his brother Peter with numerous pages of barely legible scribbings! Peter, not realising what was in store for him, had agreed to decipher and type John's memoirs. They make entertaining and interesting reading.

I would like to acknowledge Peter's part in putting these memoirs into a legible form. I would also like to thank my dear Pop for taking the time and effort in putting an important part of not only his history, but also my history and my children's history, onto paper.

Alison Harrington (nee Sheppard)
30th January 2002

JOHN CROXTON SHEPPARD RECOLLECTIONS

EARLY DAYS

I was born on 8th February, 1918, in Christchurch. When I was four, in 1922, our family lived for a short time in Tonks Street, North New Brighton. Uncle Keith (Hadfield) owned a house not far away in Bowhill Road, where he and Aunt Connie lived now and again. One morning Uncle Keith came in his big car to pick up Dad to go to work. We children all rushed out to see the car. Dad hopped in and off they went. Unbeknown to them I had jumped on the running board, so off I went too. After going a little way I decided to get off but jumped the wrong way and landed on my head. With blood streaming from my head I ran home. Dad didn't know of the accident until he got home that night.



When I was five we went to live for a while with Granny and Granddad Croxton in Repton Street. Granddad had porridge every morning and used to dip his spoon into a small bowl of cream and then into his porridge. In the mornings Mother took us to Elmwood School. Dad bought a house at 103 Leinster Road, with the assistance of Uncle Keith; a five bedroom two storey house with a balcony upstairs where I slept. The section was just over an acre, with part of it in fruit trees and a large empty grassy space. Later, in my teens, I and some of my school friends made an underground hut with a fireplace there, where we fried potatoes which we had pinched from somewhere.

In a primmer class at Elmwood School our teacher was an old bag of a woman (Biddy Biddy Baron). She didn't like me, especially my adding up. She sent me outside where I sat on a seat going round a willow tree, underneath which there were lots of pebbles. I had to count the stones as I put them on the seat. One day I got fed up and ran off home, about 400 yards away. Of course Mother sent me back!

Granddad died in 1923, and Granny came to live with us, She was a lovely person, very good to us children. She used to make elderberry wine in huge barrels, which had been cut in half. We children were pretty young so we didn't bother about drinking the wine, mainly because it looked so awful. There was a funny incident, which involved Granny. One of the girls had a large rag doll called Jimmy Richards. We were all playing out on the footpath near the front gate when somehow Jimmy fell into the gutter which had a lot of water in it, and he disappeared beneath the bridge. We poked sticks under the bridge to get him out, to no avail. One of us tore into the house to get Granny, who was looking after us, calling out, "Quick Granny, Jimmy Richards is under the bridge and we can't get him out." Granny came hurrying out, telling us to get longer sticks, saying, "Poor boy, we must get him out or he might drown". With a lot of poking and shoving eventually the bedraggled Jimmy was hauled out. Granny who had thought it had been a real boy was

flabbergasted. She was really angry with us, but also I think quite relieved. Granny died in 1927, having been ill with blood poisoning after pricking her finger with a chicken bone.

A MOVE TO SUMNER

In 1928, when I was ten, our family went to Sumner to live in an oldish two-storey house on the esplanade, just over the road from the beach and a short distance from the Cave Rock. One of our neighbours, on the corner of Stoke Street, was the Hall family – Commander and Mrs Hall and their two daughters, who I thought were very nice. I went to the Sumner School where the headmaster was Mr Allen. I managed to win the school athletic championships, after which Mr Allen said, "Here we have a young man who has just arrived at the school and has scooped the pool!" We made some good friends at Sumner, my mate being Alfred Bishop, a part Maori. His sister, Noleen, was a Canterbury champion tennis player. The Stammers family were pretty tough, but we had mostly verbal confrontations. I enjoyed the school, and the teachers, and found the swims we went for good fun. I didn't get into much trouble and don't remember any fights. There was a good-looking dark skinned girl called "Nig" the other lads and I used to chase around the play-ground.

LEINSTER ROAD AGAIN



We went back to Leinster Road to live in 1930 when I was twelve, and to Elmwood School again. My friends there were Alan Osment, Tony Cowper, Paul Rutherford, Spud Murphy, Trevor Shine and others. Charlie Thomas's son, Donald, a big bloke, went to Elmwood. He was going home from school one day past our front gate when I was there, and I thought he said something rude to me,

so I chased him down the footpath. He turned round, and I shaped up to him, but no punches were thrown!

Dad bought a large dolls house, which was assembled by hooking the walls together with the roof. There was room inside for two or three girls as well as a table and chairs. One day when the girls were inside, chatting away, Tony Cowper and I thought we would have a bit of fun. We got a long rope and wound it round and round the house and secured it, and ran away laughing. What a commotion from inside.

I was given a BB gun (air rifle), and who better to give a BB gun to for a bit of fun? So I chased Nancy around the garden and shot her in the leg. I got into trouble over that one. Mind you, Tony was just as bad as I was! Osie, Tony, Trevor and I used to go to Tony's

parents' large home in Glandovey Road beside which ran the Wairarapa Stream. We rowed upstream in their boat to a shingle pit where we had a stone fight against the Boyle family (they were hard shots too). I was never hit; which was fortunate.

We had a lot of fun on this stream. On the way back to Tony's we raided an apple orchard. Paul Rutherford had a nasty accident one evening leaving our place. Going very fast on his bicycle out our gate he ran into a passing car. He was badly injured, especially about the face, and was in hospital for some time.

Another good friend at school was Ray Whinfield with whom I played tennis. He had a very nice mother, and an attractive sister who became a good nurse. I played in the Elmwood footy team which had some good results.

My memory of the headmaster is of a stink of tobacco in his office, and his bushy eyebrows.

I didn't have much to do with the girls in those days, but there was a girl I took a fancy to. She was a petite girl with blond ringlets and wore pretty short dresses which showed off her nice legs. I used to chase her around the playground. I even remember her name – Kathy Reid. Our neighbours were Mr and Mrs Jones and their two daughters, Nancy and Audrey. They had a two-storey house on a large section. Other neighbours were the Fleetwoods, and Mr and Mrs Holland with son Geoffrey. Mr Holland (Syd.) was later Prime Minister of New Zealand (National). Mrs Holland, plump and jolly, was a good sort. Mr and Mrs Charley Woods lived in a huge house the other side of Jones long drive.

BOYS HIGH SCHOOL

After Elmwood I went to Christchurch Boys High School in 1932, and was there for four years. I cycled to school, which was about two miles away. My main interest at school was sport; I wasn't very good at lessons. I was very keen on rugby, and unfortunately had my nose broken when a big bloke fell on top of me, with my face on the ground, after I had tackled him. Dad later took me to a doctor friend of his who didn't do anything, and didn't send me to hospital where I should have gone to have the nose straightened, so it remained a bit bent. During a game I received a blow to the mouth and had my two big front teeth knocked out. In another game I broke a wrist which had to be put in plaster. That didn't put me off from taking out that night the attractive niece of the Hansens who lived across the road. I took boxing classes while at Boys High School and won a cup one year for the most skilful boxer.

I don't know how Dad managed to pay for all the children's education, sports equipment and the family food, and look after the large two-storey house on its big section. He worked hard as a land and estate agent (Sheppard & Smith Ltd.), selling houses and properties.

Mother was always busy, with five children to look after. She was a regular church goer,

being a member of the Mothers' Union. As was usual in those days with a large family she had the services of a girl help in the house. Mother played the piano, sang and taught singing. We children all had piano lessons which sometimes I used to bunk. Peter was the only one who kept playing the piano. He sang in the Cathedral Choir, which gave him a scholarship for a year at Christ's College.

