

my life



Part 2

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P r i v a t e l y P u b l i s h e d

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Acknowledgements

The original objective behind the start of this life story was to give a picture of my life here in New Zealand to my Grandchildren who were born and lived in United States of America. Since my early years go back almost to pioneer days in New Zealand history and indeed early years in the growing modern world I felt it was worth painting a picture of what life was like then for their benefit. The project grew and the availability of a diary kept during most of my war years and of other overseas trips gave me a unique opportunity to relive those days and record them for my family and descendants. It has been a very nostalgic and intriguing journey to take and I have found it very interesting myself.

This venture was started after Millie's death but much was written after my unanticipated marriage to Elizabeth. I was grateful to her for allowing me to take over her sunporch/sewing-room for my computer and basic records. There was just enough room for my morning coffee cup on days when the sun called.

I am also very much indebted to my daughter Dawn for intensive editing work on the earlier chapters. In the later stages I acknowledge the painstaking work Ron has done in further editing and preparation towards publishing the work. In this process all of the other members of my family - David, Susan and Dawn - have been helpful in checking facts and layout.

Called Up

Early in June 1941, I was summoned into the Initial Training Wing at Levin for preliminary training. We were of course issued with Air Force uniforms. The outdoor life, fresh air and the hunger generated by the unwonted exercise resulted in my overfilling my tunic particularly in the chest area and I had to request an exchange. I was actually glad of the change as my original was slightly 'off colour' and the new one was quite normal. Training included "square bashing" or formal drill in which we learned the variations of drill movements while at the same time upping our physical fitness. I recall playing in a game of rugby during physical training and not having a clue what I was supposed to be doing - I think I was somewhere in the forwards. It was my first ever game of rugby and I had no knowledge of the rules and pattern of the game at all. I don't think the Ranfurly Shield was at stake. Apart from the drill and the outside activities, we spent most of our time in lectures. These involved initial introduction to Meteorology, Mathematics, Navigation, Aircraft Recognition, Air Force Establishment, Air Force law and regulations and so on. In short, a good introduction to the Air Force and how it worked.

It was a six-week course and before the end of that period I received a letter from Nancy wishing to break off our engagement. She had a vision of becoming a missionary to Mexico and believed that our engagement cut across that vision. In that respect she was right as I had no feeling of call or ambition for missionary work. At Pounawea Convention I had often heard invitations to commit oneself to God for missionary service but had never had any conviction that this was for me. So our paths seemed destined to part. Rather strangely, she would enter into no further communication on the subject - she did not reply to my letters and although I spent the next six weeks training closer to home at Taieri aerodrome before going overseas I did not see her again. I can't honestly say that I was completely devastated but it was not a very pleasant experience nevertheless.¹ While at

¹ Nancy did go to Mexico where she met a man from the United States whom she married. He was apparently a member of the Closed Brethren and when she did return to New Zealand while we were still in Invercargill, she addressed the United Baptist Women's

Levin I was able to get into Wellington a few times at weekends and enjoyed going out to Karori. I have a memory of visiting the Burtenshaws and their two little girls. It was good to renew acquaintance with Ayson Clifford and with the many young folk I had shared time with.²

And so to Taieri - and to Tiger Moths.

My first flight was on 28th July 1941 with F/O Greenslade and lasted 20 minutes. It involved 'air experience' and 'cockpit layout'. Preparation for flying involved the issue to each pilot of the necessary flying gear. It is cold in July at Taieri especially at altitude - we were given wool-lined leather jackets, flying boots (also wool-lined), leather helmets, goggles and gauntlet gloves. The cockpit of a Tiger Moth is open and furious cold draughts whirl around it. My second trip the same day for another 20 minutes included the 'effect of controls, straight and level flying,' How could anything be more simple! The Tiger Moth is not easy to handle on the ground. With its tail down position the nose which houses the engine sticks up in the air and obscures the view straight ahead. So moving forward involves swinging from side to side to take a look ahead out of the side of the cockpit while the nose is turned alternately to port and starboard. In the air, however, with the tail up in flying position the visibility is very good. I was soon doing takeoffs and landings, climbing and turning, powered and gliding approaches and landings, and spins. My first solo took place after 7:50 hours dual instruction and lasted five minutes. As I recall the landing was reasonably good without being a perfect 'three-point' touchdown in which the tail skid and two wheels touch the ground at the same moment. Familiarity with the aircraft and flying skills were gradually honed as the days went on.

We were organised into two 'Flights' or sections. These were usually divided alphabetically so my class mates always had surnames from A to L. While one flight was flying, the other was in the classroom learning the academic skills which would prove useful as we proceeded to more advanced flying - meteorology, navigation, principles of flying, aircraft recognition, background to servicing and maintenance, rules of the air, communication. There was continuing parade ground work but there was also time for skeet shooting and other recreational activity. We became fit on the ground and in the air.

Eventually we were sent on cross-country navigation flights on our own. I recall one of the routes was from Taieri to Hillend, then to Balclutha and return to Taieri. Another was in the direction of Kaitangata. On these navigation flights we had a map in a holder strapped to our knee. We had to draw in our course, calculate the bearing allowing for

Fellowship on the subject of women wearing their hair long according to scripture! Millie thought, and rightly, that it was a very specific and controversial kind of subject on which to speak to a group of women like that whom she was unlikely to meet again. Maybe I had a lucky escape but then, had we married, her own theological experience might have been very different. I am sure that Cyril and Margaret saw to it that we were thrown together a lot in those early days and had a lot of responsibility for our getting together. Strangely, her brother was married to a still very good friend of mine from that time and I found on returning from overseas that their marriage had ended in divorce. She and he both had lovely voices and I enjoyed hearing them sing. He claimed, and I believe rightly so, to have had perfect pitch.

² Joan was of a somewhat reserved nature, but Mildred was very open hearted and loved to sit on my knee and play with my brass buttons thereby tarnishing them severely after I had made sure they were clean and bright before leaving camp. Of course, she was only about ten years of age. She was later a lovely wife to Ian Carey, of Lower Hutt. I met her at Baptist Assembly in Lower Hutt in 1962 but sadly both she and her husband have since died, now many years ago. They must have been only in their fifties or so. Joan served as a missionary in India.

the wind drift and calculate the time for each leg. Then we had to fly an accurate compass heading. The Tiger Moths were fitted with a compass on which the needle used to float and fluctuate with the motion of the aircraft in wind and updrafts and it took some skill to average out these swings to maintain a 'mean' course.³ On one occasion in my Tiger I was carrying out some solo flying and I climbed as high as the Tiger Moth would go over Mount Maunganui near Momona. I reached 10 000 feet and had a very clear view of the Hokonuis about eighty miles away. All the undulating hills between were well below the line of sight. Another day I was practising stall turns, spins and upside-down flying. The latter was really just gliding except that in the upside-down position the controls operate in reverse. We had been warned not to do this for too long as the plugs would oil up with insufficient fuel coming through. I proved they were right - when I straightened up and started for home the engine was miss-firing a bit with some loss of power. I was perhaps 10 miles from base about where Momona Airport is now, heading for the north east of Mosgiel. We had been instructed in forced landings and I was duly scanning the terrain ahead for a suitable field to glide into if my engine cut out. All was well as it coughed its way back to the drome and I made a successful landing. However, I had to advise the ground crew that the plugs would need cleaning before being used again. The Tiger Moth had only gravity fuel feed. It would have needed forced fuel injection to have flown upside down under power.

One of my most enjoyable flights was a test flight with the Flight Commander. After getting me to run through the execution of various manoeuvres - steep turns, spinning, stall turns and so on, he said, 'See those cumulus clouds over the hills towards Hendon. Try low flying around those tops.' Low Flying! To do this, my attention had to be lifted out of the cockpit and instruments and I had to watch the clouds or I might 'crash' into the fluffy top of a cloud. It was my first experience of "seat of the pants" flying and I found it quite exhilarating. I was going into steep and medium turns without closely watching the 'turn and bank' indicator to check if I was too steep or too shallow or if I was gaining or, more likely, losing height in the turn. I think I performed pretty well and for the first time felt one with the plane in a different way. We also did simulated flying in the Link Trainer where you are enclosed in a mock cockpit with normal flight controls in which you have to react to the artificial flight simulations of the machine. For this and for Pilot Navigator I was rated 'above average.' We graduated from Taieri on 5th September 1941. Eventually my assessment as a pilot at the end of the period was 'average' but it was evident that the word 'above' had been erased from the 'space'. 'Wings' were not awarded after our Elementary Flying Training as obviously we had done a minimal amount of flying and even that on only a very simple aircraft. We were sent home on "final leave" - we were due to sail from Auckland on 21st September and I am sure we were aware of the implications of these orders when we left Taieri.

It was good to be home, though I knew it was for a very brief time beyond which was the knowledge that I was then going overseas probably for a long time and to a very uncertain future. Things must have been quite busy on the farm as it would be the beginning of lambing but I do not recall being involved in much of that work. My farming experience was minimal in any case as I had left home when I was eighteen and had lived the life of

³ The planes I flew later were fitted with a Gyrocompass which gave a steady direction reading. The principle was that of a spinning gyro which stabilized the compass no matter what turns and spins the aircraft might do.

a 'townie' since that time. I recall a round of visits, mainly with Mother, to family relations such as the Uncle Bob Gardyne family at Esselmont and Uncle George and Auntie Violet at Rankleburn. Mother and I made a trip down to Isla Bank near Otautau where Auntie Fanny Paterson was living with her bachelor son Stan on his farm. Dorothy Paterson, who was a great niece of Auntie Fanny's husband, came with us and we called in at the Oreti Manse where Rawiri Dun was Presbyterian minister.⁴ It was quite a long journey on dusty corrugated roads and we spent the night with Stan and Auntie Fanny. We also visited Uncle Will and Auntie Olive and there were farewells from the church. I was also farewelled from North Invercargill Baptist church and they faithfully remembered me with occasional letters and parcels while I was overseas. The letters were often from a Christian Endeavour meeting when each would pen two or three sentences. I was also on the Knapdale Patriotic District list of servicemen and received parcels from time to time from them. This must have been thankless work in many ways but they were reassured that the parcels were really appreciated. I was not unique, of course, in going overseas as both Jim and Bert Gardyne were already away and Ernie later went to the Pacific. My service was always in pretty comfortable quarters and with good meals on the whole but many men were really grateful for parcels from home in the Western Desert and other difficult fields of war.

So, my journey started. There was a strong element of adventure in heading overseas but there was undoubtedly the unspoken thought of the unknown future I was facing. It was difficult for parents and family who also did not know what my future might hold. In too many cases, friends were left only with the recollection of the last time they saw a son, brother or pal on the railway station platform departing for the war overseas.⁵ In this manner I saw Uncle Will and Auntie Olive Gardyne, Aunties Edna Elder and Win Botting and a friend from CE days, Rymal Roxburgh, on the Dunedin railway station; then Uncle Fred and Auntie Lizzie at Oamaru among others. On the train from Dunedin was Dorothy Paterson, my former East Chatton schoolmate, who was travelling right through to Auckland. We boarded the ferry at Lyttelton straight from the train and had a night or two in Wellington. For some reason which escapes me now my sister Bessie was in Wellington so I saw her there. Coming off the boat, I had arranged to have breakfast at the Railway Station with my friends Cliff Cocker and Jim Lambert. It occurs to me now that these two were rather a contrast to each other. Jim was my room mate at Karori and Cliff was a former fellow-boarder in town. I also called in at the Tax Department to see Malcolm Porter with whom I had been very friendly and settled a small item of business for Auntie Fanny. I bought a camera. It was an Agfa with folding bellows and a normal lens. It cost me four pounds five shillings and the leather case an extra nine-and-sixpence! I took Bessie out to stay with Mr and Mrs Beavis and had the night with the Lamberts in Mornington. Jim loaned me his two cylinder motorbike and I was embarrassed when the drive chain broke. Mr and Mrs Neal Freeman invited me to dinner at Karori after which I collected Bessie and went to the train. Dorothy and I shared a seat for the night journey - all fourteen hours of it. The third class seats on these trains were not big softie armchairs. The backs were so made that at the end of a trip they were swung over to face the other way so that the carriage was ready for the return trip. This was not conducive to comfort over a long period. I had not seen much of Dorothy since leaving primary school but she was a very attractive girl and made good company on

⁴ He came from a district family and was an older brother of Kathy Cross whom Susan will know.

⁵ Overseas' was then a term which applied to the departure for war service. Now it is the term for the 'great OE' - so different.

the long night trip. We had much in common. It was good to have her company and we caught up with each other's lives since we had left school. Dorothy's brother Jim had gone into the Royal Air Force in 1938 and had been killed in the Battle of Britain. We agreed to correspond while I was overseas. This in no sense was a romance but perhaps in the back of my mind was the possibility of developing the relationship if and when I returned home. That possibility ended when she wrote in one of her letters that she had met and become engaged to a U.S. officer.⁶ So that latent dream faded and it meant that when I went to Blackpool I had not even the most tenuous of romantic links back home.

I had a night in Auckland where I recall staying somewhere in town. Bessie and I contacted the Mountjoy family at Onehunga who had been so good to my parents and me during my illness in Auckland hospital about three years earlier. Dorothy was visiting an aunt but came to the dock to wave me and a few hundred other airmen off en route for Canada and the Commonwealth Air Training Scheme.

Farewell New Zealand.

⁶ I have learnt only recently that she had her wedding dress all made when the marriage was called off - I have no idea why.

Auckland to Brandon

We boarded the Matson liner S.S. Monterey, a Trans-Pacific ship which plied between San Francisco and Sydney. She was an American vessel and on 22nd September 1941 the United States was a neutral country although Franklin Roosevelt, the President, had stretched the neutrality to the utmost in making lend-lease war materials available to Great Britain. This included fifty older destroyers made available to the Royal Navy for convoy escort duty in the Battle of the Atlantic against German U-Boats. The carrying of uniformed airman on a civilian ship was but an extension of this covert backing of Britain which was otherwise standing alone against Germany, at least until the time that Hitler launched his attack on Russia.

S.S. Monterey was in full civilian mode so we were accommodated in what seemed to us to be luxurious cabins and we were fed like prize turkeys. I have a very distinct memory of an item on the menu which read "Roast California Tom Turkey and Cranberry Sauce." I was in a two-berth cabin with washbasin, toilet and bathroom. There was also a stretcher for which I had drawn the short straw, so to speak. It must have been quite comfortable as I don't recall any great hardship. We left Auckland in our Air Force blue uniforms and sailed almost due north towards Fiji. The weather got hotter by the day. One day the Daily Orders included the instruction that khaki dress was to be worn as from the following day. We had been issued with tropical kit before embarking and we were right glad to get into it. I must admit that the authorities had really chosen the right time and the right latitude to make the change. The heat was still increasing and the shorts and shirts made it much more bearable - very much so in fact, for after six weeks of winter flying in open cockpits at Taieri we were beginning to really enjoy the voyage with all its luxury. There must have been at least three or four hundred of us including many Australians. There were a lot of strangers but our own flights from Taieri remained intact so there were plenty of fellows we knew. Life on board was not all idleness. There was PT at 6:45am followed by a short

parade before breakfast at 8:15. We had lectures from 10:00 to 12:00 and from 2:00 to 4:00 and dinner at 6:15. There was time between these activities for dips in the swimming pool and later cold baths to try and cool down

We had been very seriously talked to about security and were aware that our letters could be censored. So in my first letter I spoke of the likelihood that the next port of call would be at the place where 'Grannie's brother, my mother's uncle, had lived'. Of course he was no longer alive and Grannie herself had died in 1926. His name would have been Jones but we did not know of any descendants. Three days later we reached Suva, being escorted into port by HMS Achilles at about 8:00 am. We had been escorted by the Navy all the way from New Zealand. We were paraded for shore leave and were free from mid-morning to wander around in groups, visiting the NZ Army barracks, Government Buildings, the NZ Club and to do some shopping in the town. This gave us our first experience of bargaining as the Indian traders always asked an excessive price, expecting to be beaten down. We could not buy anything of any size as our kitbag space was quite limited. At the camp I met Clive Sage, an acquaintance from Invercargill who had been a teacher at the Tech and active in CSSM and Crusader work. I found Suva an attractive place with a happy friendly spirit amongst the residents - but very hot. I came back on board in the late afternoon with sunburnt arms and face from the unaccustomed sun. As the ship pulled out the chaps were throwing pennies into the water and Fijian lads were jumping in to retrieve them. Two airmen lost their caps overboard in the fun. Each time a local rescued it and threw it onto the wharf from where it was thrown on board. A florin was quickly tossed to the lad in the water as a thank you reward.

The next day according to the date we arrived at Pago Pago in American Samoa but as we had crossed the international date line it had in fact been a journey of two nights and two days - we had the 25th of September twice. Our ship was placed in quarantine because of some sickness on board and we were not allowed ashore. Hills rose precipitously from the shoreline and behind the town, all richly clad in tropical vegetation. The day was a slow one but we were entertained by a police band and by groups of Samoan Islanders. A fire alarm disturbed the sultry afternoon and there was some excitement watching the Fire Brigade rush off round the hill to an unseen blaze, followed by truckloads of locals intending to assist or sight-see, or hinder! Cargo was unloaded and loaded which meant we had to spend time in port. As we left the quayside the band played the British National Anthem as a parting gesture.