LIFE AFTER SCHOOL

I left Christchurch Boys High School in 1935, and started work at N.Z. Loan & Mercantile Ltd. as a stamp licker (office boy). Got some odd jobs with the grain chap driving a V8 car at times. Was transferred to the Tyre Department which I didn't like much. Mother took me to the Education Department where Professor Shelley gave me a test to find out what work I would be suited to. I spent most of the day being tested on adding, writing down different clock positions, assembling a door lock, and other tricky things. From the tests the professor thought I would be more suited to working with my hands, labouring or farming.

Just a mention about the Hansens who lived across the road in Leinster Road. He was Swedish, the manager of Fernleaf Butter Company. He was a big jolly fellow, and had the unfortunate habit of giving Nancy and Marjorie slobbery kisses on their lips, which they hated. His wife was lovely, as was a female friend they had living with them. They were keen on rugby and sometimes took us to Lancaster Park (now Jade Stadium) to watch a game.

Dad located another job for me – on a small sheep farm at Cave, South Canterbury, belonging to a Mr Sams. Mr and Mrs Sams (she was a bit plutey) had two daughters who went to Rangiruru School in Christchurch. Mr Sams was a bit of a hard shot; used to like the drink. He gave me a horse to ride, which I used for looking after the sheep and doing odd chores around the farm. The girls weren't bad sorts, but not my type. I played rugby for Cave, playing in the backs. I had a friend who was in charge of the small post office. After I had a few beers one day I had an argument with him in the post office, and I jumped over the counter and attacked him. I was fortunate that I didn't get into trouble over it.

I joined the CYC (Cavalry) using a horse which our neighbour had lent me. I enjoyed the time I had in camp at Wingatui doing manoeuvres with the horses. After being with the Sams for a few months they found they couldn't afford to keep me, so I went back to Christchurch. One of the temporary jobs I had was with the Papanui Timber Company, as a rouseabout, and stacking timber. I answered a newspaper ad for a job on a Mr Malcolm Brown's dairy farm at Murchison on the West Coast, and landed the job. There were three of us young blokes, the others being John Sumner and Bill someone. John later had the second-hand book shop in Manchester Street, and his son makes statues of people. There were about 100 cows milked, which I didn't like doing much, and I fed the calves. After feeding out we had the job of clearing logs and trees from paddocks and piling them up to be burnt. In 1939, when I was 21, war was declared. I was quite happy

working at Murchison, and wasn't worried much about the war. Mother phoned one day and asked me whether I was going to enlist. So to oblige all, I joined up.

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP

I had met an attractive girl with whom I became quite attached. Pat Ellison and I had good times together, and enjoyed dancing and playing tennis. We visited each other's homes quite often where we each got on well with each other's parents. Her brother John, whom I met, had been at Sumner school. Pat was very loyal to me when I was in the army, and a prisoner of war, writing often and sending parcels. She questioned me about marriage, but I wasn't sure. Pat married an air force chap; a very nice chap, Frank, and Helen and I have seen them regularly over the years. After Pat's death, Frank kept in touch by phone. While I was at Mr Brown's farm at Murchison I met another girl. Edna Penman was a good sort, very friendly. During the war she wrote to me often and sent parcels. After the war Edna came and stayed with us at Leinster Road, and we played tennis etc.. I visited her at her home in Auckland, and kept writing after that, but then heard that she married a farmer. They had two or three children.

MOUNT SOMERS

Uncle Frank and Aunt Mabel ran a large leasehold sheep farm about 15 km South of the Mt. Somers township. Aunt Mabel was Mother's older sister; Uncle Frank (surname, Peter) had lived and farmed with family at Anama, 15 km East from there. Uncle Frank was one of the early pupils at Christ's College. He was blind in one eye (lost by a stone in a snowball at school) and had only one useful hand. They had no children, so we were very fortunate that they had us to stay with them on the farm sometimes in our holidays, two or three of us at a time. Aunt Mabel would pick us up at the Mt. Somers railway station, or take us back with her when she and Uncle Frank visited Ch.Ch., driving her huge Armstrong Sidley. On one of our stays at the farm we lived in the shearers' whare, and were looked after by Mrs Sams, a friend of Mother's, who was very strict with us, which we didn't like much. Mother and Dad had gone to the Dunedin Exhibition. We were allowed to ride a pony called Topsy which, when Marjorie was galloping up the hill, and topsy decided she had had enough, so she bucked Marjorie off. Topsy got plenty of work while we were there. I rode her to the wool-shed one day, and offered to take the shearers' mugs back to the cook, and hung them on the side of the saddle. Topsy went flat out and the mugs started to fall off the saddle. I soon lost the lot, had to go back and pick them all up, and walked all the way back to the cook-house. With flax-stick rods we went fishing in the creek which ran not far from the house. We didn't have much luck with bits of meat and bent pins. Later, when we used proper hooks, we caught some lovely trout, which Aunt Mabel cooked for us.

There was a maid to help Aunt Mabel in the kitchen and about the house, and a cook in the large kitchen when things were busy on the farm. Aunt Mabel had her own pantry and small kitchen where she cooked lovely food, delicious puddings, and often made Turkish

Delight and other sweets. We weren't very keen though on the butter she used to make; it had a strong taste. She and Uncle Frank were very good to us, but if I misbehaved a clip on the ear from Uncle Frank's crippled hand would make me sorry. He wasn't one to cross, as one of his farm hands found out when he was a bit too familiar with a maid and Uncle Frank threatened him with the stock whip.



*Back;
Mother , Uncle
Frank, Rosemary
Winston,*

*Middle;
Peter, Jan, Aunt
Mabel, Marjorie,*

*Front;
Dad, Bluff*

Aunt Mabel was a bright charming person, very musical, and played the piano very well, often our tunes which we loved. She was still playing the piano well into her 80s. There were games for us to play in the evenings or on wet days, and magazines to look at. With Aunt Mabel there was never a dull moment. The lights in the house were lit by gas, the gas being made by the action of water on carbide, in a shed close to the house. In later years the gas system broke down, and candles and kerosene lamps were used.

There was a large bed of raspberries, and in the season, raspberries and cream were a favourite.

When I was a bit older I was allowed to use Uncle Frank's .22 rifle, creeping round the garden, trying to keep the blackbirds at bay. When I was quite small I picked up one of the cats to put it through the back gate, not knowing the shepherds' dogs were on the other side. The dogs saw the cat in my arms, got very excited, and the cat struggled and clawed my arms, scratching me badly. When I went bawling into the house, crying that Snowy the cat had scratched me, I was asked, "Why?" "I was only throwing him to the dogs," I said.

We were not allowed to watch the sheep being killed, but managed to sneak down to the slaughter platform over the creek next to the cow yard and see Jock, the old shepherd, slit

a throat or two. The sight of spurting blood, sheep being skinned and insides being pulled out didn't worry us too much. All part of us learning something of farm life! At an older age I helped Aunt Mabel in the garden and mowed the lawn. On a horse helping with the mustering, and burning off the tussock land, watching closely the wind direction, I learned more about sheep farming.

A cousin of ours, Mac Marriner, son of Aunt Hett and Uncle Harry who lived at Sumner, worked for Uncle Frank for a while. I got on well with him and he let me use the workshop next to the garage. I spent time there making various things, mainly little yachts from flax sticks with outriggers, which I floated in a dammed pool we had made, and in which we also bathed.

In a large shed there were two horse buggies on which we used to play, one two wheeler and the other four wheel. They were very rarely used so it was a thrill when one day we were taken for a ride in one of them. There were fowls, ducks and geese running all around the yard, with eggs to be found everywhere. There was no shortage of good food on this farm; eggs, mutton, lamb, raspberries and cream, scones, cakes and sweets! We had a great deal of fun when we were taken by Aunt Mabel over to the farm at Anama where Uncle Frank had lived. His niece, Juliet, had a couple of small carts in which she harnessed dogs to pull us around the paddocks. There were some great times there. When I was older I helped in the shearing shed, sweeping up and pressing wool. One of our most enjoyable outings was going to the store in Mt. Somers to buy groceries etc.. It was exciting going into the store and getting the smell of the place, and then looking round at all the containers and goods. Of course Uncle Frank always spoilt us with various goodies.

LIFE IN THE ARMY

I enlisted in the army in November 1939, and went into Burnham Military Camp where I joined the 20th Battalion. There were a lot of Boys High School old boys there. We spent our time doing quite a lot of marching and rifle drill, leaving there in February '40 to embark on the troop-carrying ship the "Dunera" at Lyttelton. Down below decks we slept in hammocks which we rolled up when getting up in the morning, and hung them above long tables at which we ate our meals. We mostly had to make our own entertainment, and also took part in various organized sports. I entered a boxing contest, and even though I was handicapped by a sore arm after an inoculation. I went at it hammer and tongs, but lost the bout on points. My opponent was a professional boxer, from the West Coast, which



was for me a further handicap. Jimmy Burrows was the ref.. After the fight I went to the toilet and was as sick as a dog. I really shouldn't have boxed, however I was OK in a couple of days.

We traveled to Melbourne, staying on board ship there, and then on to Freemantle where we had a day on shore in the city. There was some fun when some blokes came back on board with a dummy kangaroo which they had "borrowed" from somewhere. The roo was eventually returned to its rightful owner. The ship sailed up to Colombo in Ceylon, escorted by warships, and we had two days on shore doing some sight-seeing. Our next stop was Suez, right into the hot desert, and from there we were packed into train carriages and off to Cairo. Then to Maadi Camp in the desert, just outside the beautiful Maadi village where there were a number of lovely homes owned by the wealthy.

I had kept a daily diary on board the Dunera, which was later sent home. Most of my letters were given to Bunty at home to type. I also kept a diary during the Greece and Crete campaign. Photos which I took in Greece and Crete, North Africa, and when on holiday in Alexandra, are in photo albums.

There was an incident in Cairo for which I was sorry afterwards. After having a few beers, I was outside a prostitute house (a place renowned for its cleanliness) and got into a barney with two other blokes. Two pommy MPs joined us and took us to their office and asked for our pay-books. Mine had been stolen, which the wogs often do in Cairo and sell them. I was sent to Jimmy Burrows who was our commander, and he gave me five days CB which involved work in the kitchen and other places.

ACTION IN THE DESERT

Most of the events in which I was involved on North Africa are recorded in my letters to home and in my diary. 20th Battalion first action was a fairly small affair. We had to cut the Bardin road next to the coast. We were carted on trucks over a steep escarpment with bren carriers, debussed when we reached the road, and advanced in extended file. The Italians, ahead of us, opened fire, and we replied by firing at will or at an Itie when seen. The Italians got scared and took off, and we raided their living quarters and huts. Our company commander who was wounded was heard to say, " My first action and I'm pleased to have come through it OK". After that bit of action we had a rest and a swim in the sea. I had the misfortune to get a desert sore and was treated in hospital. I must have thought hospital was the place to be, because I landed in there again, this time with jaundice



In the desert Details of the Battalion's action in Greece and Crete are recorded in my diary. Attacked by German paratroopers, and had some action against them. However we were heavily outnumbered and short of equipment, and had to evacuate the island, and got back to North Africa. While there I was pleased to meet Michael and Mate Watson (cousins) and Jean, Mate's wife. As a result of my illness I missed the Battalion's trip to Syria, and a boat drill which they had. The next big action was at Bellamid, Sidi Rigeigh, which was a balls up. We were following a white tape to our destination, and were in a shallow pit when the German tanks roared all around us. Alan Hadfield, who I had been at school with, had joined my section carrying the Bren-gun and was wounded. Before we started out orders had been given we were not to stop for the wounded but to stick a rifle in the ground and put a helmet on it. I disregarded the command and went back to Haddie and dressed his wound on the side of his body. He was lucky; he was taken prisoner and put in a German hospital tent. When the Germans were attacked they took off, taking all the walking wounded and left

Haddie behind. Our blokes captured the tent and Haddie was taken back to Helivan Hospital.

PRISONERS OF WAR

We were marched off in fours with German guards and walked for miles. What happened after this is recorded in a book, "No Honour, no Glory", written by Spence Edge and Jim Henderson. Edge went to Elmwood School. The book refers to my time, with John Ringland, in Italy as a prisoner of war. I didn't keep a diary in POW camps, but wrote letters to home which Mother kept, also the cards I sent, especially those I sent from Germany. When I was in Italy I decided to go out on working parties, because there was more food and better treatment. John and I stuck together and potted about on fruit and vege farms, and later we were put with a working party to Aqua Tredda. See p.159, "No Honour, no Glory", re the bombing of Aquila.

We were taken by train to Austria, "Moosburg" MA, and later to working parties in "Passing". One day as we were working (pottering around doing as little as possible), in fact sitting around a wood-burner, a nasty officious young guard came and told us in German to get cracking. We objected to his bullying manner, and I hopped up and grabbed his rifle which he was holding across his chest. He immediately shoved a bullet up the spout and stood back, and luckily for me he didn't pull the trigger. My punishment was five days in jail. The jail was in our compound, and the blokes smuggled some extra food to me. We were working in a huge marshalling yard, a large netting

fence between us and Ukrainians. I noticed an attractive blond girl standing near the fence, and tried to talk to her, but she didn't understand English. In a sort of sign language I managed to ask her for a photograph of her, and she indicated that she would go to her town nearby and get one. In a couple of days she came again and gave me a good photograph of her which I later pinned on the wall next to my bed. When the yards were bombed by huge Allied bombers we were moved from that job, and I didn't see my little blond again. When the Allied bombers came over the sirens sounded and we all disappeared into the air-raid shelters. It was I think the most frightening period for me in the whole war. We, and civilians, just clutched each other and shivered with fear. One bomb landed on the shelter, and fortunately for us it landed on the supporting pillar and didn't explode. Later there was a bombing raid at night just outside our POW camp, probably by Lancasters, which had been preceded by the path-finders dropping their flares. Most of us took off and dived into a slit trench, and I landed on top of another bloke. We had a near thing when a bomb landed close by, showering dirt over us.

The German guards quite often made searches of our rooms and beds. I came back from a job one day and found the photograph of my little blond girl was gone. One of the guards had pinched it. We were helping to make air-raid shelters when one day a German political prisoner came to me and asked, in English, if I would write to an English person in England and tell the family that he was alive and well. Apparently he had studied in England and had stayed with that family I did write, and later when I was in England, on the way to Scotland with John R., I visited them, for which they were very pleased. Unfortunately I didn't keep in touch with them.

The details of my movements after leaving Germany and reaching England are recorded in letters which I had sent home, were typed by Bunty, and which I have, so they will not be recorded here. I had been a prisoner of war from December 1941 to the end of the war in 1945. (see the section on *20th BATTALION POW- L/CPL J. C. SHEPPARD* page 24)

BACK TO WORK

I arrived back home in 1946 and was discharged from the army in October. Travelling to NZ on the steamer "The Andes". John R. and I ran a crown and anchor school, but didn't make much money. I put in for a farm ballot, but missed out. I was told by the Government to do some training at Lincoln College and progress from C to A grade. I went to the College but don't think I learnt a lot. Played tennis fairly often, sometimes with a friend, Pam (Elsom?) who hit the ball pretty hard. Played rugby for H.S. Old Boys, and for a team at the College, in the backs. Suffered some broken ribs in a game there and, in absolute agony was carted off the field and taken to the College hospital.