We headed north once more and on Sunday 28th September 1941 we crossed the equator about 1pm. During this time, though tropical dress was the order of the day, we had to dress for dinner because we were on a civilian liner in peace time mode. This was an ordeal but I think in retrospect that the dining saloon must have had some measure of air conditioning. Removal of the "blues" after dinner was immediate and it was usual when in our cabin to strip to a minimum of clothes. I can remember writing in underpants only and still dripping with perspiration. However, relief was to come and as we continued to sail north the heat began to ease somewhat. I was on security watch one night from 3:30 till 6:00am. There were two of us on guard but the other chap spent the time asleep so it

was pretty quiet. I had no idea what our duties were but I suppose if something unusual occurred we were supposed to raise an alarm. There were also deck hands and others of the ship's company about so it was a pretty nominal kind of duty. I used to have my first swim of the day at 6:00 when the water was at its best. For the rest of the day there was much of the same - same heat, same parades, same meals, same timetable, same lazy, listless feeling. At least the 'same meals' continued to be excellent.

On 1st October the gangway was lowered and we were free on shore at Honolulu for some six hours. We found that the Honolulu Red Cross had arranged cars to take us around for the day. Les Rawlings and I and a couple of others found ourselves in a Super Deluxe Ford V8 driven by Mrs Richard Kimbell, wife of the manager of the Halekulani Hotel on Waikiki beach. We had seen our share of American cars in New Zealand but they were mainly of the standard serviceable models. Here we saw them en masse - Cadillacs, Buicks, Packards, Deluxe Fords, Chevrolets, Studebakers. Of course the streets were busy, much busier than back home down south and they drove on the wrong side of the road - no, they drove on the right side! The beauty of the lush tropical trees and flowers was striking. We were taken to the other side of the island over a very rugged pass with sharp volcanic rocks. We were told the story of King Kamehameha who drove an enemy tribe back against the perpendicular cliff on the far side where the only alternative to capture was to be forced over the cliff to their death. The road was just a shelf cut out of the sheer wall of the cliff and was a series of hair-pin bends and Devil's Elbows although the road surface was excellent.

We travelled about 15 to 20 miles along the coast quite close to the sea. Once clear of the pass the country flattened out and we came to a resort area where we were to enjoy a swim, drinks and lunch. The swim came first. I can even now recall going into the water with Les Rawlings barely able to feel the water as it was so warm - one could hardly take a swim to 'cool off.' Of course it was still refreshing and it was a change not to have to gasp at the first cold plunge. The beach was not very interesting as the water was shallow and the sand a peculiar pale yellowish colour and a bit gritty. We realised later that it would have been coral sand which would explain its different nature. In my letter home I told of being entertained by a Japanese-Hawaiian dancer accompanied by native music. I did not describe this very accurately as it was actually belly dancing which might have been disapproved of by my parents. The girl was very attractive and her contortions amazing. After this very relaxing and enjoyable time we returned to Honolulu and our hostess took us to her hotel for refreshments and to meet her husband before returning us to the ship. The day was sponsored by a team of ladies of The American Red Cross and we were really grateful to them and in particular to our own hostess. Altogether a very enjoyable day and one which remains in my memory very vividly.

Hawaii was the headquarters of the US Navy Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour quite close to the commercial port of Honolulu. We did not see anything of the navy but we did have our first sight of US aircraft overhead. It was a strange feeling only little over two months later to hear of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbour. Maybe they were not interested in a civilian ship and four hundred untrained Australian and New Zealand airmen!

Shortly after leaving Honolulu Daily Orders proclaimed a return to our blue uniforms. There were many murmurs of dissent at this but actually the next day when we donned them the temperature was noticeably cooler. I assume now that not only had the latitude been changing but the command had access to forecasts of cooler weather. Our first sight of the United States mainland was at San Diego where we simply anchored in the roadstead. I recall my first glimpse of a Catalina flying boat. When I joined Coastal Command navigation school some time later I was to wonder if I might one day be flying one of them.

On 7th October we arrived at San Francisco. As we approached the harbour entrance we were fascinated by the sight of the Golden Gate bridge, a tremendous suspension bridge spanning quite a wide harbour entrance. The bridge is a mile and a quarter long and its twin suspension towers about 700 feet high. I was standing on the foredeck as we approached and the foremast looked far too high to pass under it. I recall as we got nearer that the bridge seemed to get higher and the foremast lower and of course there was room and to spare. Once inside the entrance San Francisco harbour opens out into a very large basin. One quite prominent feature is the island of Alcatraz so well known for its prison from which escape was nigh impossible. As we moved up the harbour towards the docks the high-rise buildings of the city came into view. There was the inevitable commercial and semi-slum areas near the docks with the main business centre further off. Once off the ship we were formed up on the dockside and marched in column to a ferry terminal to cross the harbour to Oakland Bay City. The ferry took us under the Oakland Bay Bridge linking the two cities in two spans, one to Treasure Island and the other from the island to Oakland Bay. The bridge has two levels with train traffic on one and vehicles on the other.¹ At Oakland Bay we found a train waiting for us and we were soon on board ready for our journey to Vancouver, a trip of 36 hours. Views of the harbour were very poor due to a heavy haze from bush fires. On Treasure Island we saw the buildings of the Golden Gate and South Seas Exhibition held some time previously - they looked quite impressive.

Our journey to Vancouver started as evening fell and I was disappointed as it meant that we would see little of the country surrounding San Francisco. I was agog to see all that I could on this once in a lifetime trip. From Oakland City the route led up the Sacramento Valley. Fortunately it was moonlight and I have pictures in my mind of the 'Sacramento Valley by Moonlight'. Can you appreciate the tedium of being part of a large group of men, preparing for off-loading, waiting, disembarking, waiting, being formed up, waiting, marching, waiting, boarding the ferry, waiting, crossing the harbour, waiting, marching to the train, waiting, boarding, waiting and finally started on the journey. However, all the time there were things to see and impressions to absorb.

Our train journey was in three sections - night, day, night. Of course we were troops and were not supplied with millionaire-quality rolling stock. However, the seats could be dismantled and made up into reasonable beds for the night and it was possible to sleep when not peering out the window trying to see the sights. In the daytime the seats were

¹ A few years ago when San Francisco experienced a severe earthquake, I saw pictures on TV of sections of this bridge collapsing and cars trapped or dropping off the edge where the bridge had collapsed. This was all the more poignant to me having actually been there and passed under that very bridge.

no more comfortable than those on the 14-hour train from Wellington to Auckland but this trip was one of about 1060 miles over 36 hours. Nearly all of the daytime section was through forests. The train climbed over a saddle at 5000 feet and in this area there were some very large trees. Later in the day we passed through small areas of open country in Oregon which did not show much sign of farming use. On some of the ascents and descents we got open views across tree-clad hillsides and valleys but for the most part we were viewing trees, trees and more trees. We were impressed with the length of some of the freight trains we passed going the other way - up to 100 large enclosed freight cars often with only a single engine.

We arrived at Vancouver on a dull drizzly morning at 6:00 am. We were given breakfast in a Canadian Pacific dining car and then taken to the YMCA where showers were available and also a heated indoor swimming pool. We had no togs so it was a case of a 'skinny dip' for some four hundred airmen at once. It was refreshing after a 36-hour trip in the same clothes - 48 hours if one includes the day before. We then had a pay parade and changed our money for Canadian dollars. After some free time we went on a coach tour of Vancouver, passing through Victoria Park by their own big new harbour bridge, one mile long and a similar suspension design to that at Golden Gate. I believe Vancouver is an attractive city but the persistent rain spoilt any good impression we might have obtained under better conditions - what a pity the sun had not been shining. We were struck by the change of hemisphere as we looked out on trees in their brilliant autumn colours in sharp contrast to spring back home only two weeks earlier.

We left Vancouver about 4:45pm and with the overcast sky and the rain we had not reached interesting country before darkness fell. Once again darkness was to rob us of the magnificent rugged beauty of the Frazer River Canyon except for glimpses in the moonlight as we cleared the coastal rain belt. When we woke in the morning we were some 380 miles away at Revelstoke and we were only just approaching the Rockies proper. So began a whole day passing through the Rockies - a day to be remembered. The train went through one tunnel about five miles long - not a very good view over this stretch - and then passed along Kicking Horse Canyon. I think the horse was entitled to kick! A ledge had been blasted out of the almost perpendicular canyon wall for the railway line and from the train one looked straight down fifty feet or more to the river tossing over an extremely rugged rocky bed. It was similar in the Albert Canyon except that there the canyon was very narrow indeed and the drop was about one hundred and fifty feet. The bad weather system we had encountered at Vancouver affected our trip through the Rockies for although it was not actually raining many of the peaks were shrouded in cloud.

Near the end of our journey we came to the spiral tunnels. We plunged straight into the mountain, circled to the left inside emerging to pass over the entrance fifty feet or so below. The two tunnel entrances are only a quarter of a mile apart though the tunnel is about a mile and three quarters long. Only a couple of miles further on the procedure is repeated in a two-mile tunnel circling to the right and coming out forty five feet higher. The train made a stop just beyond The Great Divide at Banff, the highest point on the Canadian Pacific Railway. On the west side of the divide rivers flow to the Pacific Ocean. On the east

side they flow thousands of miles to the Atlantic through the United States or east-north-east towards Lake Winnipeg and thence to the North Atlantic by way of Hudson Bay. Banff is a noted winter sports resort and is known for the big Banff Springs Hotel which we could see in the near distance. The town is ringed by peaks which are snow-clad even at the end of the summer season. One notable feature is The Three Sisters, three similar peaks more or less in a row. Contrasting with the rocky peaks and escarpments were the fall colours in the foliage of the trees. We arrived in mid-afternoon and had a welcome break of a couple of hours on our feet. From Banff it was a fairly short run down onto the prairies and then on to arrive in Calgary about dusk. Our train was broken up at this point and our two carriages going to Brandon, Manitoba were hooked on to the cross-Canada train. We had an hour free to stroll but in the dark and after shopping hours there was not much to see.

That night and the next day we travelled at faster speeds over the endless prairies through Alberta and Saskatchewan into Manitoba and to the city of Brandon. The prairies were monotonous. Harvest had been completed except for a few fields with stooks of grain. There were very few trees and the colours were the dreary brownish hue of late summer and approaching winter. The countryside looked dry. Brandon turned out to be a typical prairie town obviously servicing the needs of the surrounding countryside. It had a population of 17 000, about double that of Gore today. I recall the city as a rather grey place though to be fair I saw it only in late fall and through the winter. Winter, in Canada, has the effect of diminishing colour.

So I had arrived at Brandon, Manitoba and was soon installed in the centrally-heated dormitory ready for the winter and for the start of advanced flying training.

Canada

We had arrived some days or so before our course was due to start and the previous course was not yet completed. This was no trouble to the Royal Canadian Air Force which provided classroom work for us. We found that our ground work in New Zealand was well up to the standard they were introducing us to at Brandon but the extra class time probably stood us in good stead in the long run at the end of our course. The first course at this fairly new station had been a group of New Zealanders and they left a good impression. The report we got was that they might not have been quite as quick on the uptake as Canadians but they retained what they learned longer and in the end were better pilots. So we came in with goodwill towards us. We found the RCAF was very strict on punctuality, whether at class or at parades. Reveille was at 6:30, breakfast at 7:30 and parade at 8:12 and we were finished for the day at 5:30pm when we were free for recreation or study or to go out. We were accommodated in large dormitory huts which housed about sixty of us in double free-standing steel-framed bunks. I chose a top bunk as I did not fancy being below a restless sleeper and the top bunk gave a little more privacy. Les Rawlings, my Baptist friend from Invercargill, was down the other end of the barracks. We were organised into two flights which alternated between flying in the morning with lectures in the afternoon and the reverse on the next day. The weather was lovely - bright, warm sunny days with hardly a cloud in the sky but with nights beginning to get quite crisp and with sharp mornings when we went to breakfast. We found the food different and hygiene conditions not as good as back home - I noted in my diary that the cutlery and cups did not seem as clean as they might have been.

I wrote in a letter home: "Ron Verity from Invercargill has an aunt in Brandon. Ron was a school teacher out Makarewa way, is a little older than most, and is a very pleasant bloke. His bunk is quite close. Also in the course is a young handsome chap called Brian Tallboys. He is in the other flight." ¹

¹ Ron had another aunt in Sacramento, near San Francisco, and he was able to contact her by phone as we came through and

I had done 51:35 hours flying time at Taieri on Tigers. At Brandon I found that we were going onto twin-engined planes. They were Cessna Cranes, a neat little flying machine with seating for a total of about five people. The cabin was enclosed and did not have a good heating system which became a significant issue in later weeks. I first flew at Brandon on 19th October with Sergeant Pilot Button, an American in the RCAF. He was a good pilot and I got on very well with him. It was standard practice not to let us go solo until we had six hours dual instruction - I see that I went solo at 6:05 hours. My letter at the time remarks how generous they were about flying time and reckons that I had only had about four and a half hours actual instruction. My first two solo landings were better than I had been doing under instruction - but enough skite ! The previous day we had been flying well away from the drome and off the edge of the map we had on board. After turning back I had just identified a place on the edge of the map when he put me 'under the hood' for some instrument flying. The 'hood' was a screen which was hung around the pupil pilot - the instructor's view was clear so he could keep a lookout while the pupil had no outside orientation and had to rely solely on the instruments. Forty minutes later my instructor took away the hood and said, 'We're lost. Where are we?' Looking at the map and applying the course we had been steering I soon identified a town near a river and airport and railway and said, pointing 'Here' and gave him a course for home, allowing for magnetic variation and wind. We arrived safely - lesson learned. At this stage one member on the course was grounded because of defective vision. The muscles of his right eye were not reacting correctly and this affected his vision when approaching the runway. A week later he was grounded permanently and would likely be going back to New Zealand - disappointed, no doubt, but probably quite glad to be going home. I never heard any more of him. Flying continued steadily, alternating with lectures. One morning Sgt Button sent me off on a solo exercise with a fairly tricky buffeting wind. When I returned after doing the exercises he had given me I found that solo flying had been banned after I had taken off - I got down quite safely. One day about the beginning of November I had five hours in the air with another instructor. There were two of us and we took turns at pilot navigation and as passenger. The prairies were wonderful for this flying training. They were not totally flat but the hills were small. From a navigation point of view you had to study the ground features closely to identify your location. It would have been easier if there had been more distinctive natural features but on the positive side the prairies made for pretty safe flying. One day I was sent up on a height test to go up to 12 000 feet. When I got there I wondered how high the plane could go and got to 16 200, or 14 900 above ground level. Yes, in mid Canada we were about 1300 feet above the level of the sea which was probably nearly 2000 miles away.

In the afternoon meteorology class one day the instructor told us that snow was forecast before morning - the sky was clear as a bell, sunny and calm. In the morning as we went to breakfast the ground was white with a couple of inches of snow. The remarkable thing to us Enzedders was that the ground was still perfectly dry and the fine snow and dust were blowing around together on the pavement. Temperatures were below zero and there had been no rain at all. This was an illustration to us of how different the climate was and was going to be. Yet to us Kiwis the dry air did not seem that cold. We would walk to breakfast in our blues while the Canadian boys were wearing greatcoats for the shortest

his very attractive girl cousin managed to come to the boat to see him.

distance outside. Later we too needed our greatcoats. About this time I had my first experience of flying off and landing on snow. This was with the Flight Commander and I felt that I did not cope very well. I had just been in the Link Trainer [simulated instrument flying] for a long session and it was late in the afternoon. Then the flaps on the plane went u/s [unserviceable] and we had to change to another machine. I recall that on my first landing I was just about to level off when the instructor panicked and hauled on the stick to override me. The result was that with both of us pulling on the stick we ballooned and had to steady again for the landing. The point was that the perspective is different coming in on snow and it is easy to misjudge your height - once the runway has been used after fresh snow it becomes much easier. After only one circuit in the new plane he got out and to my surprise told me to go round on my own. I did so and made quite a good landing. That was it so far as training for snow flying was concerned. We were on snow for the rest of the winter.

In mid November I was waxing lyrical about the beauty of the snow in my letters home: "It is not so much bleak and wintry as simply beautiful with the mantle of white over all, with here and there a fence, or a leafless tree, or a building, or even a windswept open spot, to break the monotony. The early morning temperature was -4 deg F, or 36 degrees of frost [about -16 C]. I had a week without a flight. On Sunday it snowed, on Monday it snowed, on Tuesday it snowed, on Wednesday it snowed, on Thursday it cleared (but I was in the Link trainer), on Friday it snowed, and on Saturday and Sunday I was on leave. At a "Wings Parade" for an earlier course we were rather unimpressed with the slovenly dress and marching of the graduates about half of whom were from USA. Of course they had won their wings and we had yet to do so. One of the smartest was a lad from Chile who had come up at his own expense to join up. Our course was present to provide support for the occasion.