I achieved my grading after leaving College, and got a job on Mr Wright's dairy farm on Russley Road in Christchurch. Mr Wright's wife, the sister of Rewi Alley (famous for his exploits in China), and a peaceable person, had two sons and a daughter. I don't know how she put up with her much older husband at times, who could be rude and nasty. Some of my time was helping with the milking and feeding out. While there I cycled into

town to train with the High School Old Boys senior rugby team at Musson's gym, and played matches on Saturdays. There were also training runs around the streets. After a few months with the Wrights I left for a job at Springburn near Mt. Somers. From what I had seen, I decided that town supply farming was fairly lucrative, but I had no idea what was in store for me. The farmer, a stocky fellow and very abrupt in manner, was keen on harness-racing. He had a training track on the farm on which he was frequently driving his trotters. I didn't know if he had any wins like his brother at Methven who had a champion trotter. A buxom daughter lived on the farm, and the father was separated from his wife.

One of my first jobs was to plough a 50 acre paddock with a large tractor. I didn't have a clue about ploughing, but after the boss showed me how to mark out the paddock and start the stake out I was left to it. I battled on, making a few mistakes which I covered up, and finished the job in a couple of days. He owned another farm a few miles away, so off I went on the tractor, crossing a fairly wide stream on the way, and did some more ploughing. The manager of this farm wasn't a very pleasant chap, but his wife was OK. My wage was 4 pound ten a week, and the farmer was reimbursed by the government.

The boyfriend of the buxom daughter owned a beaut 2 ½ Montgomery motorcycle, which I eventually bought from him. My 2-stroke bike had given me a lot of trouble on the roads from Springburn to Christchurch, which was quite a long way, especially as some of the roads were shingle. Just as I arrived home at Leinster Rd. one week-end, the bike blew a piston, so I sold the thing.

A NEW LIFE

Playing rugby I damaged my left elbow, which the doctor found was cracked, which meant a trip to the Ashburton Hospital for an operation. After my request, they agreed to let me go to the Christchurch Hospital. And in ward 7, there was a beaut sister in charge of the ward. She was nice. Her name was Helen. I was there for only a few days, and when I was home again I asked Mother if she thought it would be all right if I took Helen some flowers. Whether I didn't have the courage or whether Helen wasn't there I can't remember, but I left the flowers at the office. I phoned her that evening and arranged to meet her!

My work preference now was with dairy farming, on town supply. I applied for, and was given a job on a large dairy farm at Ladbrooks, not far from Wigram. Mr and



Mrs Foster, both of big build, were good people; there were three daughters and one son, Murray, all good sorts. Mr Foster ran a good farm and liked you to be on time, otherwise you would cop it. I joined the local tennis club and enjoyed some good games with the members. There were some happy times at Ladbrooks. Helen loathed motorbikes, but came along with me on mine, clinging tightly to me on the back.

When I had been with the Fosters for a few months (1948), Mr Foster said he wanted a married couple on the farm. I applied for the job, so Helen and I, as quickly as possible, got married, and became the farm's married couple. Mr F. arranged for a house to be built and brought to the farm, for us, and this was placed near their front gate. It was a nice little cottage with two bedrooms. We called it "Mushroom Cottage"



In the meantime Uncle Keith (Hadfield) who had been looking for a farm for me found one which he thought would be suitable, in Lower Styx Road, Marshlands. It was necessary to have it approved by the Government as a viable farm business, which was done, and then the price agreed upon. The vendor wanted no less than 61 pounds per acre and 100 pounds for his surplus hay. Final

arrangements were made, his terms were accepted, and we now had a dairy farm of 60 acres.

SELF EMPLOYED FARMER

The house wasn't very big, had two bedrooms, kitchen, lounge and sun-porch. There was a night-storage stove (replaced later by a 4-element range), and a small fire box in the kitchen which heated the water. The toilet was outside about 20 yards from the back door. It was emptied once a week by the nightman. This inconvenience was replaced by an inside loo near a back porch which I built on later. A septic tank about 30 yards from the house was required for this.



The kitchen waste water went out to a ditch which carried water from other farms, the flow being taken into the Styx river. I spent a lot of time cleaning the ditch, and eventually bought a ditch cleaner

which was attached to the tractor. The descending depth was about 4 feet to 8 feet.

I built a concrete sump near the road, and a 6 inch lift pump sucked up the water into the pipe running under the road, and so into the Styx river. Unfortunately the impeller caused a lot of trouble. To assist me with the pump problems I borrowed from the Meyers an endless chain to lift it, and left it attached to the pump. And some blighter pinched it. I had to buy another for the Meyers. I built a small shed to secure the pump, which also housed an electric motor later on when the power was connected there.

I employed a builder to build a new cowshed as the old shed was falling to bits. I found it necessary to record the hours he worked, and constantly check on him, as his drinking made him unreliable. His brother finally finished the job which had 3 races holding 6 cows. It kept one man fairly busy. New posts and heavy rails were used in the yards which were altered, and I made a foot bath for the cows to use



when entering the yard. At various times I employed three chaps, the last one a good bloke from a North Canterbury farming family.

An implement shed we had built in the yard behind the cow shed was partly burnt when the tractor caught fire when I was filling it with petrol, the engine running. Panic stations! I managed to get the tractor out, but rafters and sides of the shed were burnt. I replaced the

rafters and used concrete posts from Chaney's Corner. The tractor was an old 10-20 which had replaced the draught horse.

Adjoining a boundary of my farm there was a 300 acre plantation of pine trees fenced with wire fences and gorse hedges. I could graze the cattle in there on condition that I kept the fire brakes free of gorse and scrub and the fences in good order to prevent the cows from getting into the Windsor golf course and the Burwood forest. I did have a lot of fun out there. In the middle of the forest there were about 5 acres of dried up swamp land with a well which provided water for the cows. I put the dry cows out there, but it was awkward if an animal calved there. A cow that did calve there took a dislike to me, chased me around a pine tree until I managed to cling to a branch out of reach, but with skinned arms. Half a dozen heifers grazing in the forest thought it would be fun to go next door on to the Windsor golf course and they broke through. The fence on to the course and trampled on a green (Mahurie) and the fairway. The chairman of the club, Ray Blank (once headmaster of Fendalton School), sued me. It wasn't worth defending so I

paid the club 100 pounds to keep them happy. I made sure the fence was in good order in the future.

The purchase of a gorse-cutting machine which fitted on to the tractor was a great help in cutting the gorse hedges and controlling the scrub and gorse in the plantation. I took the machine down the road and cut Mr Tanner's (fruit and vege merchant in Christchurch) gorse and broom. Sometimes I took him a cart full of cow manure for his veges. He didn't pay me much, he was so tight with money.

When I bought the tractor I drove it all the way back to the farm from Springston, a long way. The exhaust sticking about 3 feet up in the air got in the way when I drove it into the shed, so I lowered it below the engine and it ran alongside the back wheel. I had Paul with me one day when I was fixing a fence (he was 2 years old), and he climbed down from the tractor seat and straddled the very hot exhaust pipe. Poor kid – he was badly burnt. We took him to Burwood Hospital where after treatment he was given a skin graft. It had been an awful sight to see the wee chap with his hands tied to the sides of the cot. He was there about 8 weeks.



The purchase of a Ferguson tractor, with hydraulic controlled plough and grubber, was a great help on the farm. It was a beaut; could do 25 mph in top gear which I did when chasing some heifers that had got out on to the road. Roaring along the road, I couldn't see the concrete sides of a culvert as they were covered in grass, and the tractor ploughed straight in to the left one. Luckily I didn't fly over the steering wheel, but my chest was a bit sore after it had hit the wheel. And the heifers got away! The front axle was bent and I had that replaced.

At the back of the farm I had a large hay barn built, which held 1500 bales of hay. The back paddocks were mostly under water. As a member of the Belfast Farm Improvement Scheme I received assistance from the Dept of Agriculture in improving the drainage on the farm, which made possible an increase in the milk production. The drainage job was completed in 1957. (A Press clipping of the Dept's involvement is on page 30). I spent a lot of time dividing up the paddocks, using concrete posts and putting a 2-wire electric fence around the whole farm. It was a job keeping the bottom wire free of weeds. Barbed wire was terrible where there were cows. As I was rounding up the cows one day one of them decided to try and jump the barbed wire fence, got stuck on the wire and with her teats and udder ripped milk flew everywhere. Unfortunately she couldn't be repaired.

As part of the drainage system I put large pipes under two bridges, and dug ditches on the hack paddock to drain into the main ditch. I bought a seed and lime and manure spreader, a knife mower for hay cutting, a hay rake and a new Holland hay baler. Things didn't

always go right, so I took on a contractor for the hay baling. Colin Clark was doing the job, and at tea break time I popped into the house to make the tea. Out in the paddock we settled down to drink our tea, and Colin said, "This tastes funny." I sipped mine – yes, it tasted funny all right. I looked in the jar of sugar. It wasn't sugar, it was salt! I heard about that one for a while.

There was a long paddock running alongside the Styx River in which I had some calves. I was trying to catch a calf, which had escaped from the paddock, and it tumbled into the river. I stripped of to my underpants and waded into the river to catch the thing, eventually tackled it and dragged it up the bank. Just as well I was pretty fit!

When I started on the farm we used 10 gallon milk cans. After a few years, town supply farmers had to install 200-500 stainless steel tanks to hold the milk which was sucked into a milk tanker which called each day. So it was necessary to build a room next to the dairy to hold the large tank.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

I joined the Windsor Golf Club, after a while became a committee member and later the greens supervisor. I played left handed and won the left handlers cup one year. When I bought a set of clubs for Helen, she joined also. She became the Club Captain. My handicap never reached below 18, which was assisted by help from Keith Kerr and Park Harris.

I had a lot of fun with an old 15 cwt International truck that I bought. When Helen went for her licence in it the officer said "If you can get your licence in this thing you could get your licence in anything". I used to tow a large trailer over to Firestone Tyre Company at Papanui once a week and shovel cinders on to the trailer for use on tracks around the farm. I met Norm Kirk there (later Prime Minister of NZ a large pleasant fellow; the boiler engineer. Dad was paymaster at Firestone for a number of years.

Mother and Dad visited us on the farm occasionally. I was milking the cows one evening, and Peter arrived, and said that Dad had died from a heart attack. It was a big shock. He and Mother were coming away from Lancaster Park after watching a rugby match, Canterbury. v Otago; 1954.

The truck was going flat out one day when I was chasing the heifers, trying to head them off in one of the paddocks, and the big ditch loomed up. I couldn't stop and the truck went nose first into the ditch; and once again the heifers got away. My next act was to get the tractor to pull the truck out of the ditch.

Alison, when she was nearly three, gave us some concern when she disappeared one day. Helen phoned all the neighbours, and our good friends the Treleavens from along the road searched the big drain while I looked over the back of the farm and the river. After a few hours, when we were extremely worried, we had a phone call from a neighbour who

lived just inside the forest about a mile away, to say she had a small girl there, was she our child. Alison had wandered down the road and the woman had taken her into the house. We were upset that she hadn't phoned us a lot earlier. When we arrived at the house we found Alison was OK - and entertaining the family.

I often called at the Treleavens' home, enjoying wandering around the sheds looking at the bits and pieces of iron and steel and other things hanging on nails on the walls. Whenever I saw anything that I knew would be useful to me they would tell me to help myself. So I did.

We needed more space in the house for our expanding family, so we got John Batson (brother-in-law) to build a bedroom on to the side of the house, to be used by the girls, Alison and Marion. The boys, Michael and Paul, were in the spare room, and there was a bed in the entrance verandah. Later the sitting room was extended about 4 feet. The family grew, so the living area had to grow too. My contribution to the building plan was a new front fence and a paling fence alongside the house on the West side. The kitchen was improved by replacing the old storage stove with a new electric stove.

SPORTS, COMMITTEES & FRIENDS

I joined the Marshlands Tennis Club, enjoying some good tennis, and became the club's Chairman. I also was a member of the school committee, and was the chairman for a term. Our family went to the little Anglican church a Marshland, where I became the secretary, and represented the church at the larger All Saints church at Burwood to which we were attached. My trusty tractor was useful in carting me and drums of weed killer over to the Burwood church- yard where I sprayed the weeds around the graves and surrounding area. Helen never knew whether I was at the golf club or the Burwood church. I played table tennis at the Marshland hall, and was on the committee. I was also the secretary of the Marshland hall committee. Supervisor at the golf club was another job I had.



Dad and Me

So there was always something to do. I was in touch with all the farmers in the district, one of my friends being Johnnie Morten, who lived down the road, a good caring sort of bloke. We helped each other with our mowing and carting hay, and he would take the children for a ride in his dray when he went to the beach to pick up seaweed and driftwood. One day he went missing, and searching for him on a friend's farm in Coutts Island, I found him with a gun lying beside him. He had shot himself. It was a very sad affair. Other friends and people I visited were the Fechneys, Stewarts, Meyers and son Ron and daughters who Helen had sometimes as baby-sitters. Also the Hudsons, Dick and Zoe who was a Canterbury champion golfer. Dick and I used to race each other home down Marshland Road after table tennis on Monday nights, he in his old Hudson and me

in my old International truck. It usually finished with me heading him off on the corner of Marshland Rd. and Lower Styx Rd.. We never had a crash!

Lower Styx Road was a shingle road for quite a few years when we were there, and when it was tar-sealed there was a great reduction in the dust coming from the road. Alison reminded me of the times when I asked the children to go to Charlie Carney's shop at Spencerville to buy me Zig Zag tissues and smokes when I had run out of them. I knew Charlie quite well. Charlie Winters, and his very nice wife were others in the area I knew well. They had a Mongol daughter. And there was Mr Wells and his boys on their dairy farm. I mowed hay for a chap way down at Brooklands.

When I bought a runabout boat with a 50hp outboard motor the boys and I had a lot of fun at Brooklands Beach in a large pool area, which ran into the Waimakariri river. Paul did some water-skiing, which I had a go at, not very successfully. The boys tried their hand at catching whitebait with home-made nets, in the river across the road, always being aware that the ranger was travelling up and down the river. A neighbour's wife warned them that the ranger was coming, they quickly hid their nets in the long grass, said hello to the ranger who passed on unaware of the hidden nets.

Always looking for something to do, and some fun attached, the boys made a raft out of empty fuel drums and sailed across the river to a small island where they made a fire, keeping it going with branches they found lying about. A chap passing by thought the fire looked a bit dangerous and called in at the house to tell Helen. She told him it was all right but he insisted on phoning the fire station, and it wasn't long before a fire truck arrived, They couldn't get across the river, so the boys helped them across with their raft. The fire brigade blokes put out the fire, and thought the whole thing was a good joke.

There were some good week-end afternoons when the Batson and Cradock families and other friends had pine-collecting parties, with the use of the tractor and trailer, in the plantation; they made great, and hot fires. One afternoon the boys were over in the haybarn and found a cubby hole where someone obviously had been sleeping. When I phoned the police they said that they thought that a chap who had absconded was in the district. Two policemen arrived soon after and they and Michael Waring, who worked for me, went over to the back of the farm on the edge of the forest, on the tractor and trailer. There was a deep gully covered in gorse and broom where we discovered a hide-out with a bed made out of my old baler twine, pots and pans and other bits and pieces; a tidy little set up. The bloke must have heard us and took off, but he wasn't quick enough. Michael chased after him through the gorse and broom, and soon we heard shouting and swearing, and found the two of them, with Michael, covered in gorse, sitting on top of the little fellow. We carted him away on the trailer, and the police put him in their car out on the road. Some time later I received a letter of commendation from the police, but I knew that Michael had done the hardest part.

There was always something happening on a farm, sometimes not so pleasant. The Waimakariri river flooded one year which caused the Styx river over the road to flood, which caused our large drain to flood, and so the low-lying back paddocks were a sheet

of water. It was like that for weeks, with the pump working overtime, and the cows had to be fed on the sandy parts at the back of the farm.