One day when I went to flight for flying, my instructor sent me straight out solo without any check circuit or even a plane check before my trip. "You can test the plane - you have had more than ten hours solo." Away I went with quite an exhilarated feeling. In early December we started formation flying and also night flying. Our planes had no heaters. Even though we wore fleece-lined flying jackets and good gauntlet gloves my hands were frozen after an hour and a quarter of formation flying. This calls for constant concentration and we had to grip the joystick fairly firmly. At any rate I was glad to have an instructor who took over and landed the plane. I bought a pair of leather gloves for street wear but someone decided his need was more than mine. I recorded that in windy weather the wind seemed to go straight through the woollen gloves I usually wore. Night flying on the snow runway had its problems but one night I struck a problem which had nothing to do with the snow. On approaching to land the flaps refused to come down. Flaps, of course, reduce the stalling speed of the plane and enable the approach to be made at a slower and safer speed. Without flaps the landing speed is faster. I made two approaches in which I was still too high and had to "go round again" On my third attempt I was able to lower my flight path sufficiently to make a good landing.

In a letter home I mentioned "Another lad, Brian Talboys, who wrote a sentence or two in one of my previous letters, has been in hospital for a fortnight, and the latest diag-

nosis is T. B." I spent an hour with him in hospital and don't know how he got back to New Zealand. He was, of course, grounded from flying. He was in the other flight so I had not really got to know him very well. I sometimes smile when I recall his comment in 1970 at the opening of the Baptist Hall in Gore that he had been in the Air Force with me and that a few years later we should share the speaking at the opening of the new Gore Fire Station. Letters were written home at this time just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. It was a bit eerie hearing of this attack just two months after we had spent a day in Honolulu. Certainly we had been in the city and not in the Pearl Harbour area some distance away but near enough for it to have been highly disconcerting had we been there that day. My letters home do not mention the attack, no doubt because of censorship requirements. Another lad, Mark Death, was grounded because a medical check found he was stone deaf in one ear and had been so for about eight years. He must have got through previous medicals without being found out. He eventually went to the New Zealand Ambassador's staff in New York and had a very interesting time there. I did not hear of him after the war. He was a smart and pleasant chap.

Christmas was coming near, but before it came our exam results. I was disgusted with my 148/200 mark in the Airmanship written paper. However, when all marks were in I found I topped with 90 % with the next being a Canadian with 88.5%. Flying tests were still to come.

Later that week I was a co pilot in one of five planes which put on a half hour formation demonstration, including low level runs over the station. The pilots were instructors and it was very good flying. Christmas on the station was spoiled by an accident one night when flying was in progress. I had finished my flying about 10 pm and went to bed. Some time later while some planes were still in the air the fog came down. All landed safely but one. It was not till after daybreak that they found the wreckage and Harry's body lying nearby - he had been killed instantaneously. We were sad for his family learning this news right on Christmas.

The accident delayed my "Wings Test" which came on 27th Dec. I made a very smooth landing but received only 72%, which I thought was a bit disappointing. I thought I had done better although it was a perfectly adequate figure for a pass. I had a feeling as I had at Taieri that they disliked giving lavish results. Maybe it was to avoid students getting too high an opinion of themselves and becoming too daredevil. New Year was spoiled for me by a chest cough and a temperature so I did not go as planned the 80-odd miles to Birtle where there was a lady who had some connection with my father's cousin Jean (or Jessie) Elder. I spent quite a lot of time in bed. Back at camp, the doctor put me into the hospital with a temperature and slight cough. In the even atmosphere of the hospital the cough was almost gone but I kept having a slight temperature. This persisted until Thursday 15th when the doctor on his rounds said, "We have to get this fellow out of here by tomorrow." - 'tomorrow' being Wings Day.

The presentation of wings was a very formal occasion with a full parade of our class, backed by an escorting flight of other personnel. I received my 'Wings' first and the others

followed in alphabetical order. The layout involved me in quite a march, firstly away from the official, then across at right angles where another right turn led directly to the Commanding Officer who pinned on the wings. Then about-turn and return over the same route. After all the wings had been presented, the Mayor Mr Young made a little speech, then called me up to receive the Brandon Plaque, awarded to the Honour Student of each course. As he was presenting it to me he said something like this, "I am very pleased to present you with this plaque. And I hope you will enjoy your turkey dinner. You are going to Mr Wade's, aren't you?" A bit stage-struck, I tried to mumble a suitable reply. Brandon must have been a bit like Gore where quite a lot of people are acquainted with quite a lot of people.

We found at this stage that our course was not finishing as we had expected but had been extended for another four weeks to cover some more advanced training. This was to prove unfortunate for me. On resumption of work after wings, we were introduced to interception flying. Planning an interception in aircraft on a moving target is a rather specialised procedure. During the Battle of Britain, our fighters were given interception courses from the Ops Room. At Brandon a fugitive aircraft would start from a given point at a specified time and on a known course. Three pursuit aircraft would set out at the same time from three widely different points and we had to calculate the required three courses to intercept the quarry. Our team worked out our sums quite quickly and were first to leave the briefing room. Our exercise worked out perfectly and each pursuit plane met up with me as the quarry. Unfortunately they then lined up on me in formation for the return flight of ten minutes or so to base. I had the task of giving the signal to break formation, something which had not been in our instruction up to that point. Two of the lads were somewhat flamboyant flyers and they broke off with a flourish and collided, both crashing in flames. For 'disobeying orders' in doing formation flying, the other pilot and I were charged and given 28 days with hard labour. The instructor in the briefing room gave evidence that he had warned about not flying in formation but I had no recollection of this. It was one of my first days back after sickness and warnings may have been given previously. He had either given the warning or was covering his own skin. In the event I had no choice in the matter as it was the other three who formed up on me and there was nothing I could do about it. We were kept in the Guard Room on the station and not sent to the punishment station, I think largely because the C.O. realised that I in particular was the victim rather than the perpetrator. Before I eventually left the station he called me in for a personal interview to tell me he admired my record as a trainee pilot and wished me well in the future. It was clear that with two deaths an example had to be set and we two were in line to be the examples. This meant two things. First, there was no chance of a commission with this incident on my record and second, I was separated from the rest of my course and did not leave until four weeks after them. However, I was grateful for my life and for my clear conscience. During that period I set myself the task of reading the whole bible through and achieved this. The four weeks after I restarted flying was a busy time and included navigation, formation flights (!) and instrument flying. I left Brandon with a total of 178 hours flying, completed on 12th March 1942. We were given a week's final leave with travel warrants and ordered to report to Halifax for embarkation at the end of it.

Our time in Brandon was made a great deal easier by the support of the people at

the local church. After going to St Pauls United Church in Brandon with Ron Verity, Les Rawlings and I found the Baptist Church by the simple method of asking someone on the street for directions. We found a substantial building with a gallery on three sides and an evening congregation of perhaps two hundred and fifty, half filling the ground floor. The choir was very good, robed, and Rev G. R. Easter led and spoke very well². We found him a very warm-hearted man who extended us a warm welcome. They held an after-church social time at which all visitors were asked to introduce themselves. Les and I got a warm reception when we said where we were from. There was quite a sprinkling of Air Force chaps there, mostly ground staff. These fellowship evenings proved a lot of fun over the weeks and months. They included items, talks, competitions, bible quizzes and such. One Sunday morning I went out with Martin Brown, a student for the ministry, to a place 21 miles away called Rapid City where he preaches each Sunday morning. Rapid City is just a village about the size of Waikaka and the church has a very small congregation and looked to be a dying cause. I liked him."

At the Baptist Church Les Rawlings and I were soon invited to the home of Mr and Mrs James Wade. The couple had an only daughter Gwen who was three years older than me. They were very kind and hospitable to us and we often resorted to their home to get away from the limitations of our barracks. They often invited us for meals on Sunday. Mr Wade was a prominent businessman in Brandon and was quite well known. Gwen was a lovely girl.

One night at Wade's, Gwen Wade remarked that Canadian wives of New Zealand air-men get a free passage to New Zealand after the war. "Oh", said one of the girls, "I've always wanted a trip." When the laughter died down, as the only Enzedder present, I asked "Any other applicants?" She did not get an offer! At a later weekend when I was with people named Stibbon who lived on an experimental farm near the city, the temperature dropped to 20 deg F below, or 52 deg of frost. All activities at the farm were indoors. There was a herd of Shorthorns which they are seeking to develop as dual-purpose milking and beef animals. They had pigs in sties insulated with layers of hay. They were incubating chickens in two incubators, one with 5400 eggs and the other with 2000 - it boggles the mind to think of incubating chickens at 52 below zero. They also had bees but they would have been hibernating".

Parcels were coming through and I recorded "biscuits [a bit dry as the bottom came off the tin they were in] the shortbread was lovely, the cake looked good, and the chocolate much appreciated". Parcels came from home, from the Gore Church, from North Invercargill Baptist Church and from Knapdale Patriotic Society. My mate Les Rawlings from Georgetown lost \$40 about this time. He bought U S dollars from someone who "sent" the money in a letter. The sender apparently slit the envelope as if it had been rifled and had taken out the notes, leaving only some coins. The guy was in the Air Force, so the Air Force police were waiting for him to come back from leave. Les had relations in U.S.A. and

² Speaking of Mr Easter reminds me of an interesting sequel many years later". One Sunday evening in Gore in the 1960's I was on door duty when a couple, obviously overseas visitors, arrived at the church about twenty minutes late. Talking to them after the service I found that they came from Vancouver. In the course of conversation I asked if they had heard of Rev Ralph Easter. 'Certainly we have' they said, 'He was our minister for some years in Vancouver'. Strange. I invited them up for a taste of New Zealand hospitality, somewhat to the surprise of Millie who had been at home with the children.

was getting money to visit them while on final leave. At a Christmas party at Wade's we had some fun writing telegrams with the initial letters of the word Christmas. Mine was "Canada Has Record Influx Stupid Trainees Making Amazing Slips" Another was "Come Home Romantic Insurrection Started. Thena Mentioned As Supporter" Thena Bennett, one of the girl friends of the Wade's and often present at our get-togethers, was a pretty good leg-puller herself. I was in at the Christmas Service on Sunday evening. The pulpit and communion rail were completely draped in white with silver stars dotted here and there. A light was draped high up to resemble a star. The service commenced with the choir processing in the dark, carrying lighted candles and singing Silent Night. Christmas hymns and carols were followed by a slide show illustrating the annunciation and birth of Jesus. In the hall afterwards I was dragooned into leading a song time of carols and hymns, my one and only experience as a conductor. They obviously did not know my skills - or lack of them. The church had really taken us into their hearts. Christmas dinner at the Wade's was super. "The turkey, a 22lb one, was lovely and tender, and was served with some very nice stuffing, carrots, potatoes, and peas. And the ten of us did full justice to it," I wrote at the time. There was a competition afterwards to see if we could still touch our toes!

When it came time for us to leave there was a round of farewells from the friends to whom I had grown so attached. I would have loved to have revisited Brandon sometime but the opportunity never came. After five months at Brandon there was some regret about leaving the very good friends I had made there. I corresponded with Gwen Wade while I was in England but the correspondence lapsed at the end of the war. I suppose it ended when Millie and I got married and came to New Zealand but looking back it was perhaps a pity we did not keep in touch with Christmas cards or such.³ Railway stations in Canada do not have a platform or a covered roof over the boarding area. A steward places a small set of steps by the entry to the passenger car which enables one to board the rather high carriage easily. Rev and Mrs Easter, Mr Wade and Gwen and Marion, Thena Bennett, Martin Brown and Edna Detwiller all came to see me off. It was a bit sad to think that I was unlikely ever to meet these people again. I certainly found that the bond of being a Christian gives an immediate link to other Christians. These people had shared with me in the winning of the Brandon Plaque, in our Christmas with them, and with my problems later in hospital and otherwise. They were lovely people.

I had asked my parents to send a copy of The Weekly News to Mr. Easter and Mother has preserved his reply: "It was a lovely surprise to receive your New Zealand magazine last week, with the little note inside. You will never know just how much we appreciated it. We learned to love Ivan while he was here. He and another N.Z. lad, both Baptists, arrived in Brandon and came straight to the Baptist Church. They meant a great deal to us during the months they were here, and we only pray we may have been some help to them. How very rich is Christian fellowship. It encircles the globe. One's heart warms to another who knows Him, even though the second may be a stranger. These will be anxious days for you with your loved one far away. But this is our Father's world. We are all in His care. He watches the sparrow, and are we not much more than they." I did not know the contents of

³ She married a chap who was courting her while I was in Canada. Many years later she phoned me from Auckland where she and her husband had a day or so returning from Australia. We chatted for quite a while and caught up to date with our news. At that time she and, her husband, Vic had joined the Assembly of God Church.

this letter till after the war but it must have given pleasure to Mother and Father. Yes, they were a great help to Les Rawlings and myself during the time of our stay.

So I started off on leave, going straight to Toronto. This proved to be about a 40-hour journey. We left Brandon about 3 pm and headed to Winnipeg across the eastern prairies, mostly in daylight. After leaving Winnipeg, the cabin staff made up our beds for the night - one up, one down - and in due course we went to bed. The beds were made using two mattresses stored above the seats during the day. One went on the lower level and one in the upper, with crisp clean sheets, two lovely soft downy pillows and two personal reading lights. Privacy was provided by a curtain closing the bunk off from the corridor. During the night we traversed the northern edge of Lake Huron, passing through country consisting of myriads of lakes and woods. This continued all next day as we turned more south. We were not in sight of the main lake, unfortunately, but enjoyed the views of lake after lake, forest after forest, through fairly rugged, rocky type of country. Nearer Toronto the landscape became more open and able to be farmed but by this time it was night again and it was still almost dark when we came into Toronto about 7 am.

Toronto was my first experience of a bigger city and my impressions were very favourable. I had been invited to stay at the home of Gordon Kendall, a ground staff airman at Brandon who also came into the Baptist Church there. His mother and his brother and wife shared a double flat, even to sharing the front door but with separate living facilities inside. It was good protection for Mrs Kendall, having independence but with help at hand if needed. She was very hospitable. From home I had the address of Mr and Mrs Cook of the Evangelical Union of South America, the missionary society with which Auntie Iza was serving, and I found that the Kendalls were friends of the Cooks. They told me I reminded them of Owen Elder, one of the sons of Robert Elder in Buenos Aires. An interesting visit I made was to the Canadian Bank of Commerce, in a 34 storey building reputed to be the tallest building in the Commonwealth at that time. This included a visit to the safety deposit vaults where we were locked in during our visit as we were shown the many safety boxes of various sizes.

The next day two or three of us visited Niagara Falls. The 80 mile trip cost \$2.60 and at Niagara City we hired a taxi for \$1.25 each. Apart from the spectacular view of the falls, both the Niagara Falls and the American Falls, we went down a lift shaft of about 230 feet to the riverside where you get a vivid impression of the force and volume of the current. About a mile downstream were the Whirlpool Rapids. The river flows between 200-foot banks and makes a right-angled turn, forming a tremendous eddy. We crossed from side to side over this whirlpool in a cable car. I described it as "a wonderful and awful sight". Wonderful in its uniqueness and awful from the point of view of the danger it was creating. We climbed the 236 steps to the top of the General Brock Memorial from where we got a wonderful panoramic view of the falls, the river, and the United States beyond. This area of Ontario seemed to be the fruit bowl of Canada with many orchards and other agriculture farming between Niagara and Toronto. It was a memorable day out even though wartime restrictions prevented us from any close contact with the Falls. As a big source of electricity, the area was important to the war effort which Canada had been involved in from 1939.

The United States involvement dated from December of the previous year. Other places I visited in Toronto were the Royal Ontario Museum, the Toronto Bible College and the Peoples Church, famous for its well known Pastor, Dr Oswald Smith.

I travelled on by the Montreal Express at 4 pm Friday. This was a lovely ride - 350 miles in six-and-a-half hours and my ticket provided me with a nice dinner. I went to the Queens Hotel and linked up with Willie Tuck and Frank Hide, also from Brandon. On Saturday I woke with a swelling on my right jaw. The word "mumps" immediately came to mind so I phoned an Air Force unit and requested a visit from a doctor. "Couldn't I come to the station", they asked. "Not very easily," I replied. "First of all, I am not well. And second, I am a complete stranger and have no transport to find the station." So the doctor agreed to come and arrived about 2:30 pm. I had stayed in my room. I had some swelling, alright but had no temperature, no sore throat and no headache so he declared it was not mumps and I could carry on. That afternoon I climbed Mt Royal for a commanding view of the city, went to bed about 9:00 pm and did not rise till after noon on Sunday. Again I had no temp and no sore throat, so I took the opportunity during the afternoon of visiting Montreal Cathedral. Frank Hide and I caught our train to Halifax about 7:00 pm but there was no sign of Willie Tuck. We found later he had gone to the wrong station - CPR instead of CNR or vice versa - and had caught a train leaving about half an hour later. It took 26 hours to get to Halifax and we went straight to dormitories where we were allotted beds. I was up early next morning and went on sick parade as I still had this swollen jaw. The M.O. looked me over then called his colleague to examine me also. "Looks like mumps" said one. "I agree" said the other, "but he has no temperature or other signs." So I was diagnosed with mumps and sent into an isolation hospital where I found myself in a ward with about 15-20 others, most of whom really did have mumps! A few were quite badly ill but I never raised a temperature right through the 21 days I was in isolation. It was rather a boring time. I consoled myself that I might have missed a dangerous convoy to England. Frank Hide, who had travelled with me from Montreal in a private compartment, also went into quarantine but never developed any problem. Willie Tuck, who had travelled on a different train and had a bunk across the aisle, did not get caught. However, he found he had lost his log book and thought he had left it at Brandon. A letter to Brandon brought the reply that they could not find it. How he managed I never learnt. One's log book was almost like a drivers licence or an Amex card - you didn't leave home without it.

News came through that Jim Gardyne and Dick Angelo (Nth Invercargill) had been taken prisoner in North Africa, both in the Ambulance Corps. Also that Vera had missed her Matriculation by some three marks in French. I advised her by letter to spend a few days in Montreal which was about three-quarters French. In the same letter I told the family the comments in my log book from Brandon:

"Ability as a twin engined pilot - above average.

as a pilot navigator - above average

Remarks : - a very good pilot, no outstanding faults."

About this time I got a letter from Bluevale near Jamestown. Jamestown is a small

village in which there had been a family named Jones with four daughters and two sons. The writer knew the names of the husbands of two daughters but nothing more about them. Aunt Fanny had told me of this family which she thought had four sons and two daughters. The father of this family would have been an Uncle of Aunt Fanny and Mother. I had hoped to make contact from Toronto but did not have information in time.⁴

Cured from mumps (?) and discharged from hospital found me with seven days of sick leave. Halifax was full of servicemen, many in khaki, many in air force blue and others in the dark blue of the navy. On the street that day I spotted a familiar figure and tapped Gavin Cruickshank of East Chatton on the shoulder. We enjoyed a good talk and a walk around the city. It was not a very attractive town. It was still only the end of winter and there was a lot of smoke-begrimed buildings from the large amount of shipping which uses the port. There are even more ships than normal as it was an assembly point for trans-Atlantic convoys. I also picked up pay which came to \$100, collected my gear from store and got a bed in the YMCA for 25c. At first I thought that leave was a bit of a waste in that isolated part of Canada but then remembered my mates who had been posted to the General Reconnaissance and Navigation School on Prince Edward Island. A train journey of 250-odd miles west, then a change northwards to the ferry for PEI, and then a bus to their camp brought me to familiar faces like that of Ron Verity. I stayed in the camp for three nights with quite a bit of leisure time during their work day but enjoying their company in the evenings. All the time since I left Brandon, we had been in the sludge of late winter and early spring. PEI and Nova Scotia were no exception and remnants of melting snow made things quite bleak. There were no leaves on the deciduous trees - I imagine PEI would be lovely in the spring and summer. Anne of Green Gables must have thought it so - or would say so even if she did not think it!! A later letter from home said that Vera had been awarded her Matric, presumably on a recount. My father, strangely enough made me homesick by his letter in which he described the scene in the lounge at home, even noting a bowl of asters and a "dish of apricots on the table" - I'm fond of apricots. During my spare time I visited an uncle of Rev Easter's in Windsor, Nova Scotia. Poor chap, he had just lost his wife a week before unbeknown to me and I think he appreciated my visit as it helped to take him out of himself. I had no experience of grief counselling at that time and maybe not even now. Back at Halifax I met Matt Grainger, a former B T I student who knew Wilfred. I also spent time with Gavin Cruickshank and we joined together to write a letter of thanks to the pupils of East Chatton for parcels we had received.

On 30th April 1942, we embarked on the Polish ship S S Batory. I found myself in a four-berth cabin with five people and this time it was not me on the mattress. We were all Kiwis but the others were strangers who spent a lot of time playing cards and gambling which was forbidden on board. There was hardly room for another in the cabin while they were doing this, so I spent quite a bit of time in Gavin's cabin with him and his friend Scott

4 Several months later I got a letter from a Mrs Bateman of Ethel, Ontario, Canada. I had written while in Canada to John Jones in Ontario and the letter had been returned unclaimed. This lady had somehow had an enquiry from the Post Office about my letter. Apparently her mother was a daughter of John Jones who may have been my mother's uncle. Alas, by that time I was in England and unable to make any contact. In view of later interest in family origins it is a pity I did not follow up this contact.

Craw from Bluff⁵. I had two separate days on sentry duty. The first was from 2300 - 0100; 0500 - 0700; 1100 - 1300; and 1700 - 1900. The next duty was for four-hour spells: 0030 - 0430 and 1230 - 1630. During the night we were in complete blackout and it was a bit weird. At first light the other ships in the convey would gradually appear, at first like phantom ships and then more clearly. The convey was quite large. I don't think I ever got a count but there must have been well in excess of 20-30 ships with destroyer escorts and larger warships as well. I was glad to get moving from Halifax and therefore from Canada as it had been some seven weeks from leaving Brandon to embarking. Time spent in hospital and then just waiting for the convey to assemble seemed very dead time. The Atlantic gave us a reasonably calm crossing - no storms worth mentioning. There was some fog early in the voyage that was no doubt due to the effect of the Gulf Stream meeting the colder water of the Arctic around Newfoundland. The voyage across the Atlantic, though pretty safe for us, made me aware of the courage of those who manned the ships which were the target of enemy action. The sea is unrelenting to those who suffer the loss of their ship. I heard reports of depth charge activity during one or two nights of the trip but did not witness any such. I was looking forward to seeing green grass, having seen none since leaving New Zealand in late September.

⁵ Recently I was exploring on Banks Peninsula while staying in Christchurch. I came across a little Anglican church at Chorlton on the north side of the peninsula opposite Akaroa. I stopped to look through it and on the sunny side of the church I found a park seat labelled "In Memory of Scott and Margaret Craw". Down in the cemetery nearby was their joint grave - a very unexpected but poignant memory with a sense of pleasure to find that he came through the war and became a worthy citizen.

England 1942

England 1942

We arrived at Greenoch on the Clyde River in Scotland on 12th May 1942. We had been in sight of land for some time as we passed north of Ireland and circled round to sail up the Firth of Clyde. It had taken us two weeks, a commentary on the speed [or lack of it] of the convoy. The Queens would cross in about four days. A convoy has to travel at the speed of the slowest ship and this must have added to the problems of the escorting ships. It also increased the chances of U-boat interception. We reached land with considerable relief, mainly because of the risks inherent in trips of that kind in a wartime situation. It was spring. We disembarked straight on to a train which proceeded to meander during the late afternoon and night down through Scotland and England to Bournemouth on the south coast, a trip of about 17 hours. It was mostly in the dark but I identified cities like Lancaster, Crewe and Bristol among others. My landlady in Karori came from Clydeside so I recalled some of the stories she had told of the ship-building days. We were all very impressed with Great Britain - "England's green and pleasant land." Bournemouth was a peacetime holiday and retirement town and was very attractive and beautiful, especially at that time of year. Gavin and I had plenty of leisure time which we spent walking and exploring.. There was a good beach with a low cliff running above it and the spring foliage and flowers made the town doubly attractive. The camp was a manning depot and most of the personnel were between assignments awaiting despatch to their next station. New arrivals were usually given leave and I was hoping for leave quite quickly. One day Gavin and I each bought a leather suitcase with straps and mine proved very useful as a supplement to the kit bag - they cost 65 shillings each.

After arriving in Bournemouth on 14th May it was another fortnight before the admin caught up with us and gave us leave. In the meantime the air raid sirens went at 8:45 pm one night just before a hit-and-run German fighter-bomber came in off the sea at zero altitude to drop a bomb in the park about a quarter of a mile from our four-storey hotel. We did not quite know what to do when the siren went but our indecision did not last long. There was a loud explosion nearby and the sound of the enemy plane quickly died away. In the morning there was a huge crater in the park and the church steeple perhaps 200 yards away was spattered with mud to the top of the steeple. Next night without any siren alarm another bomb burst in the same spot with the same zero loss of life. It must have been a delayed action companion of the previous night's missile.

On 1st June I was at Latimer near Chesham, Bucks at the home of Jim and Valerie Elder. Jim was a son of Robert Elder, my father's first cousin who had gone out as a missionary to Argentina in 1900. All the family of nine had come to England to Eltham College south of London, a school for the children of missionaries. In 2001 I learned more of his story. Jim returned to Argentina after his schooling and worked in the Buenos Aires office of an international accountancy firm Price Waterhouse. Some time later he returned to England to marry Valerie Kemp, whom he had met before his return to Argentina. Jim and Valerie were evacuated out of London to this little village in Bucks and his office operated in the village hall. Their cottage was quite small, overlooking the village square {a triangle!} opposite the small store and post office. They had two little girls, Elizabeth aged three and Patricia two months. They lived in England until 1947 when they went to Argentina with their girls and lived the rest of their lives there. They had a son Ian while in Buenos Aires. I met Valerie at the age of eighty-nine and all three of the family when I visited Argentina in 2001.

Coming through London I collected some mail from N Z Army Base Post Office, and had my first experience of the Underground. I wrote in a letter home: "The London Underground system was all rather bewildering, but one just keeps one's eyes wide open for signs, notices and arrows and does what they say." I took a taxi from the Post Office to Baker St station to catch the train out to the Chesham area. The village originally was for the staff of Lord Chesham's estate just up on the hill behind. Nearby, in the middle of a field is the grave and tombstone of a man who died in 1777 and his wife who died in 1809. He had apparently insisted that he be buried in the middle of this field and there was his grave enclosed by an iron fence in memoriam. One day I walked down to the village of Chenies about two miles away and found a quaint little church, "Built by Ladye Russell under the last will and testament of the Erle of Russell". The church is on the Estate of the Duke of Bedford whose family name is Russell and who owned extensive property in London around Russell Square, Bedford Square and the Russell Hotel near the British Museum.. Valerie's parents, Mr and Mrs Kemp, had used some of the last of their petrol to come up from Weybridge in Kent for the weekend and I was able to meet them. The next week I made a trip up to Liverpool and when I returned on the Saturday it was to find that Valerie had invited Jim's sister Bertha and her husband Mac Davies and son Graham over to meet me. I was to see a lot of them later.

I wanted to start seeing London so spent most of my days when Jim was working doing just that and finding mail and looking up some people whose names I had been given. The Stibbons in Canada had given me the name of Mr and Mrs Law in Balham. One night I was sussing out how to get to Balham with Jim's street map of London. I said, more to myself than to anyone, that it would be quite easy. "Come out of the station, turn left then left again and proceed to the first street which crosses, Sarsfield Rd and I'm there" Jim, listening, said, "108 Sarsfield Rd." "Yes" I said., surprised. "Mr and Mrs Law" said Jim. It turned out he knew them well. In fact, they had been their legal guardians in England when he and his brothers and sisters came over from Argentina to boarding school and the children had spent a lot of their holidays with them. I gathered they were respected rather than loved as they had proved pretty strict and not particularly warm foster-parents. Strange that I should have been given their names by completely unknown people in Canada. So I visited them. They had a son at home who was very ill in bed with T.B. I don't think I saw them again but I was able to pass on greetings from their friends at Brandon.

Those days in London were fascinating. I found Madame Tussauds with many figures in wax that I recognised. I went to get a catalogue from an attendant inside the door only to notice just in time it was a wax figure. I also found the British Museum near Tottenham Court Rd. which was closed for the duration, the burnt-out shell of St Clements Church - "Oranges and Lemons, say the bells of St. Clements", the Law Courts, the Thames Embankment and Charing Cross Railway Station. Here I caught a train to Orpington and found Star Lane Cemetery near the railway tracks. I paid homage at the grave and cross of Flt Lt James Paterson, killed 27.9.40 just as the Battle of Britain was almost over - one of the "few" to whom so many owe so much. He was, of course, a school-mate at East Chatton two years behind me. I photographed the grave and sent copies to his family back home. It had been his sister Dorothy who travelled with me to Auckland on my way overseas who had given me the details of the cemetery. I took the train back to Charing Cross but instead found myself arriving at Cannon St. Station and merrily set off in the direction of The Houses of Parliament. I did not reach them but found myself outside a huge building. When I got to the front I found it was St. Pauls Cathedral. I found the Cathedral vast and beautiful with lofty ceilings, wonderful dome and lovely architecture, full of history in the tombs of great men. But I wondered how a service could be warm and personal amid all the stone and space. Twenty eight years later Millie and I had the privilege of attending the annual service of the Order of St Michael and St George and with a large number of people it was an impressive service. This Cathedral and others like it were built for large congregations and it was the people who made the atmosphere.

Other well known names such as Ludgate Hill and Circus, The Strand, and Baker St Station for the trip back to Latimer were struck in the course of the day. It had been hot and I had taken my greatcoat which I had checked in at the N Z Army Post Office for the day so the two mile walk to Latimer from the station was wearying. On another day I found such places as Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey. Here I unexpectedly came across the tomb of "The Unknown Warrior" and found the moment very moving. Perhaps the circumstances of another war made it all the more poignant. The war damage in central London and the recent visit to Jimmie's grave heightened the

pathos. As time went on and I visited London repeatedly on leaves I became much more familiar with the layout of the city and found my way about more reliably.

As I said earlier, I went up to Liverpool. I had boarded in Invercargill with Mr and Mrs Kirkham who had come from there and I had promised I would look up their folks when I got to England. I had booked on a high speed train with only three stops at Rugby, Stafford and Crewe which covered the 200+ mile journey in four and a half hours. I booked a night in the Angel Services Club for one shilling and then contacted the Kirkhams. What a warm welcome I got. A cup of tea appeared in no time and I was soon taken back to the Angel Services to pick up my bag. "You cannot stay there, you must have a bed with us". Well, that turned out to be good and bad. I was taken sightseeing round Liverpool, seeing the result of the bombing, seeing areas hardly touched by bombing, the wrecked building from which Bill Kirkham had emerged virtually unhurt and so on. Ernie Kirkham was a fireman and at the worst of it only had his clothes off for a bath and change occasionally during eight days of continuous fire fighting. The good came next morning when I had breakfast in bed. The next day we went round the family - first to Bill Kirkham's hotel where I had a 'grape juice' on the house. A chap accosted us spouting Maori saying he had been in New Zealand for twenty years and knew "Paddy Webb, Bob Semple, and Micky Savage" - all Labour politicians, the latter being the first Labour Prime Minister. He was a bit of a pest but our tram came along and rescued us. On one tram I heard a voice say, "There's a New Zealand airman". A dozen heads turned as one in my direction. The Kirkhams took me into town for a lovely dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire Pudding, roast potatoes, cabbage, ice cream, cream, and a little fruit. We visited the old family home, met a single sister who lived there, called on a great friend of my Mrs Kirkham's and called on more friends about 9 00 pm. Another sister arrived at the house about 11:15 pm and so it went on. 15-year-old Ernie was in the A.T.C. and was proud to have his picture taken with a 'real' airman. Likenesses to Harry Kirkham in Invercargill were quite obvious and I enjoyed making the contact with the family for the brother who was never going to get back to see them. Back at Euston after a hot journey I had time to invest a shilling in a bath at the station before catching my train out to Chenies and Latimer.

It was a hot walk from the station so I met second cousin Bertha and her husband Mac Davies with my shirt sleeves rolled up and perspiration beaded on my brow. It was lovely to meet them and they were to be very kind to Wilfred and me during the next two and a half years. Bertha was a bit "proper" in some ways but I was to learn much more of the Argentine family from her than from Jim and Valerie. This was probably just the difference between a sister and a brother in the extent of their family interest. They had a little boy called Graham and I showed him a snap of my nephew Graeme and told him about his third cousin. They told me I was like Frank but I did not have the moustache! They suggested I grow one and pay an unexpected visit to his girl friend in Portsmouth! They told me Frank was in Orkney and had met an old lady who remembered an Elder in Kirkwall who was a Fisheries Inspector! Why did I not go to Orkney to meet this lady? It could have well been interesting in the light of our knowledge today.

On Monday I escorted Bertha to London and across the city by Underground to

Waterloo from where Bertha caught a train home. I took the Underground to Elephant and Castle to see the burnt-out ruins of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, known as the Metropolitan Tabernacle, where the great man had preached. Later I went to Tower Bridge and sighted the Tower of London from the outside - it was not open during wartime - then made my way back west by Underground to Buckingham Palace gates and Victoria Memorial just outside the Palace. I wandered through St. James Park, through Admiralty Arch, past the end of Downing St and then through Trafalgar Square to the N Z Forces Club where I had a cup of tea and a good rest. I nearly always met up with someone I knew at the club and this time it was Frank Hide from Brandon days. It was a real experience to wander round London and actually see such well-known places which were always so easily recognised from the pictures I had seen over the years.

The Underground was very impressive and a wonderful way of covering distance quickly. A stranger has to be quite alert to select the right escalator, passage or staircase and even the right platform. If you go to the wrong platform you can find yourself going the opposite way by mistake. It is possible to spend all day on the Underground as long as you don't pass a ticket barrier at any station. One could travel many miles this way for the price of a ticket to the very next station - not that the idea appealed! As time went on I became very familiar with the Underground and even experienced the rush-hour a few times. Once I was able to direct a platoon of soldiers, Geordies from the Newcastle area, who were crossing London for the very first time having never been in London before. I came to the last day of my introduction to London and the next morning went back to Bournemouth to await whatever the R.A.F. had in store for me.