The wear and tear on the body began to show. In 1963 I had a medial meniscectomy (if you know what that is) on my left knee, and in 1969 one on my right knee. In 1972 there was a total right hip replacement, and in 1982 the left hip was replaced. I soon adjusted to the new body parts, and the treatment of hypertension, angina, arthritis in the neck and a hernia repair. I employed a good lad who was from a farming family, when I couldn't do much on the farm, and Helen learnt to drive the truck. At some stage I changed from the Ferguson tractor to a more powerful diesel Fiat.

The lad who was helping me had a confrontation with a bad-tempered Jersey bull I had bought, when the bull took to him and bowled him over. He managed to hold the bull off with a stick when it charged him again, and made the gate just in time before he was really damaged.

In 1973 we decided to retire from farming and sell the farm, after I had the right hip replaced. There weren't many people interested in buying the farm when we auctioned it, but finally Mr Richards, a neighbour, purchased it at 100 pounds an acre. We had bought it at 60 pounds, aided by a Government loan at 3%. After selling the farm we found a comfortable home in Shirley.

OVERSEAS TRAVEL

In 1979 Helen and I went over to Australia and stayed with Anne, Helen's sister, and Norm. We had a pleasant couple of weeks with them, and were taken around Brisbane and countryside places. In 1981 we traveled to America where we stayed with Graham and Alison and their two children in their rented home at Fort Collins. We had a very enjoyable time there, and Graham took us in his station wagon up to Edmonton in Canada, crossing the Rockies on the way to stay with Marion, Steve and family. Steve Pomeroy, Marion's husband, did an amazing thing in 1988. He showed me a trip to South Africa where I stayed with Bunty and Eddie in their very comfortable home in Stellenbosch. I kept a diary, and put on tape what I did each day, a discussion with Eddie about the SA political system, and a talk from Lynn, I used up quite a number of films in SA, and sent the prints home with the tapes I had recorded. George and Bidy Oram in Durban, whom I spent some time with, were a very pleasant couple. George communicated well with the black people which I saw when he showed me around various places, including a clothing factory run by blacks, very nice people. They appeared to be very happy in their work when I talked with them. When I was about to leave SA, I found that I couldn't take any money out of the country, so I used the money I had by purchasing odd things to take home.

At Zimbabwe Airport, when the black chap weighed my suitcase he said it was overweight, and I told him it was the same weight when I entered the country. He was a bit hopeless and had to get a woman officer to help sort it out. Finally when I told them I had

no money to pay for the extra weight they let me go. I think my hip replacements upset their metal detector, because they asked me to empty all my pockets. There were no untoward incidents on the long trip home.

Cousin Michael Watson and I enjoyed a group trip, in May 1995, to Hong Kong to watch the Hong Kong rugby 7s. As well as watching some great rugby we visited Macau, and went into China. Our group played up one night and went to the red light area where our passion was roused when we saw bare breasted women hanging over the counter. Michael wasn't thrilled by the occasion, and took off back to the hotel. We struck no trouble in the dark streets at night, which appeared to be quite safe. There was an underground tunnel for buses and cars from Hong Kong to the mainland. We were amazed to see the hundreds of people when we visited a casino in Macau – Chinese, Malay, Asians and many other coloureds. We noticed a room marked "Millionaires only". There was a huge variety of goods in the many shops, the currency difference being 4 Hong Kong dollars to 1 NZ dollar. I had to borrow a few dollars from Michael, through his bank card, to help me buy a lace table cloth and a gold chain for Helen.

MY TIME WITH FLOWERS

Having been busy all my life, I needed something to keep me occupied, and I was fortunate to get a job with Downies, flower delivery people. Mr and Mrs Downie were a very pleasant couple I enjoyed the work, driving around the city and suburbs of Christchurch, meeting many people, all the florists in Christchurch, churches and funeral parlours. Things changed for the worse when the Downies sold the business to a Mr Basher, an ex roading contractor, a very difficult man to get on with, who brought his wife and daughter into the firm, which didn't work out too well. He made changes, which were not very practical, but did something useful when he had radios installed in the vans. Backing out of a drive into a narrow street one day I bumped into a car and dented a door. I couldn't find the owner, didn't leave a note with my name and address, and drove home. Bad mistake, which caused Mr Basher to give me the sack, which he did on the phone the next day. I didn't mind, because he wasn't a good bloke to work for. He had a brother who was a lot better.

BURWOOD BOWLING CLUB

Our home was almost next door to the club, so naturally I became a member and enjoyed playing there, and meeting a lot of new people. When they made me the green supervisor I spent so much time working there that Helen suggested I put a bed in the club room. The club installed a computerized watering system which I set incorrectly a couple of times, and caused panic when it came on and the greens were full of bowlers. The power was turned off smartly to stop the flow. I had some good assistance from Sonny Calder, a green keeper and excellent bowler, who advised me on the spraying of greens, top-dressing, mowing and coring, and general green work. It was interesting visiting other Christchurch and country greens with other green-keepers, hearing about their systems

and watering techniques. At one stage I had been involved in training a new green-keeper. There came a time when I felt I had had enough, and I retired from the job, It had been very time consuming, but enjoyable.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

In 1985 I was having trouble with the blood circulation in my right leg, and had a by-pass operation, which was successful. There was a similar occurrence with the left leg in 1989, but without success, and the leg was removed from below the knee. A fellow in the same hospital ward as me had just had a leg amputated and was skeptical when I told him I would bowl again. He laughed and said, "No way." I was determined, and very fortunate to have Helen push me in a wheelchair over to the bowling club. The blokes lifted me, chair and all, on to the green, and I bowled from the chair, and one of them pushed me down the other end, and so it went on, being well looked after and pushed from one end to the other. The chaps were great, and of course Helen was marvelous. I was pretty tired when Alex Kies pushed me home. The fiberglass leg took some getting used to, and several visits to the hospital were necessary to make adjustments.

Helen and I decided to sell our Shirley home in 1998 – it was not easy for us to handle the garden, and we wanted to be closer to Alison and Marion. The house sold fairly quickly, for \$185,000, close to our asking price. While we were looking for a new home we rented a house in Lower Cashmere, and after viewing about 20 houses. Alison found a suitable place in Beckenham, one of a group of 18 houses in a tidy well kept area named Castle Way. The comfortable house with under-floor heating has a smallish garden running both sides of a narrow lawn, Our neighbours who we meet now and again are very pleasant mostly elderly people. I still have my motorized scooter on which I buzz around to visit people and use to do some shopping at the Centaurus shops, not far away, buying sweets beer and wine (not every time).

We had purchased the house for \$195,000 after I discovered \$6,000 in a bank account I had forgotten about. The girls are not far away from us, Alison and Graham up on Cashmere Hill, only 5 minutes away, and Marion on Huntsbury, about 8 minutes. They take Helen shopping now and again. Graham, always helpful, installed an under-ground watering system around the garden. Once a month Helen takes me to the Shirley Probuss Club and from there she goes to the Burwood Bowling Club to play cards.

My friend Colin takes me out to Peter and Jan's home at Cust about once a month. They built a very nice house there 3 years ago, not far from Robyn and Dave. Tim is at Ashley, and Sally and Elizabeth in Rangiora. Rugby and old school times are talked about when I meet sometimes with my old bible-class friends, Cranny Hearn, Jack Clements, Eddie Kerr, Doug McKenzie, Alan Hadfield, Wyn Fairclough and Tony Cowper. Another, Reg Keys, an old Elmwood School mate, died recently.

At present, July 2001, my eyesight has deteriorated, and am having difficulty reading, and sit pretty close to the TV. Had an arteriogram of my right leg recently at the hospital, to

try and get the blood flowing to the toes, but it wasn't a great success. So life goes on. Helen, as always, cheerful and wonderfully attentive to me, and the children (quite big now) supportive, and understanding when I have been a bit grumpy at times. Helen has born witness to my sometimes argumentative tendency and knows that I am not really a rude person. It's just that I seem to get a kick out of taking the opposite view at times. I know I'm often wrong, but to me that doesn't matter.