Late in June I was posted to R.A.F. Leconfield near the small town of Beverley in Yorkshire for refresher flying training on twin engines. When I got there I found four from the Brandon course there also. Roy Jackson from Invercargill was posted from Bournemouth the same time as me but to a station near Oxford. Beverley was near York so I was planning to go in and see York Minster. I visited the Salvation Army hut one Friday night and met a New Zealand WAAF there who came from Kelburn in Wellington. I soon got familiar with the Oxfords we were flying and was sent solo after only one minute fifty five dual. One of my approaches to land got a bit too exciting. I was coming in fairly steep, as we were taught to do, when another plane appeared about a hundred yards in front and below me. He was coming in on a low 'creep' approach which was forbidden but fortunately he was a bit ahead of me. The control tower at this point signalled 'red' and we abandoned our approach and 'went round again'. Next time he did a low approach again but I kept a wary eye on him. I began to experience the English haze - in calm cloudy weather the industrial haze hung in the air and visibility was consequently very poor. Not only are the landmarks difficult to recognise but other planes appear and disappear quite suddenly - disconcerting to say the least. I described it as "murk" at the time and it was a good description.

About this time I got a letter from a Mrs Bateman of Ethel, Ontario, Canada. I had written while in Canada to John Jones in Ontario and the letter had been returned unclaimed. This lady had somehow had an enquiry from the Post Office about my letter. Apparently her mother was a daughter of John Jones and he might have been my mother's uncle. Alas,

I was then in England and unable to make any contact. If I replied, it would have been only to say that I was no longer in Canada. In view of later interest in family origins it is a pity I did not follow up this contact.

One Sunday evening another lad and I went in to the Baptist Church to find the service had already started at 6 pm so we went on to the Methodist Church, that being his denomination. The service was pretty devoid of much spiritual content but the minister's wife invited us to the parsonage for dinner. It was a good meal and they were very friendly. Another day we took the bus into Hull, not many miles away, and witnessed some of the devastation there. Being a major shipping port on the North Sea coast it had been the target of much enemy activity and the damage was terrible. It made me wonder how a town or port continues to function after such damage.

News from home told me that Auntie Fanny was getting a refund from the Land and Income Tax after some contact I had made on her behalf while on Final Leave. A strange little bit of news to receive in the midst of the war situation in England. At this stage the British Eighth Army had been driven back by Rommel to El Alamein just outside Cairo and the situation there was looking grim. One bright spot was a telegram delivered to me late at night informing me that Wilfred was in England. I wrote and wired him to let him know where I was. I had a day in York at last. I was amused by some of the street names, Micklegate, Spurriergate and so on, obviously arising from the name of the gate in the walls. These 'gates' are no longer such except for the portal in the walls but the streets maintain the names. I was greatly impressed with the Minster, reputed to be the longest in the world until St Peters in Rome was extended. Stained glass windows were removed for safety during the war, one at least having been shattered by bombing. Many years later, Millie and I saw one of these windows being pieced together like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. York Museum also impressed me - it was very well done. I was moved up near Middlesbrough for a short while. Some of us flew up with one of the instructors. Near our destination we flew into a fog bank and the instructor quickly became disorientated. When he sighted an airfield he put down quickly to find out where he was, then took off again to finally make our destination. We pupils were very unimpressed with his airmanship - not at all cool, calm, and collected! The surprise of my time there occurred one evening in my room where I was looking through my correspondence when there was a knock on the door and there stood Wilfred. He had brought a birthday cake from my mother in New Zealand. - mothers are wonderful. It was about a week before my birthday but Wilfred could only stop a night and I was on a concentrated course so the cake was started and there were short odds on any of it surviving until the actual day. Such things have to be shared and everyone agreed it was special and had arrived in very good condition. Wilfred went on to Glasgow to Ron Falconer's. Ron's father had been minister at Waikaka and Ron had gone to High School with Wilfred. He was then a minister of the Church of Scotland and in charge of religious broadcasting for Scotland. I visited him later a number of times. On the eve of my birthday I was night duty-pilot and didn't get to bed until 9 00 am though I did get some sleep after night flying was finished. I was up again at noon and had an hour's flying in the afternoon, circling Middlesbrough from a safe height. Finally at suppertime I had the very last piece of birthday cake saved up for the purpose - so passed my 24th birthday.

While I was sitting in the Sergeant's Mess one night reading the paper an officer put his head in the door to say that 24 Enzedders had arrived and one of them was looking for his brother. Sure enough, it was Wilfred and we were both to be in the same flight. Now the name Elder on the flight roster was not enough and an initial had to be added. We did not have long together as my posting to Harrogate for a Pilot Navigation Course came through. I was able to get a couple of days leave and visited Mac and Bertha in South London, reported to Harrogate, got another 48 hour pass and came back to Leconfield near Beverley for Vic's birthday and the next day, Wilfred's. We speculated that at the same time as we were marking Vic's birthday in England they would be marking Wilfred's 30th in N.Z. I had left my heavy bags in Leeds so had to haul them up an overbridge to get to the right platform for Harrogate. As I write this, I am reminded of a story told by my father-in-law many years later. A lady asked the porter where she had to go to catch her train. "Up over that overbridge and then to the left" she was told. "But I have a tin chest" she said. "It doesn't matter if you have a wooden leg, you still have to go over the bridge."

Back in Brandon I had nominated Coastal Command as my preference and my posting to Harrogate was the first indication that I was finally heading in that direction. All pilots on Coastal Command were required to do this course as on long range patrols co-pilots were required to assist with navigation. The course concentrated on navigation but included a lot of time in aircraft recognition, ship identification, radio procedures and a number of allied matters. We were billeted in The Majestic Hotel, about four stories high and set in parkland not far from the shopping centre of Harrogate. The town was a spa town popular with those who came to "take" the waters and it had a lot of small hotels and bed and breakfast houses. Another new Zealander on the course was Doug Robertson [Robbie] from Tauranga who I found was the son of a Baptist minister who had been at one time at North Invercargill. We discovered this as we exchanged names of Invercargill people we knew and realised they were all Baptists. His father had once stayed at our home when he preached in Gore. Sadly, Doug had little interest in Christian things but we got on well together. Another New Zealander was a dairy farmer from Putaruru. His name was Colin Wood and we got on famously. Colin would have been about eight years older than me, an Anglican, and he and Doug took me out to a nearby golf course for my very first game of golf - in fact my first swing of a golf club. My records show that I scored 135. Knowing since how much can go wrong with a golf swing I am quite impressed with that total. Colin and Doug must have been very patient. Colin and I became quite friendly but separated some months later when I became ill. We did not make contact again until well into the sixties. We did a number of things together. While at The Majestic we were able to have some tennis and an odd game of squash down in the basement gym but we lacked good exercise because of the full days of lectures and the need to study at night. One of the P.T. gurus stationed there was Leslie Ames, England's pre-war test wicketkeeper.

I went to the Baptist Church as often as possible. On one occasion I went to church parade at camp and then on to the Baptist Church where I got the same sermon. It must not have made a deep impression as now 60-odd years later I can't remember it. At the church I met a Mr and Mrs Smith who were very kind and friendly. After I had left Harrogate I dropped her a note which she acknowledged and said, "Well, Ivan, each time you go to

other fields you must remember you are not going alone. There is a Presence journeying with you all the time, and that Presence is the greatest gift that you can possibly have. It will help you when you are tired and dispirited, when you are tried almost to breaking point, and when there are enemies to conquer. We shall be delighted to have a letter from you any time you would care to write. We shall always take an interest in your welfare. Elizabeth Smith.” It was not long after that letter that I took ill in Northern Ireland. I wasn’t fit to write for quite a while and in any case my possessions were in bond in Long Kesh for a long time and I did not have her address. I don’t think I ever was able to communicate again. There must have been many good people in England who didn’t hear from men they had hosted, often because they had become casualties. I suppose I was a casualty myself, in a sense. But I am running ahead in my story. About this time I learned from Les Rawlings that his mother had passed away which was very sad for him. It was sadder still for his father some time later when Les was killed and his brother Ray only two or three months later.

I completed my G.R. course [General Reconnaissance] on 10th October 1942. My average marks obtained were 93.7% and the Assessment was ‘Exceptional.’ In spite of this the result of the course simply said ‘Pass’ , one of the only two alternatives on the rubber stamp used. The word ‘Fail’ was crossed out!

We were expecting to be posted to an Operational Training Unit [OTU] but this did not happen immediately. We applied for seven days leave which would have coincided with a short leave that Wilfred had arranged. We thought we would go to Scotland together but in the event Wilfred went on alone to Ron Falconer’s at Coatbridge, near Glasgow. He left Leeds on the morning train and on the same afternoon we had a pay parade and were given our leave. I sent a telegram to Ron’s which almost followed Wilfred in the door, to say I would be up the next day. I wrote in a letter: I shall long remember that journey. .It was rather long and tiring certainly [10.30 to 5 00 pm] but it was very thrilling to think that I was heading to Scotland. with a whole seven days to kill. Not until then did I realise how much the Scottish atmosphere of Otago and Southland and of my Scottish forebears had been bred into my bones. As we left Carlisle on the border [after travelling through North Yorkshire which I came to enjoy so much later] and made our way up through the border hills on the west coast, it was wonderful to look out and think, ‘Well, this is Scotland’. The advent of autumn was very pronounced but it had not quite got to the stage where the trees were losing their golden and rust-coloured leaves. So the sight from the window was very pretty. Here too we were in country that is much more like some of the country round Gore - perhaps after the style of the Ferndale area - fairly hilly with quite a sprinkling of rocks and some tussock land. Of course, it varied as we wound along some very fertile valleys with fine rippling rushing streams down below us, fringed by autumn-tinted trees. Towards the end of the day we came to more populous parts and it was not long till we were in the city itself. Glasgow was the largest city in Scotland by a good margin, having something like one million people. It was fairly flat though not without some small hills and it lies on the banks of the river Clyde, famous the world over for its shipbuilding. Amongst its most notable products were the giant liners, the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth.

I was pleased to see Wilfred and a "parson" by his side who was later introduced to me as Ron. They promptly led a rather dazed and bewildered Sgt Pilot hastily along the streets to a then unknown spot where we were to find a tram. We certainly found it thanks to the sureness of our guide who was pointing out this building and that as we went along.. It was a ride of some fifteen miles or so out to Coatbridge involving some 35 minutes in the tram. Civilians got this for threepence and H.M. Forces for one penny. There were also buses and trains which were quite convenient for Ron to use. with only a very short walk to all three. Arrived at Trinity Manse I was introduced to Ron's wife Elizabeth who was known as Betty. A very slim figure she was most homely and echoed Ron's warm welcome. Ron was very pleased to have a contact with Waikaka days and had been pumping Wilfred for all the news. "Do you remember so and so, is he married?" "And what about so and so?"

On Wednesday morning we all got up fairly early and Ron, Wilfred and I caught a train about 8:30am for Edinburgh. This is what might be called Scotland's Queen city for though it is smaller than Glasgow, it is much more picturesque.. And it has , of course, a tremendous interest to those of us who know Dunedin well. It has a population of about 600,000 and its main street is named Princes St. Parallel to this and also quite important is George St. which leads to St Andrews St. at one end. At right angles you find Castle, Frederick and Hanover Sts. Across the other side of the narrow ravine [once a loch] which separates the newer Princes St. part of the city from the older part, you can see a Portobello bus going down High St. It was across to this part of the city that we headed from Waverley Station on our arrival, making our way right up to Edinburgh Castle. This was a very prominent and outstanding sight. It stands on a massive rocky base, probably two or three hundred feet high, with access from the South only. It is like a big bluff, building up slowly from one direction and dropping away almost perpendicularly on either side and to the North. The rocky cliffs are almost unscaleable while the entrance was in olden days by a drawbridge across a moat. We could look through most of the castle, one very interesting part of which is the Scottish National War Memorial Shrine erected in memory of all Scots throughout the world who had laid down their lives in the last Great War. It is a very fine memorial and I was struck by the fact that it was for Scots from all parts of the world and not just from Scotland itself. Across the ravine from here, its face upturned and eyes looking purposefully up at the castle, symbol of all that is Scottish, is the bronze figure of a man in kilts armed for battle. It was erected to the memory of American Scots who answered the call of their homeland over twenty-five years before. It was a fine tribute.

To the north of the castle lies the Forth River, famous for its huge bridge the three spans of which can be seen a few miles further upstream. Closer in lies the city with several quite notable churches standing out here and there. To the right, eastward, is the dried up loch along the bed of which trains now run and on the farther side Princes St and the main business area. Southeast and a bit behind is Waverley Station. Southward lies the gentle slope down High St and Canongate at the bottom to Holyrood House, more of which later. St Giles Cathedral is part-way down. To the southwest is another big chunk of earth and rock, 822 feet high, known as Arthur's seat. Many years earlier Millie and her mother walked up this hill. Turning round to come down, her mother had been seized with vertigo and couldn't move. Millie got her to close her eyes and hand led her down from

the height. I think Millie was only about 12 or 13 at the time. To the west and northwest the city stretches out to the more or less open country with the Forth Bridge several miles away.

From the castle and its commanding view of the city we went down to St Giles Cathedral. The Cathedral is the Church of Scotland Cathedral in the city. In one corner is the private chapel of the Knights of the Thistle, a select order of Scottish noblemen headed by the King and Queen and members of the Royal Family. The building is quite a fine one but with less elaborate fittings than Church of England Cathedrals and without an altar. I liked it much better than most I have seen, a good deal for that reason. It is here that the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland are constituted with a service of worship and devotion. Leaving the Cathedral we crossed over again to Princes St. and went right along to Charlotte St. and to Charlotte Square. We were looking for Charlotte Chapel when Ron accosted a passing minister who turned out to be none other than Rev. J Sidlow Baxter, the present pastor. He was just making for a meeting and could not stay but directed us to the Chapel in a side street nearby. He told us to ring at a side door for the caretaker who would show us round. It is a fine big building with the choir and organ up behind the pulpit, a gallery on three sides and the pulpit well raised. There is a hall down below almost at street level. The church programme seemed very active with young peoples meetings, open airs, Sunday School, prayer meetings and Bible study meetings. After some lunch we took a bus out to the Forth Bridge which was a massive structure. I recall it being said that they started painting the bridge from one end and when they had reached the other end it was time to start over again. We met Rev Tulloch Yuile at the Overseas League - he was at Knox Church, Dunedin many years ago and he remembered Grandma and our Aunties there quite well.

Back at Coatbridge Ron took us down to a small Iron Works nearby. Here we saw them heating ingots of steel to white hot heat, then putting them through huge rollers from which they finally come out as steel rods or sheet metal or whatever may be most urgently needed. The intense heat in the furnaces must be seen and felt to be realised, as also the skill of the workers in handling these white hot bars of metal with long handled pincers. Long practice makes perfect and they seldom make any mistakes. We were not long there but it was a sight worth seeing and a notable experience among many that I had had since leaving my native land.

Wilfred's leave expired and on the Sunday I caught a bus to Edinburgh to attend the service at Charlotte Chapel. It was a very fine service. Rev Baxter, the Pastor, led the service but the address was taken by Mr Merryweather of the Ceylon and India General Mission. The singing was very hearty and it was a real privilege to attend a service in a church so full of interest because of the association it has with Rev Joseph Kemp. Charlotte Chapel is a Baptist Church and Mr Kemp was the pastor there before coming to New Zealand to the Baptist Tabernacle in Auckland where he was one of the founders of the Bible Training Institute my brothers attended. After some lunch in one of the Forces Canteens, I crossed over to the old town and strolled down High St, often called The Royal Mile, to Holyrood Palace. It is the old Palace of the Kings and Queens of Scotland and is still used by Royalty when they are visiting Scotland. There are some historic rooms open to the public, such as

the Mary Queen of Scots bedroom and her private rooms as well as other rooms occupied by Lord Darnley and other notable Lords and Ladies. The modern part is closed to the public but it would have been interesting to have seen it, I thought. I caught a bus a bit later and got back to Ron's about 4 00 pm.

The actual trip to and from Edinburgh was quite pleasant leading for the most part through countryside with villages and small towns by the way, here and there a coal mine or iron works, each with its great huge unsightly mounds of rejected rubble and spoil towering high into the air. Coatbridge is situated in the Scottish industrial area, still known today as the Black Belt and including such places as Motherwell and Hamilton. There was quite a concentration of iron and steel industries here as well as coalmining. The country had not much to attract and the air was always thick with smoke and haze as well as being often overcast and foggy and wet. After the evening service at Trinity Ron asked me to speak to the Bible class at 8:00 pm. I told them something of Christian Endeavour in New Zealand and I think they were quite interested. There were some fifty young folk, mainly in their late teens or a little older.

The following morning I had to start my journey back to camp. I caught the 8:29 from Coatbridge to Glasgow, then the same train as Wilfred had caught two or three days before, under the impression it went to London through Leeds. After having my ticket punched three times I found after Carlisle that I was not on the Leeds route at all and that I had passed the last stop before London some 300 miles away. So I trotted away through to the guard and explained my position. He said they were stopping at Crewe to change engine crews and I could get off there. I did that, having to cross the main line to reach the platform. I had half an hour to kill before catching a train to Manchester where it was about 6:30 pm and dark and the train for Leeds left from another station altogether. Being in the dark in a strange city was not fun and I had only a short time to catch a train. I took a taxi which cost two shillings and sixpence but it got me there quickly and easily. I didn't use taxis much in those days as they cost money but this was a worthy exception. The city was shrouded in a typical (so I am told) Manchester smoke fog. The train that I caught was a 'slow' train which stopped at every small station and took two and a half hours to run forty-odd miles. My letter home states: "In the latter part of the trip, the occupants of the compartment gradually thawed out into conversation. It turned out there was a young lady, who, like myself, was hoping to get the 9:25 home to Harrogate from Leeds. It was 9:35 when we got in, but the other train had been held back. We made a frantic dash and caught it, thus saving a wait until 11:15 pm."

Back at Harrogate it was a case of waiting for the next move. I was left rooming with two other kiwis and an Aussie. In the meantime we had organised games - squash mainly - and some lectures. A talk on 'Intelligence' proved very enlightening, as did a talk from a sea captain who had spent eighteen days adrift in the Atlantic two winters before. He was only 56 lbs when rescued having lost 130 lbs - he had lost both his legs and was on artificial limbs. Another day I went to The Stray, which is a strip of Common near the city centre, and watched some dog trials. The work of the dogs was very impressive and rather took me

back to farm days.¹ Colin Wood and I had a visit to Mr and Mrs Pryce Jones, a very friendly couple more Colin's friends than mine. During this time we all seemed to get parcels, mine containing underwear, shortbread, Daily Light from Bessie, a pair of socks and some sugar. This was about 21st October so it came in very good time. The shortbread was undamaged but had been packed very neatly. So we were sharing shortbread, chocolate and cake for two or three nights. Wonderful. The letter, dated October 1942, contained the news that Jim Gardyne, serving in the Medical Corps, had been captured and had been repatriated in an exchange of ill or noncombatant personnel.

I also got my marks in the various course papers - 89%, 90%, 93%, 94%, 97%, 97.3% and 94.5% - average 93.7% .

¹ Perhaps the word 'common' deserves some explanation as it is a term found only in England. It is a block of land usually near the centre of a town reserved for the common use of residents.. Animals can be grazed there if kept under control, dogs may be exercised or it can be used for other recreational purposes.

OTU - Interrupted

About ten days later our postings came through. Colin, Robbie and I were all posted to Turnbury, south of Ayr on the Clyde estuary. So, I thought, Scotland - here I come again!

On shifting from one base to another we were required to hand in any equipment issued to us for whatever course we had been doing - this might include flying gear and parachute among other things. We also had to be cleared by our mess for any outstanding debts from the bar. It was always a pain getting these clearances signed but we had to get it done before leaving. For some reason, on the morning of our departure we were required to march to the railway in full kit, including webbing, gas masks, gas cape and tin hat. This formality seemed so senseless and pompous, especially as we were being posted to various destinations. In the event it rained so we got a ride - for once we were grateful for the English rain. The journey included a change of train at Leeds, a long ride to Glasgow, a walk of two blocks to catch another train on which we spent 40 mins before another change. A phone call to the camp asking for a ride brought a negative response so the 18 of us tried to catch a bus. We had just got to the door when it closed - 'No more: Bus full.' The next scheduled bus was two hours away so we found a taxi nearby which took seven of us to Turnberry Air Force Station. We arrived in the blackout, trying to locate someone who could direct us to living quarters. We were directed to a hut with half a dozen Canadians sitting around a stove with the hut in a frightful state of untidiness. A couple of days later I was told I was being deferred till the next course in about four weeks' time but would have some staff piloting to do in the meantime. The news came with a week's leave but the next morning I was told my leave was cancelled - two hours later it was on again! The difficulty was apparently in the matching up of crews of pilot, navigator and wireless/air-gunner. Colin Wood was in the same plight so we went up to Glasgow and stayed the night in the Adelphi Hotel. Next morning we parted and I headed to London to Mac and Bertha Davies. I left Glasgow at 8:00 am and got to Ashted about 10:00 pm to find Wilfred already there.

On Sunday Wilfred and I went to Ashted Free Church before he had to go back in the afternoon. About 8 o'clock a knock at the door turned out to be a policeman with a notice for me to return immediately to base! It was too late for any night trains so I caught a train at Euston about ten on the Monday morning, reaching camp about eleven that evening. The chaps sympathised with me but they also had a good laugh as there was a funny side to it - personally, I found the 'funny side' of a day trip from Scotland to London a bit hard to see!

My new station was in Coastal Command and would be training us on Beaufort Torpedo Bombers. I think I was disappointed at this as there was little prospect of my using the skills learnt at the navigation school. A navigator in the crew, only one pilot and the relatively short range of the Beauforts suggested that there would be no navigation needed from me. The Beauforts were twin-engined and proved to be quite reasonable to fly. There were also Hampdens on the station and I thought I was lucky not to land in that section. They did not have nearly as good a reputation and were supposed to be tricky to land.

The place was lovely, situated on a small projection well down the eastern shore of the Firth of Clyde. We had the interesting isle of Ailsa Crag a short distance off-shore - a very small and quite distinctive island with steep rocky sides as its name suggests. Further away on the opposite shore was the Isle of Arran which has intrigued me ever since - I have never managed to visit it.¹ Near the drome was the palatial Turnberry Hotel situated on a rise and adjacent to one of the cross runways. One night when I was night flying with an instructor our plane suddenly dropped in the down draught of a rather gusty wind and it felt as if we were in for a quick visit to the hotel grounds. However, we found clear air again and climbed out of danger. I think we dropped 300 - 400 feet that night. After about five hours dual I went solo and then dual and solo alternated to a large extent after that. It was now into November and the days were growing shorter and the nights colder.

Turnberry was an interesting location. To begin with, it was the site of twin golf courses and the hotel was associated with these. I had no idea how the hotel functioned during the war years, deprived of its golf clients. Years later, when Millie and I visited the golf course, some of the runways could still be seen. The story of our intention to play on one of the courses restored after the war will be told much later. Nearby was a spot called the 'Electric Brae.' This was an optical illusion which gave you the sensation of going uphill when in fact you could free-wheel downhill on a bicycle - I actually did so. In the reverse direction one expected to be able to free-wheel but had to pedal. It was odd. We were in 'Burns' country for a few miles up the road was Ayr where I visited Burns Cottage. Also nearby were the villages of Girvan and Maybole, while our living quarters were almost in the very tiny village of Maidens. Quite near our hut area and right by this village was a dairy farm. Colin and I were out for a walk one day and stopped to admire some Large White pigs. The farmer came along, noticed our interest and showed us over the whole complex including the indoor winter housing for the cattle. These included purebred Aberdeen

¹ A few years ago I was envious of my niece Margaret Bonney and her husband Geoff going on holiday through Arran and then on by ferry to Kintyre and further north into the west of the Highlands.

Angus animals. They also grew about 100 acres of potatoes each year and he had huge stores of seed potatoes all laid out ready for planting in the spring some five months away. Ron Falconer sent me some addresses down this way and one day I called on a lady near Prestwick who was very hospitable. It was amazing through my time in the United Kingdom how people gave us introductions to others in whatever area we were going to. Colin and I visited another farm where again cattle were housed. The farm's main income was from potatoes and the housing of cattle was largely to enable collection of manure for the potato fields. Perhaps I should say that with the severe winters experienced so far north, it was necessary to house the cattle indoors. The 'muck' from the wintering was spread on the fields before potato planting. The smell from this 'muck' spreading is very obnoxious. (Millie's sisters near Blackpool called this an "Agricultural Aroma'.) We were invited in for tea which was really nice at this rather cold time of year. That particular day we had got wet on C.O.'s parade so we had abandoned our intention to go into Ayr and the farm visit was a very good substitute. A feature of our visits to town was to have a nice meal at some restaurant or other as a change from mess meals. I should add, though, that generally we were well fed if the menus perhaps sometimes lacked interest and variety. I received a patriotic parcel even containing cigarettes which I sold to someone with nicotine addiction for three pounds. The parcel came from the National Patriotic Fund in London and had been packed originally in New Zealand by the Canterbury Provincial Patriotic Council. It was very gratefully received. I was fortunate in getting parcels quite regularly from home and also from Gore Baptist Church, North Invercargill Baptist, Knapdale Patriotic Committee and other individuals and one from Karori Baptist. Just before Christmas I was able to visit an aerodrome near Ayr and found Les Rawlings of Brandon and Invercargill days and another chap, Neil Knox, also from Taieri and Brandon days.

Christmas 1942 was a very quiet one. I was in camp. I slept in until about 10:30 and had a hot cup of coffee as I washed up and shaved in time for lunch. I spent the afternoon letter writing until Christmas dinner at 6:00 pm. This consisted of a first course of soup. Roast Turkey with stuffing and a white sauce followed, accompanied by brussels sprouts and roast potatoes. Then there was a small helping of a very good Christmas Pudding which was surprisingly rich. All this was accompanied by generous quantities of beer but the chaps were pretty well behaved. The next afternoon, which we also had off, I went across the road to the Forbes farm with my photo album in which they were very interested and I had a pleasant evening with them. A Canadian who had lost all his pay gambling and was sleeping it off, woke up in the late afternoon and asked what the time was. Alas, he had intended waking two-and-a-half hours earlier to go out to Christmas dinner at 3pm - he missed his dinner. I had kept my Christmas parcel from home until Christmas Day and enjoyed tongue and peaches - the cake was kept to cut when there were more around to share it. There were also two parcels from the Wades in Brandon and Christmas greetings from others. Perhaps I should say that parcels from home included things that Wilfred and I were able to take to the homes in which we stayed and these were always so welcome. My thoughts were very much in New Zealand but I nevertheless had a pleasant couple of days.

We had more time off at New Year and I went into Glasgow and then out to Ron Falconer's at Coatbridge. Betty's mother and sister were there also. Helen Brackenridge,

Betty's sister, was a pretty bright spark and Ron had also a quick wit so the New Year period was quite a lively time. I had just had an inoculation and had a sore arm so that 'entitled' me to breakfast in bed. We 'saw in' the New Year with thoughts of New Zealand where 1943 was already nearly 12 hours old. (Ron claimed that the BBC broadcasts for 27 hours out of 24 - I took it as fact but am still not sure how it works out.) Mrs Brackenridge, Betty's mother, was a sister-in-law of Rev W. P Nicholson, the Irish Evangelist who preached so effectively in New Zealand in the early 1930's. The sister was Nicholson's first wife and they seemed to be hurt that he had remarried only eleven months after her death. Mrs Brackenridge had become a Christian in the revival days around Motherwell and Glasgow in much earlier years and was a lovely person.

After a lovely interlude it was back to the station where a big change was to take place. The first week in January the whole training unit was transferred from Turnberry to Longkesh not very far south of Belfast in Northern Ireland. My last flight in Scotland was on 28th Dec and my first from Longkesh on 15th Jan - some of the pilots got to fly the planes across but I went by train with all the unit's goods. The train went down the coast to Stranraer, then by ferry over the Irish Sea to the terminal at Larne near Belfast and thence to our station. The coastal rail journey to Stranraer was a very pretty run along the outer Firth of Clyde and into the northern part of the Irish Sea. Millie and I were to do it by car many years later and I enjoyed it just as much the second time.

We did quite a bit of flying. One night when I was doing circuits and landings with only my Wireless Op on board, the undercarriage light stayed red instead of turning green to show the undercarriage was down and locked. I reported to control through the wireless. They asked if we could see the locking area with a torch but we could not. I fired the emergency cartridge in an attempt to lower the undercart but there was no change. I then flew low through the beams of the Chance Light which flood-lit the runway but the passage of the plane was too quick to enable my wireless op to do a good check. I eventually came into land with the wireless operator in the crash position, wondering if one or both wheels would collapse as the weight came on them. Nothing untoward happened and I turned just off the runway onto a hard standing area and shut down. We walked home very thankful that it was only an electrical fault. Another night I learned the need to concentrate on my instruments while flying in the dark. My attention was taken briefly by a lighthouse until I noticed a change in engine sound and found that my nose had gradually lowered and I was going off course. It was soon corrected but it was a warning to me - in the dark or in clouds, rely on your instruments. On another occasion as I was landing and closing the throttles there was an unexpected burst of power from the starboard engine. This initiated a swing to the left. I quickly corrected but had swung off the runway and ended up in a wet patch at the end of the short grass beside the runway. I strongly suspected that my tunic sleeve caught on the lever but had to shoulder the blame - the buck stopped with me! There was no damage so an explanation to the CO was all that was required. We had a set of twins on our course who were flying on Hampdens. One night on a navigation exercise the plane of one of them just went missing - he was lost along with his navigator and wireless op. The two brothers were in a different flight to me so I was not closely acquainted with them. I often had a feeling for the crew members who were sent up with these rela-

tively new pilots, trusting their lives to the pilot's ability to bring them back safely or to the navigator's ability to give correct courses. Mostly they did so. During our off time we visited Belfast and became aware of some of the religious problems there. For instance, British forces were forbidden to go into the Falls Road area which was a very Catholic suburb. We enjoyed our visits to the city and some of the restaurants there.

It is easier to build aerodromes on relatively flat land which was why Longkesh had been chosen for the purpose. In this case, although the runways and taxiways were all solid sealed tarmac, the surrounding ground was virtually reclaimed bog. There were paths between the buildings but the huts were surrounded by very wet ground and had been built almost at ground level. Our hut took water when it rained and although we had a stove it was almost impossible to keep the hut warm and dry. I survived this until about the 9th Feb when I woke with a very painful upper chest in the left shoulder region especially when I took a breath. So I got dressed and went on sick parade at 8:00 am. The walk to sick quarters was a very slow one as I had to stop quite often to get my breath and ease the pain and even then my breathing had to be kept very shallow. Strangely, I had just visited Colin Wood in sick bay a day or two before the M.O. put me in there myself. They told me I had a "touch of pleurisy", something I don't think I had ever heard about. I had a couple of days or so in Sick Bay and then was sent some miles west to a Military Hospital.. I must have been fairly sick for the first few days, as there is a gap of 20 days between my letters home and I usually wrote once a week. After a few days they tapped the fluid with a needle between my ribs and took off a good deal of fluid - my memory tells me perhaps 1700ccs but I am uncertain. I know it was regarded as a substantial amount. The pain in the shoulder indicated that the fluid had built up around the upper lobe of the lung. I was kept very quiet for quite a long time. In those days there were no readily-available antibiotics, though a couple of years later Winston Churchill became something of a guinea pig when Penicillin was tried on him with some success for Pneumonia. My treatment was strict rest while the body gradually absorbed the fluid and cleared it out of the body. After some six or seven weeks I was allowed to sit in a chair for an hour or so. Draughts was a popular game and my immediate neighbour was very keen. I would play two or three games and then turn him down as I found that the tension and excitement of the game sent my heart-beat into overdrive. I must have got fairly weak. A visit from Colin and Robbie brought me the news of their departure and from then on I went without visitors. Not quite, as Wilfred came over once when on leave and a friend of his, Joe Chambers, of the Scripture Gift Mission in London, came with him. I was proud of the fact that I could walk, even if only a few yards across the ward with a nurse in attendance. After the initial very sharp pain when I went on Sick Parade, I had very little discomfort. I suppose the pain receded once the pressure was reduced and I was breathing lightly through having no exercise.

During all this time I find that my faith kept strong. A favourite hymn to me back in Karori days and later was, "God holds the key of all unknown, And I am glad. If other hands should hold the key, or if He trusted it to me, I might be sad." I felt that my times were in God's hands and even the apparent setbacks may, who knows, eventually turn out to save my life. I shall never know if that in fact was true - all those other possibilities that never had a chance to happen are still unknown. I think I had a fairly deep sense of calm, though I was

frustrated in the loss of friends and eventually my crew. I had been told earlier that my crew had wanted to wait for me in those earlier days when the length of my illness was thought to be brief. They also visited me and told me so. My heart was warmed by their confidence as we had not flown much together - while I was learning to fly the plane well they were in lectures and exercises to improve their navigation, aircraft recognition, gunnery, wireless and other skills. I was happy to have won their confidence and they were held back for me. However, in the end they had to be re-crewed. As I remember, my naturally pragmatic sort of attitude and my faith in God kept me very much at peace during most of those times and during this particular time as well. About the beginning of April 1943, Wilfred wrote in veiled terms to the effect that he was about to go on "ops." He said his confidence was "In the One above all others".

Mother sent me the addresses of some cousins of the Aitkens across the road from home at Springdale one of which was quite near Ron Falconer in Coatbridge. The Aitkens, two brothers and a sister, were our close neighbours and Teeny was a good friend of Mother's. On a later visit to Ron and Betty Falconer I met this family and enjoyed a Scottish music night with them. Their daughter had a lovely voice and I did enjoy her singing of various Scots songs. It was nice to be able to tell them of their cousins in New Zealand whom I think they had never seen.