*Michael, Alison, Marion Paul:
John, Helen:
50th wedding anniversary 1998*

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS I WROTE HOME, FROM EGYPT, 1940

27th February: Well, we've arrived at our destination, "Somewhere in Egypt", and now I can sit at a decent table in our new canteen with good lighting, and write this. I am afraid I won't be able to impart much information. The authorities are very strict in censoring letters and the only news will be about my health and the weather. What a curse! But there it is. I received the first mail from NZ on 24th and 25th Feb. Two letters from Edna, and Mother your no.1 and no.2 letters arrived. It was thrilling reading the news, but they made me feel a wee bit home-sick.

We can have showers now, but we have been told not to have them too often. My left foot is playing up, not so much the bunyan, but just under my toes. I've been to the medical tent several times, but they can't do much for me. Re photos, I've taken dozens of snaps, some of the films are still getting developed. We are allowed to post home photos and post cards. I hope to send some beauties. I have a lot to tell about Cairo, which will be on post cards. We have to pay postage to Suez.

26th April: This is the first opportunity I have had of answering your letters which arrived last Sunday. A jolly good mail too – 7 letters and 3 parcels of newspapers etc.. 2 from Mother, 1 each from Marj and Nancy, 2 from Edna and 1 from Pat. You remember when I have a birthday etc., I am always slow in opening my presents (I like to keep you in suspense), well it's the same in our tent when I get my mail. I take my time and open the papers first amidst loud groans from the other chaps who have finished opening their mail. I don't seem to change!

20th BATTALION POW- L/CPL J. C. SHEPPARD

CAPTURED

Back in North Africa, having survived the rigours of Greece and Crete, 20 and 18 Battalions were engaged in a fierce battle with the Germans at Belhamed, near Sidi Rezegh. They were advancing on Tobruk to relieve the troops there. Unfortunately the 20 were taken by surprise by the German 15 Panza Division tanks, with infantry support, and many men, two full companies in number, were taken prisoner. It was 1st December 1941. "For you the war is over", leered a German sergeant. We were, however, to find ourselves right in the middle of the war at times.

POWS

The Germans and Italians had an agreement that all prisoners taken in North Africa would be handed over to the Italians. We were upset by this arrangement as we had the utmost contempt for the Italians and for their leader, Mussolini. They were quite inferior to the Germans in soldiery, but we were prisoners and we had no choice but to obey their commands.

With a shortage of food and water and in searing daytime heat, in great discomfort we were marched for many miles to Benghazi, a port on the Mediterranean Sea. At Benghazi we were housed, 2,000 of us, in a large warehouse. On a concrete floor and with bitter cold at night, and no blankets, men became ill, with dysentery the main complaint.

TORPEDOED

A week after our capture on 8 December 1941, 2000 of us were paraded and directed to board an Italian ship, the "Jason", berthed in the port. We were bound for Italy, we were told. Boarding and descending down a vertical ladder into the five holds, was slow. Packed in with little room to move, once again we suffered the humiliation of capture.

After about 20 hours in these misery holes, we suddenly felt a thump on the side of the ship. And then screams and cries of terror coming from number 1 and 2 holds. We realized that the ship had been torpedoed. It could only be by one of our own ships. A torpedo had indeed struck the starboard side of the ship between number 1 and 2 holds. Many men, including a lot of South Africans were killed and horribly wounded. 500 men, we found out later, had lost their lives. We also learned the name of the British submarine responsible for the carnage. The captain, not knowing there were POWs on board, had fired 3 torpedoes at "Jason" - the 3rd striking the ship.

The ship's captain and most of his crew abandoned their ship in a great hurry, with not a care about the loss and suffering of their human cargo in the holds below.

SURVIVAL

A German officer took over control, and was able to create some sort of order on the terror- stricken ship. The "Jason", after a time of drifting, grounded on shore – the west coast of Greece. A young chap managed to get a heavy rope to shore, and attached there, men gradually hauled themselves along it to safety. Some men had jumped over the side of the ship to swim to shore, and a few had got caught in the still revolving propeller and been badly mauled. An Italian soldier was sliced in half by a blade, a gruesome sight. Later tents were set up for us and we each had a thin straw mattress to sleep on. There was a great deal of suffering, with dysentery again prevalent. There was also a severe food shortage. Appropriately the camp was named "Dysentery Acre".

On Christmas Day the Italians gave us what they called a "special treat", a teaspoonful of tiny raisins. We remained hungry! There followed a month of bitter cold, darkness and hunger - the camp a sea of mud.

We finally left this frightful mud patch, packed into small railway wagons, and were transported to the Greek seaport of Patras where we were housed in three large stone buildings. With 500 men in each, they were given the name of "Bungalows of Patras". After several weeks there we were ordered to board another Italian ship, and did so with great apprehension with the episode of the "Jason" still sharp in our minds. There was great relief when the humane ship's captain allowed us to stay on deck.

MORE CAMPS

Our new camp in Italy, at Tuteurano, was an improvement, but we suffered worse hunger when the Italians cut our food rations in half. When we were moved to another camp, at Gravina, malaria became rampant, but our hunger was relieved when we received Red Cross food parcels from New Zealand, England and Canada. These food parcels saved men's lives. The lice were bad here. There was only one tap under which we could wash the lice out of our clothes.

Somehow I discovered bread being made in a kitchen by Italians not far away, and trading woollen garments for loaves of bread, I surreptitiously sneaked past Italian guards with the loaves stuck down my trousers. Back at the camp, we devoured some of this beautiful food, and I kept some to sell. Unfortunately on one of my clandestine trips I was caught by a guard, who punched me when I objected to his behaviour. I almost retaliated but thought better of it. We were moved back to Tuteurano camp and under improved conditions we were able to play soccer and have boxing matches.

Once more we were moved, by rail and truck, this time to Aqua Fredda (Cold Water), high up with superb scenery, overlooking the Pescara Valley, and remarkably a toilet in each hut. We were cheered up by the arrival of Red Cross parcels and good news of the state of the war. We were also vitalized, when on our way to work outside the camp, we passed Italian girls singing on their way to work. They looked straight ahead, avoiding our prying eyes. There was only one problem with this camp – a nasty arrogant little man,

the camp commandant, who threatened to send us all to a punishment camp if we didn't work harder on the road we were helping the Italians build. So, we moved around briskly on the job without doing any more work!

ESCAPE AND CAPTURE

On 3 September 1943 Italy capitulated to the Allies. The Italian guards threw open the camp gates and made off to their homes. My friend John Ringland, and I gathered all our gear and walked to an Italian village where we stayed with a family in their home, enjoying the freedom, and helping them with wine-making and odd chores.

We had to leave the Italian home when we heard the Germans getting close, and unfortunately were caught by German soldiers before we got very far. As prisoners again we were transported to Aquila, a large village in central Italy, and there, 400 of us were selected to board ten railway boxcars, to be taken to Germany. Suddenly there were tremendous explosions all about us – American bombers were bombing the Italian railway yards. And we were in the middle of the target area, together with wagons loaded with ammunition, and fuel tankers. Our numbers included quite a few survivors from "Jason", going through the terror of attack for the second time, with no means of defense or escape. The men packed into the boxcars had been locked in. Many, an estimate of 200, were killed, and many more badly wounded. A few of the prisoners took the opportunity to escape, and hopefully their war was over.

The Germans moved those of us who remained to a small tent camp, north of Aquila, where we spent a bleak Christmas.

PRISONERS IN GERMANY

When we had more or less recuperated from the horrific Aquila slaughter, we were loaded once again into railway boxcars, this time on a safer railway siding away from the main railway yards, and off we went on a long journey to Germany. 36 hours of wretched discomfort. We were deposited at Mossburg, a large POW camp 30 km north of Munich. On the way a few had escaped through holes in the floor or sides of the carriage. There were lines of barracks in the camp, with double bunks for the many prisoners, but very little room for outside sport.