April 1943 brought the news that Vera was the new teacher at Otahu Flat pending growing old enough to go to Training College. I was teasing her about becoming Miss Elder whereas I remembered her as a High School girl in a gym frock and two long pigtails. The news, of course, was about three months old as letters had been chasing me about, often waiting at Longkesh till someone brought or sent them out to me. Vera boarded with the Pearce family who lived quite near the school and before very long she was engaged to their son Jock. They were married shortly after I came home. In the meantime she had gone to Training College and earned her qualifications. It seemed strange to be too young to enter Training College and yet to be put in sole charge of a country school with pupils of all ages and stages. She probably had to learn quickly. I received a cake in a parcel from Uncle Will Gardyne - very nice.

By the middle of April I was up most of the day but my lung was still not quite clear. I was finally discharged from hospital at the end of the month after a stay of just over eleven weeks - many years later, I am surprised at the length of my time there. Because Wilfred was coming on leave, I was discharged back to Longkesh instead of to a convalescent place as had been suggested. In hindsight this was probably not a good decision. How could Wilfred look after me apart from maybe carrying my bag? Back at the station I found three things to deal with. First was my kit which had been roughly bundled up and put in storage and took a bit of locating and sorting. I took with me on leave sufficient for only three weeks but I was not to see the rest for many months². Second, having just come from hospital and not yet having reported to the station Medical Officer, I was rostered for night duty in the Control Tower. Fortunately there was little flying and it was a quiet night but one Flight Sergeant was exceedingly tired. Once flying stopped we were allowed to sleep

² This was where I lost access to my diary and it ceased from then on. This story has been salvaged from my letters home kept by my Mother, bless her.

- if we could! Third, after a medical, I was granted three weeks sick leave and instructed to report to Central Medical Board in London at the end of it. I had then to go through all the red tape to get my leave signed, obtain clearances from the station and collect some pay before I was ready for the road. I had to pay something like three shillings and ninepence to the Sergeants Mess for some trifling thing incurred at least eleven weeks earlier. Wilfred had come over and we spent the first night at the home of Joe Chambers in Portadown and then next day went to London overnight by boat and train. It was a long tiring journey of about 11 hours and I have little recollection of it. We then seemed to spend about three hours at the Scripture Gift Mission meeting Joe and Wilfred's friends before going to the NZ Forces Club for dinner where I met two chaps from Brandon and two from Taieri before we ended up at the Chevron Club. This was a bed and breakfast place for NCOs and was very good.³

The next day we met Dot and Frank Elder for the first time and had tea with them in one of the famous Lyons Corner Shops. There were several of these in Central London and they were an efficient tea rooms/cafe type of place. The only table free - tells how popular they were - was right in front of the orchestra so conversation was a bit difficult. We liked both Frank and Dot. Wilfred introduced me also to his friends from the Scripture Gift Mission, Hilda and Gladys Claydon. They were very keen Christians, as might be expected, and belonged to St Pauls, Portman Square Anglican Church. The Vicar, Rev Clyde Carr, was a very fine preacher and it was a vigorous sort of church. Gladys, who talked first and thought second, after hearing of my illness, said "You'll have to be careful for a long time, and look after yourself. Hilda had to look after me. Wilfred, see you look after him. (and to me) You won't be right for years and years. I had pleurisy five years ago". We laughed but of course she was right. Talk of Wilfred looking after me? He would stride along the street far too fast for a convalescent invalid and I would say to him, "Is there a fire?" or "Is there a prize at the end of this race?" and he would slow down with that rather shy smile of his. One day we visited Lloyds of London, the Bank of England, The Royal Exchange, The Guildhall and Mansion House, the home of the Lord Mayor of London. We also visited a Mrs Wilson at Purley in South London. She was very keen to host New Zealanders. She came originally from Nelson, had been a nurse in the First World War and I think had then married an Englishman. She made us a very nice dinner for which we were grateful but she talked incessantly, not really letting us have much part in any conversation. We caught an earlier train back to London than we had at first intended!

During this time I had a number of quiet days with Mac and Bertha or with Valerie and Jim at Latimer. There were walks with Valerie and Pat to meet Elizabeth from school, a walk in the woods one day when Elizabeth went to a birthday party and so on. In London I had an interesting couple of hours being shown through the Houses of Parliament. Another day I sat in on a debate in the House of Commons which was meeting in the Lords' chamber as their own had been burnt out in the blitz. Speakers I heard included Hon Hore Belisha, Anthony Eden, Mr Morrison explaining a Bill on Town and Country Planning - where have I heard those words since - and Mr Arthur Greenwood. I also saw the Privy Council in session

³ It was at this place on a later occasion that I went out for the evening by Underground from Sloane Square station on a foggy night in the blackout. When I came home again by Underground and came up to street level I could not recognise the Square. After a while I found that the Underground station had four exits to different sides of the Square and I had come out of one of the wrong ones. A policeman put me right.

actually hearing an appeal from Eastern Canada. The hearing surprised me as it appeared very informal, yet dignified. A Counsel was conversationally making his case to the Law Lords who were listening intently. None of the glitz and glamour I might have expected.

At Jim and Valerie's, little Pat was still quite shy of me. I treated her with little attention until she started smiling at me and working her way closer. One day I held out my hands to her and she came onto my knee. That first time she quickly wriggled off so I let her go - from then on we were firm friends. I was delighted to renew the acquaintance in 2001 in Argentina. I found her a very lovely person. Another thing I did was to have my photo taken and printed onto an air letter form. These air letters were written at normal size and then microfilmed en masse. The film was developed in New Zealand and the miniature photocopies mailed to the addresses concerned. So the family got an up-to-date photo of me. I also got a professional studio photo taken by Pearl Freeman in London, copies of which are still about. Then I went to the BBC and recorded a message to the home folks. These were broadcast in New Zealand over shortwave, I think on a Sunday morning. Those were halcyon days after my long spell in hospital. It was springtime and the trees in Buckinghamshire were fresh and new and looking their best. There were a lot of trees around Latimer Village and I cycled further afield as the days of my leave were coming to a close.

I had received notice to report to the RAF Central Medical Board and did so at 9am - I did not leave until 4pm. During that time I had Xrays, blood tests and various interviews, the end result of which was that I was told to report to RAF Hospital, Cosford near Shrewsbury for further recovery and recuperation. I stressed in my letter home that I had not had a setback but that I apparently needed further time off flying. Looking back I think that, in fact, I had experienced some measure of relapse or perhaps that the earlier discharge from hospital had been premature - I probably should have been discharged to a convalescent home. Also, during the last week of my leave I had been exercising more by cycling round the Latimer area and I might have overdone it. I was told that I could be ready for limited flying in maybe six months and for full flying within a year. On my way to the train for Wolverhampton, I called at Base PO and collected eleven letters which was an improvement on the three or four received on my previous visit down London way. I gave them my Cosford address. It was a nice end to my leave. I was reading letters on Paddington station while waiting for my train and for the first half hour of the journey. Mail was pretty reliable but slow - it was 20th May before I heard that they had received my letters from the end of the year.

RAF Cosford was in the country not far from Wolverhampton on one side and from Shrewsbury in the opposite direction. From time to time we experienced industrial haze from the Midlands industrial area when the wind was in the wrong quarter. I think it was about 20th May 1943 when this sojourn began, shortly after the Allied cause had received a fillip from a conclusive victory in Tunisia and the banishing of the Axis powers from North Africa. General Montgomery and General Alexander were the heroes of the day.

My first days in hospital were taken up with further Xrays and blood tests and after about a week I was taken as a convalescent to a Manor House at Longdon, near Rugeley,

Staffs. The owners had made their home available for this purpose, reserving for themselves two or three rooms of the thirteen in the house. I think there must have been up to about twenty patients at full capacity in the charge of two nursing sisters. The routine was: 6:30 - cup of tea; 10:00 - cocoa and biscuits; 12 noon - dinner; 3:45 - Tea; 7:00 - supper. I presume we had breakfast about 8:00 and we had a cup of hot milk at 10:00 pm. Between these times we were pretty much free to do as we liked except that strenuous exercise or games were out. I recall that four of us spent a lot of time playing bridge, rather inexpertly as only one knew anything of the game and then not much. It whiled away many an hour and kept our minds occupied. The lady of the house was very kind and occasionally would invite two or three of us into her lounge for a chat. I think she was a bit snobbish and I think I was invited because I was a Kiwi and therefore of some interest. The place was equipped with a wireless (not called a radio in those days) and there were three or four London daily newspapers among other reading material. Our temperatures were taken twice-daily at 6 am and 6 pm. Later we were allowed to walk into the village of Longdon which was quite small and some two miles or so from the house. I was able to get into Lichfield nearby and visited the Cathedral. I was interested that our Bishop Selwyn of early New Zealand days had been at one time Bishop of Lichfield and there was a fine statue of him in the Cathedral. I also helped in picking peas and gooseberries and peeling potatoes!

About this time Dot and Frank were to be married and they wanted both Wilfred and me to attend. The wedding was on the 17th June and I was sent back to Base for M.O's permission. He was very sympathetic but questioned me closely on the location of the wedding which was to be in Portsmouth and discussed the difficulty of travel - up to London, down to Portsmouth and then return. He suggested it really was not worth the risk. Anyway Wilfred was shifting station that weekend and was unable to get leave. They managed famously without us and carried on to complete 58 years of married life. They were wonderful friends to Millie and me.⁴

I was kept at Base for some time as my Blood Sedimentation Rate (BSR) was not quite so good. It came right after a week or so. For this test the Australian Sister once took about seventeen jabs before she got into a vein to draw the blood, about half and half in the crook of each arm - needles got blunt when used again and again after sterilisation. The treatment for my problem was rest with monitoring of the BSR which was an indication of the amount of fluid being absorbed from the effusion. Unfortunately, there were no such medical miracles as we have today. It was a slow job as I think the original effusion was a fairly massive one.

At that time I was a Sergeant and what would you know but another Sgt Elder was admitted to the same ward. He was from near Montreal and had relations around Glasgow and in Northern Ireland. I also had a letter and a parcel from a Mrs Bauchop, the New Zealand War Services Association Hospital Visitor, who said that her maiden name had been Elder - I had no indication of her origins. Apparently the names of all NZ servicemen who went into hospital were notified to this organisation and we received parcels from time

⁴ It is perhaps worth recording here how Dot and Frank met. Dot's home was in Portsmouth and that was also, I think, the home base of the Royal Marines. One day Frank and a fellow officer were sitting by the beach at Southsea when two girls came out of the water nearby. 'That's the girl I want to marry,' said Frank. So he engineered a conversation and eventually got the girls to meet him and his mate on another occasion. They did and he achieved his aim!

to time. I was placed in a sunroom at the end of the ward with two other sergeants so we called it the Sergeants Mess !

I had X-rays regularly to keep a check on the state of my lungs and to make sure there was no development of tuberculosis which was apparently a possible end result. After one of these Xrays, the Sister pointedly asked the M.O. during the ward round if he had seen the latest Xray report. "I probably wrote it myself " he said. "Do you want a sputum test?" she asked. He turned to me and asked, " Could you give us some," in a rather matter-of-fact voice. "Probably," I said, though I was not coughing or having any phlegm to speak of. As he stood aside to let her go out the door first he gave me a wink and said, "Anything to oblige!" After the weekly round was finished the Sister came round to advise us of changes in our treatment and told me the M.O. had said I was to be allowed up for an extra hour a day. Pretty good psychology, I thought. There was never any further suggestion of possible TB. The M.O. was Wing Commander Robson who had been a Harley Street chest specialist in civvy life.

During all this time I kept being aware that my time and my future were in God's hands. One could not deny that I was in a dangerous game, even during training and with the possibility of having to go into action. So the future was all very uncertain even back at home before going into camp. One of my letters says, "The Lord Reigneth, Let us Rejoice and be Glad."

A slightly earlier letter speaks of receiving the news of Averil Gerken's birth and of Allan Kerr and Edna McMillan's engagement. Wilfred also came on a short leave to show off his Distinguished Flying Medal which had just been awarded. A letter from Auntie Iza in Peru told of hearing Ron Falconer on shortwave radio from the BBC. She and I kept up an occasional but regular correspondence, so she knew a lot of my wartime life when she retired and came back to New Zealand. What a lovely person she was.

The ten months in 1943 from February when I first took sick until early December when I finally left Cosford were a very crucial stage in my life. It was a long tedious journey with very little variation from day to day. My first spell in hospital in Ireland had been for about eleven weeks - I think I only realised later that I must have been quite ill in those first three weeks or so judging by the gaps in my otherwise regular weekly letters. I think I was very fortunate. Then followed the 'false' convalescent leave from Longkesh. Perhaps I should have said that when I had my medical in London at the end of that leave, the pleurisy was found to be interlobar between the upper and lower left lobes of the lung. This made it much more tricky to aspirate the fluid and the MO decided to simply let the fluid be absorbed by the blood stream over a period of time. This necessitated a long period of limited activity as exercise would exacerbate the problem. During this long period from May to December it was a case of three weeks or so at Longdon, then back to Cosford for XRay and BSR readings, and repeat with little of note to break the monotony. Finally came my discharge but not yet for flying.

My departure from Cosford was by transport to the local station, by train to London

where I called at NZ Base P O to pick up some letter and then on to Ashted. Bertha and Mac made me most welcome when I arrived about 7 pm. After I was in bed, Wilfred arrived. The next morning he went back to bed after breakfast with a dose of flu and spent the next four days there. That took up most of his short leave but at least he was pretty good when he went back to base ! Graham went down with flu near the end of this time but had probably caught it from Mac who had had a bout before we came. Not a very good atmosphere for a dischargee from hospital to come into but I must have had sufficient natural good health to escape infection. In the meantime, I had a day or two in town, visiting the Scripture Gift Mission friends of Wilfred's, Hilda and Gladys Claydon, and Joe Chambers. Joe wanted me to go to Northern Ireland for Christmas with his mother but I was not prepared to take on such a journey so soon. In any case, Wilfred and I had been invited to Jim and Valerie's for Christmas, and Mac and Bertha were to be there too on Christmas Day. Wilfred took me out to West Acton to visit a Scottish family named McAdam to whom he had been introduced by his friend Eric Kelly of Palmerston North. The McAdams had three very attractive daughters and I think, two, if not all three, married New Zealand airmen. I did not see enough of them to develop an attraction in my favour!! One married Eric Kelly and another George Curle, who later travelled New Zealand giving illustrated lectures on prophecy and the amazing numeric sequences some people find in the Bible.

I'm afraid I left a very mixed household at Ashted. Graham, whose chest was a bit suspect had a rather nasty dose of flu, Mac had just recovered, Gordon the six month-old baby started having teething troubles and then Bertha got a heavy cold. It seemed to me that I had gone from hospital to convalescent home and now to a nursing home. On the Sunday I had enjoyed a morning service at Ashted Free Church, and in the evening at Epsom Baptist Church. The evening service was a choral one with readings from Luke 2. These were the first church services I had been to since early February apart from the chapel services in hospital after I was able to walk and sit for a period.

At Latimer Valerie and Jim had been hoping for a gathering of the two branches of the family - New Zealand and Argentina- over Christmas. They were very disappointed when Mac and Bertha could not come. Frank and Dot were elsewhere also - Frank had been posted somewhere to the West of Scotland, near Oban and Dot was to live nearby. However, Valerie's mother and father, Mr and Mrs Kemp, and her sister Blanche, came up from Leatherhead in Kent. On my way through London at the N Z Forces Club in Charing Cross Road, I met Colin McKenzie from Waikoikoi and Nick Newman of Chatton and later of Turnbull's Saddlery at the north end of Main St. He told me that Bob Weir was a prisoner of war and on his way to Germany. Also on my way through London I collected a parcel from Auntie May Gardyne of Esselmont containing a cake. What exquisite timing - it was a lovely thing to be able to take to Latimer. It was very difficult to get ingredients in England that were adequate for a good cake. It was great to be out and about and to be able to meet up with servicemen and others in this way. Latimer is in Buckinghamshire, which is very heavily wooded, and it made good walking country. One walk was to the station, about two miles away, to meet Blanche Kemp, who had come separately from her parents.

Christmas morning was very exciting with Jim handing out parcels from the base of

the tree. The girls were very excited - Elizabeth had got to her stocking about 5am! Two cockerels which Jim and Valerie had been saving were the basis for an excellent meal. The Christmas pudding had prunes in it and Valerie had made mince pies. Pat was still shy of newcomers but was much quicker at thawing. Elizabeth went home with the Kemps and I was to meet them in London a week later and bring her out to Latimer. At the little Baptist Church on Sunday the service was taken by a retired minister named Walkey and Jim discovered afterwards that he had known Jim's father Robert Elder in their student days in England. I spent some time catching up with correspondence while at Latimer, telling people of my release from hospital and took ten letters into London to post. At Baker St. Station they somehow slipped from my coat and I only discovered the loss in the Underground. There was no sign of them lying about back at Baker St. but I enquired of the porters and they were all there in the Porters' Office - much to my great relief.