There was an opportunity for us to do work for the Germans outside the camp, doing repair work or maintenance and construction, which I chose, or work in mines. While doing this work we stayed in another camp outside Munich, and a dozen of us were picked up each morning by the work contractor and taken to a bombed site to be cleared, or to a new construction. Any small articles of any use we found we hid on our persons. We built air-raid shelters of concrete, using small amounts of cement in the mixture, hoping for a collapse later on.

Out on the job one day I was spoken to by a German fellow, imprisoned because of his

contrary political views, who asked me to write to someone he knew well in England and had stayed with when at university there, to say he was alive and well. I was able to do this on a special card we were given to enable us to write to someone once a week. After the war I visited this family who told me how pleased they were to hear from me.

I can't emphasise enough how important were the Red Cross food parcels we received. The handing out of the parcels and the dividing up amongst us made for a happy occasion.

CHEAP LABOUR

We were working at a brewery carting barrels of beer and, being cold, some of us decided to warm ourselves around a wood-burner, which displeased a young officious German guard. He yelled at us in German to get to work, to which I took exception and grabbed his rifle which he was waving around. He went berserk, loaded his rifle and pointed the thing at me. I really thought my time had come! He didn't fire the gun, but I was taken before a German officer and given five days in the lock-up. While in there, a couple of my mates sneaked in some food for me.

At railway marshalling yards just outside Munich where we were working, there was a wire fence separating us from Ukrainian prisoners nearby. I noticed amongst them and standing near the fence an attractive blond girl. Always appreciative of a nice looking girl I went and spoke to her. Not able to understand each others language I used signs to indicate that I would like a photograph of her. The next day she was there again, with her photograph. Back at camp I put it on the wall above my bed. My little bit of pleasure this girl had given me ended when the photograph disappeared, taken by one of the German guards in the course of a camp inspection when we were out working.

The German contractor who was in charge of us sometimes took us to a restaurant for lunch, a thin soup and black bread being on the menu . When I endeavoured to talk to German civilians I found most of them reluctant to reciprocate. They could have been in trouble if seen talking to us.

We were living in enemy territory so the proximity to a target of our own bombers was always possible. Out on the job, high above us we could see the American bombers, some of them falling out of formation trailing smoke or shot to pieces. The bombs began to fall around us. We rushed for the air-raid shelter where there were already German civilians, and we shook as the bombs came down. I had never felt such terror. One of the bombs actually fell on a large beam on the roof of the shelter, but luckily didn't explode amongst us. Once again we had been on the receiving end of an attack by our own people, something we really never got used to!

We also experienced at camp the odd misdirected bomb or two, causing us to dive on top of each other into the nearest slit trench.

Interest in life was kept alive by the issue of a camp newspaper. World affairs and the

state of the war becoming known by means of a small radio someone kept hidden. And so we were able to tell the German guards that for them the war was almost over.

Time passed slowly. There wasn't much to do at the camp, and not much sport. John R. and I learnt to play bridge, and playing together, with a secret foot-touching system under the table usually came out the winners.

FREEDOM

On 7 May 1945 Germany capitulated. American soldiers arrived soon after on foot, in jeeps and with a tank. The gates were opened, the German guards had disappeared, and we didn't hang about. We shot off to the village nearby. After nearly four years of imprisonment we were *FREE!* For a while everyone made the most of their freedom. Warehouses were raided, and with German civilians joining in, goods disappeared from the shelves. I found a flying suit, which cost me nothing!

The American soldiers had a great time, acting like big schoolboys, buzzing around in German cars. John R. and I managed to get two cars from the Yanks, drove back to camp and began to load all our belongings and any food we could find into the two cars.

The next morning, taking three Pommy POWs with us, we set off in our cars, heading west. A big "CAP" (captured) was written on each car, allowing us to travel. We procured petrol from the Americans as we traveled across West Germany. When we reached Reims, John R. and I were keen to go on to Paris, but unfortunately Pommy MPs stopped us from going anywhere, except by air to England. They confiscated the cars and all the goods we had "acquired" and sent us off to a camp to have a shower and be fumigated. Several hours later we were put aboard a Lancaster bomber and flown to England, At the Air Force base where we landed the English women looked after us extremely well. There was ample food, which we found difficult to consume because of our condition.

From there we traveled by rail through London to a town further south, where comfortable accommodation in several large buildings was provided for the war prisoners. It was V-E Day.

MEDICAL HISTORY

Age about 8 Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy
1934 Broken Nose at CHBS Football
1935 Two large front teeth knocked out at football
1936 Colles fracture of the left wrist
1940's (Hellwan Hospital) Jaundice and desert sore
1943 Malaria in P.O.W. Camp
1945 (England) SMR - previous fractured nose
1946 Football injury - broken ribs Lincoln College
1946 (CPH) Removal of fractured head of left radius
1962 (CPH) Excision of left spermatocoele/hydrocoele
1963 (St George's) Medial meniscectomy left knee
1969 (CPH) Medial meniscectomy right knee
1965 (CPH) Bilateral Keller's operation for bunions
1968 (CPH) McMurray's osteotomy for osteoarthritis of the right hip
1968 (CPH) Removal of infected McMurray osteotomy plate at right hip
1972 (CPH) Right total hip replacement
1982 (Southern Cross) Left total hip replacement
1980 Hypertension - started treatment
1980 Angina
1983? Arthritis in the neck, Gout in big toe
1984 (Southern Cross) Right inguinal hernia repair
1985 (PMH) Right femoro-popliteal bypass using vein graft - for atherosclerotic occlusion of right femoral and popliteal arteries
1989 (CPH) Left femoro-popliteal bypass using vein graft
1989 (CPH) Below-knee amputation left leg
1996 Revision of right hip, Ulcer in big toe
 Collapsed 4 times & went to Public
 Got pneumonia in hospital and was in for 3 days
 Treated for tennis elbow at Burwood
 Cancer growth taken out from right ear at Burwood
 Cancer growth taken out from forehead and nose at Public
 Nose bleed quarterised in overnight stay at Public
2001 Feb 14 Ulcer on second toe
2002 Failing eyesight

NEWSPAPER CUTTING

Increasing Production on Two Dairy Farms

Significant production increases have been achieved on the properties of two town milk supply farmers in the Belfast area whose properties were visited in the course of the farm walk this week for members of the Department of Agriculture's Springston and Belfast farm improvement groups. Both of the farmers whose properties were visited, Messrs A. W. Townley and J. Sheppard are members of the Belfast Improvement scheme, which has been operating under the guidance of the department since 1955.

Mr H. Tocker, farm management officer of the Department of Agriculture and adviser to groups, described the condition of Mr Sheppard's property when the scheme began and showed pictures to the visitors of the farm before development began.

Of 80 acres, the farm is a compact dairy unit with soils of the Kairaki complex predominating, although a sandhill strip follows the back boundary. Drainage

was a major problem, because of the closeness of the Styx River and the fact that there was little fall to the river for conventional drainage. About 30 acres at the back of the farm was in swamp and could not be grazed by stock, and obviously unless this area could be developed the farm was not an economic unit.

The drainage officer of the department, Mr J. Scott surveyed the area and after much planning it was decided to put a dragline cut through the centre of the farm and install a pumping unit to lift the water out of this drain and to discharge it into the Styx. The job was completed in 1957 at a cost of 800 pounds and this enabled Mr Sheppard to develop the whole farm for town milk production. At present the farm is running about 50 cows and producing nearly 400 gallons of milk per acre – an increase of some 60 percent on the figure before development. The target is to milk 45 cows all year round and to lift production to as close to 600 gallons per acre as possible. To achieve this objective Mr Sheppard intends to carry out tile and mole draining and to step up topdressing