In London, I met Geoff Parker, Fleet Air Arm pilot and of old Karori days. He was brassed off on a staff pilot job at a station near Aberdeen. As I was talking to him a mate came along and said to him, 'Mc Bride has been killed.' I asked if this was Robert McBride and Geoff confirmed that it was and that he came from Gore. Robert was a relation of the Nichol family. After a quick trip to Ashted, where I found everyone much better, I had the weekend with Joe Chambers, attending a Brethren meeting in the morning and then going to a Forces Club where Joe was sharing in a christian outreach. On the Saturday evening I met Joe at 10 Finchley Road, a boarding house run by two elderly Brethren ladies. They were having a New Year's Eve party and had a fun evening with parlour games, quizzes and competitions. One item that sticks out in my mind was a mock court where one of these ladies was charged with being drunk and disorderly. Her partner, a rather 'proper' lady, was the witness for the prosecution. 'Did you actually see her drinking?' 'No.' 'Then how did you know she had been drinking and was drunk?' 'Well, she was behaving very strangely and smelled very strongly of peppermints!' Proof positive! On the Monday morning I met Blanche and Elizabeth at Victoria Station. On the bus from Victoria to Baker St. the conductress refused to take any fare from me as I was in uniform. This happened to me more than once. Elizabeth started conversations with all and sundry. In the train she was interested in a mother and 21-month baby, chatting away to the mother and playing with the baby. She had enjoyed her holiday but was glad to be home.

7th Jan 1944 saw me back in hospital for a thorough check which the Wing Commander described as quite satisfactory. The Xray did show some slight shadows about which he was not worried. He gave me another fifteen days leave to go and collect my kit from Longkesh and to clear things up with my station. I was then to return to London to await instructions from the Air Ministry. He was recommending that I be attached to the Ministry of Aircraft Production for three months in a light job in the south of England.

Fortune sometimes frowns and sometimes smiles. On the train from the hospital I had to stand for half an hour. - Fortune was frowning. Then at Crewe there was a three-hour wait for the boat train to Northern Ireland so I went up town to get some tea. Here fortune smiled - a lady had just cancelled her reserved table so I was able to take it up. She had also ordered some pineapple and custard and I fell heir to that also. It was a four-hour journey

to the ferry terminal in the black out. There was a brilliant moon but even so I did not see much of the countryside. This was a pity as the trip ran through the picturesque North Wales countryside, across the Menai Strait and on to the Isle of Anglesea. In letters home we had to be very cautious about mentioning place names, so I did not name the ferry port although I am pretty sure that it was Holyhead. I had no boat reservation but produced a note from the MO recommending me for every consideration regarding accommodation. The purser took note and after sailing gave me quite a preference when allotting the unclaimed berths. I got to bed about midnight and did not get up till about nine the next morning. After disembarking in Belfast I checked my bags into the YMCA and found a Presbyterian church. After dinner at the YMCA I went out to Robert Wilson's, a cousin of Ron Falconer, where, for some reason I can't recall, I had left my camera while I was in hospital. I had enquired about having it sent over but this had not been allowed with a film in it. As it was a new film with only one shot on it I had baulked at sacrificing the roll - films were very scarce in England at the time.

On Monday morning I went out to the station to square up. I found that there were very few chaps left at the drome that I knew after all that time. The first item was to settle a debt of seven shillings for telephone calls I had made the previous May - they got their money in the end!! Then I handed in my parachute rights and went to the Pay Office where I collected thirty pounds leaving a credit of ten still to come. What riches. I felt very fortunate to have all this medical treatment covered by His Majesty's Forces, all expenses paid and to be on full pay the whole time. While in the services I had an allotment sent back home which my Mother banked for me - I even had a post office bank account in England. The next day I retrieved my kit which was in very good order. I sorted this out and repacked it and sent the bulk of it on to London. In all this I was hampered by quite a lot of rain. It had been wet when I first went there - hence the pleurisy. And it was wet as I was packing up to get out. But I have seen pictures of Ireland in the sunshine! Another impression I have of this visit is of just-missed trains or buses. By Friday I was cleared up and setting off back to London.

The journey to London was long and tiring. I stayed that night at Finchley Road guest house and on Sunday morning went to St Paul's, Portman Square with Hilda and Gladys Claydon to hear Rev Colin Kerr, a well known Anglican clergyman of the time. I just missed Colin Wood who had been in London but found that Frank and Dot were at Ashted and so arranged to meet them in London the next day for afternoon tea. Frank was leaving to go back to Oban. The next couple of weeks were spent in and out of London, staying some nights in the city but mainly based in Latimer. Wilfred came on leave for seven days and we spent some time together. I was very well but my stamina had not yet built up fully and again I had to get Wilfred to adjust his pace to my slower one. He was full of life and energy.

Finally came the instruction to report to the Thorneycroft engine factory in Basingstoke. This town was some fifty miles southwest of London in the general direction of Southampton. It was on a main line and well served by frequent fast trains to London and to Southampton. I reported to the factory at Basingstoke after an hour's run in the train.

After having my job explained by the Labour Manager, I was directed to the home of the three Misses Noonan for board. They were happy to take me but were temporarily full so I spent the first few nights on the sofa bed of a friend about fifty yards around the corner. Two of the sisters were Brethren and the other Salvation Army and they were in the over-forties age range. They treated me very well.

I was not allowed to give much information about my job in the factory to the folks at home - censorship. I was called a 'Progress Chaser', working under a much older man who taught me the job. Basically we would get calls from the assembly section notifying us that the stock of a certain part was low and we had to locate the next batch and ensure it got priority through its various stages of manufacture. A bearing, for example, might have as many as a dozen or twenty processes to go through. First the casting, then many stages of turning, sand blasting and final finishing-off. At first I could not hear what people were saying because of the high level of noise in most parts of the factory. I found, though, that after two or three weeks my ears were tuning out the unwanted noise and I could hear much better.⁵ The factory was not really under the Ministry of Aircraft Production as they were building truck and tank engines. This was pretty vital work as we were in the lead-up to the opening of the Second Front and the Allies were building up their forces for the invasion. It was tiring work as I was on my feet a great deal. This led to a problem of a corn on the under side of my heel. I went to a Podiatrist who pared all the dead skin off, then poulticed it for a time, repeating the process two or three times until it was all removed. I did this at my own expense as the problem of getting Air Force medics would have been too difficult. The work certainly increased my fitness and stamina and I felt myself getting stronger and less tired at the end of the day. I found a Baptist Church and was a regular attender except when I went to London for the weekend. Actually it was not much of a "weekend" as we worked five eight-hour days and Saturday mornings. However, it was possible for me to catch a train at almost any time and to leave London as late as 9 pm to come home.

News from home about this time was of the engagement of my brother Vic to Win Heaps of Timaru. They had met through Christian Endeavour Easter conventions which were very popular among the young people of Otago and Southland (and obviously South Canterbury where Win lived!) I had also seen Colin McKenzie in London and others from Brandon and Taieri days. In my first three weeks or so, I received two cakes, a tin of chocolate biscuits, shortbread, and some ginger nuts in parcels from New Zealand. In a letter I asked Mother to let Kathie Cross and Mrs E Collins know that a parcel they had packed for the Knapdale Women's Institute had arrived in good condition and had been much appreciated - I tried to acknowledge as many parcels as I could. I heard from home that Gavin Cruickshank was home and was engaged to Frances White of Otama. I told Bessie that I was already in on that information as Gavin had told me some two years before how the land lay. I had even had a piece of her shortbread. I'm sure that Gavin, though having an understanding with Frances, would not have made public an engagement till he was safely home. He had high principles.

News had come through of Wilfred's investiture at Buckingham Palace on 30th March.

⁵ I wondered later if the noise of this factory job played a part in my present loss of hearing. I think probably the 800-odd hours in planes with mostly twin engines were more to blame.

Wilfred had been awarded both the Distinguished Flying Medal and the distinguished Flying Cross. The first was won while he was still a Sergeant, and the second for an incident on the first flight after his Commission had been granted. This second incident was reported in local newspapers:

“One exceptional achievement during the Bomber Command battle over Europe was Southland farmer Wilfred Elder’s feat of beating off German night fighters attacks, then bringing his battle-damaged 76 Squadron Halifax back to England. Elder, almost 31, had just won the DFM over the Ruhr, and on the morning of 27 July he learned he had been commissioned. That night he took off for Hamburg. As the Halifax wheeled away after bombing, the rear gunner shouted that a Ju 88 was closing quickly from behind. Dazzled by searchlight beams, he told Elder to take evasion action. As Elder did so, tracer came from straight ahead. “I didn’t see it all”, he said in a BBC broadcast to New Zealand, “ but heard a crash and sparks flying off the port inner engine and the bomb doors dropped open.” The attacks snuffed out the intercom, smashed some of the controls, and knocked out the port inner engine. The rear gunner suffered leg, arm and face wounds from the fighter fire, his turret knocked out of action. Elder tried to ward off the fighters by cork-screwing the damaged plane but was handicapped by not knowing where they were. Shell splinters from more enemy fire now killed the mid-upper gunner as he stood by the flare chute. Flight engineer Bill Berry, an Ulsterman, climbed into the mid-upper turret and fired at a fighter that dived away in flames. But the attacks continued, shrapnel hitting Berry in the legs. Despite his injuries Berry quit the turret to fight a blaze in the empty bomb bay. “I don’t know whether the fighters attacked again but shortly afterwards they left us”, Elder said. The sustained 10-minute assault probably ended because the attackers had exhausted their ammunition. Elder’s wireless operator reported to base: “Mid upper killed, two injured. Request ambulance. Returning on three engines” Luckily the motors beat strongly as the Halifax ran home across the North Sea. The plane reached England with ample height and headed for Shipdham, an airfield west of Norwich. “Our hydraulic system had been put out of action in the first attack and all our attempts to lower the undercarriage failed,” Elder said. “Anyway, if we had got it down we had no pressure for the brakes. We were doubtful if the tyres were alright, so I knew we would have to do a belly landing”. As the Halifax circled Shipdham Elder ordered the second pilot, navigator, bomb aimer and wireless operator to bale out and prepared for a wheels-up crash-landing. The engineer, who refused to leave the plane, strapped the wounded gunner on the rest bed and then went forward to help.

“I brought the aircraft down on the grass beside the runway but I did not quite manage to touch down as soon as I wanted to and we skidded along the grass to the end of the airfield. We jumped a ditch, went through a fence and finished up by tearing the port engines out on tree stumps and came to rest on fire.” Fire fighters doused the flames, an ambulance arrived for the injured and Elder raced to the control tower to check the others had parachuted safely. They had. Deeply religious, Elder said in his broadcast that he remembered uttering a prayer: “Pay thy vows to the Most High and call unto Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee.”

Wilfred had invited me and Bertha to be his two guests and Bertha was really proud to be included. I was pretty chuffed myself. We were at Bertha and Mac's the night before and buffed up our buttons and badges to a high polish. We caught a train at 8:28 am, left our bags at the Forces Club and arrived by taxi at the Palace gates about 9:30. Half-an-hour later the queue was four or five times as long. About 10 o'clock we were allowed into the inner courtyard and then into the investiture room. Being early in the queue, we got good seats in the middle of the second front row only about five yards from the King. Wilfred had been herded off to join the others to be decorated. Just after 11am the King came through the big double doors behind the dais and the band played the National Anthem. He asked us to be seated. The recipients came one by one up a ramp from his right, did a left-turn and then took two steps forward and bowed. The King picked up their medal from a velvet cushion held by his equerry - without looking - and hung the medal on a hook already in place on the recipient's chest. He had a few words with each one before they took two paces back, bowed, made a right-turn and marched off to the King's left. Many of the recipients were in the uniforms of the three services but there were also civilians and merchant seamen. It was a most impressive occasion and took about an hour and a half. It must have been very tiring for the King who looked well but weary. I was very thrilled to be there but wished that Mother and Father could have been the guests. I had not warned my work mates of the event and had some disbelieving people to convince when I got back. However, I had the stub of my Palace admission ticket and ultimately folk had to accept the facts. I played an April Fools joke on the girls in the inspection department by putting some steel filings in a chocolate box wrapped up. I wasn't very popular over that one.

I was in London over Easter weekend when we had three days off and attended the big Faith for the Times evangelistic campaign in the Albert Hall. It was very impressive to see the 5000 or so people filling the various balconies of the great hall. On the Saturday I was walking through Regents Park with Hilda and Gladys Claydon, Joe Chambers and Alex Rushbrook of Lower Hutt (later Rev Alex Rushbrook, for many years in New Plymouth) when a press photographer asked us to walk past a bench full of servicemen and girls while he took a photo. It was published on the front page of The Daily Sketch. I was discussing pleural effusions with Gladys who had suffered one about five years earlier - very romantic!

On Good Friday the factory was working but I got leave to go at 3:45pm and went up to Marylebone Parish Church in London to hear a rendering of The Crucifixion Oratorio by Stainer, which is given there every year. The music was written for this church and first performed there so I heard it in the best possible setting. It was a very solemn but inspiring production. My recollection is that the choir was a somewhat depleted one but they were persisting with the performance in spite of it being wartime. I had a seat in the side gallery of the church quite close to the choir. It was the first time I had heard the piece as my classical music knowledge at that time was very slim. Later it was to become a special favourite of Millie's and she always played it on Good Friday - indeed we included words from it on her tombstone.

Flying Again

On 5th May I was back at Cosford hospital for my final (!) check up. The nurses said I was looking a lot better and I realised that indeed I was feeling better and stronger again. I had been keeping regular hours, eating good food and had been doing quite a lot of walking. My medical board went well and the Wing Commander said, "I am pleased with you". I was graded to resume flying duties, limited for the next three months to "no night flying, United Kingdom only, and not above 8000 feet." This was good news, surprising some of the staff who had been through much of the time with me. I must have been a bit doubting as I had left most of my kit in Basingstoke, not expecting to receive orders to proceed straight to a Personnel Holding Unit at Morecombe, near Lancaster to await posting to an active station. Morecombe was a seaside resort where a lot of the resort holiday accommodation had been requisitioned by the Air Force. We were therefore billeted in boarding houses rather than in air force accommodation. Morecombe was rather nice in the usual tradition of English seaside holiday resorts. Within a week I was on seven days leave and went down to collect my kit. Miss Noonan seemed quite sorry to lose me and I was very appreciative of her care. I asked my mother to drop her a note thanking her for looking after me during my 'rest cure'. On the Sunday I was invited out to McAdam's at West Acton in the afternoon and for tea. I went with them to the local Brethren evening service and Mr McAdam asked me to open the service for him! Another New Zealander sang a solo later.

News from home at this time brought a mixture of sad and good news. The sad news was that Sandy Gerken had been killed - what a tragedy for May and little Averil. The good news was of a new nephew, Roly Elder, born on 14th April. About the same time I heard that Alf McClean of Malloch's office, and brother of Jack McClean, had been killed. One day in the NZ Forces Club I saw a stranger who was yet familiar. He reminded me of Merve Arthur of Karori, for whose wedding I had been a groomsman. So I approached him and found he was Merve's younger brother Cliff. Another event was a

visit to The House of Commons where we enjoyed Question Time. We were fortunate in seeing Winston Churchill come in and take his seat, answer two or three rather innocuous questions, then get up and walk out, back to the 'real work'. I met Hamish Buchanan from Mataura, one of my chief rivals in High School, a chap who worked in Taxes with me, and three chaps who had been on my course in Canada. During the weekend I helped Sheena Mc Adam with a Latin problem - the previous weekend I had helped Mary Baker with a geometry problem. What a lot I have forgotten since.

Having collected my kit from Basingstoke, I had to take it back with me to Morecombe. I stayed in London to catch an early train north from Euston - with kit hanging from my hands, shoulders and finger nails, I was heading towards the station and looking for a taxi when an RAF Staff car pulled up, and I was asked, 'Where are you going?' 'Euston,' I replied. 'Hop in.' Which I did and rolled up to the station like an Air Marshall. My sleeve, however, lacked the extra rings and there were no 'scrambled eggs' on my cap. I had a good trip back to Morecombe which became a place of waiting. The days passed with little action, playing bowls, putting, one day having a sail on the sea and finding friendship from the minister and some of the folk from the Baptist Church. I roomed for a while with a Scot who had been shot down in the North Sea, picked up by the Germans after some hours in a rubber dinghy and kept as a POW for two years. He lost a leg through the crash and the exposure and was repatriated through the Red Cross. He was waiting for medical rating of his disability and discharge. It was strange how he would take off his leg when going to bed and put it under the bed! After about five weeks of waiting my posting to RAF Caistor in North Lincolnshire came through. This was a Secondary Flying Training School and was to give me a familiarisation course after about sixteen months non-flying.

My feelings were obviously those of great relief that this period of inactivity was at last over. But even at that time, as well as looking back, I think I was aware that the Pleurisy which nearly took my life might well have saved it. The plan for Beaufort crews at that time was to pick up a new aircraft from near Bristol and fly it with one's complete crew via Gibraltar to Malta to operate in the Mediterranean against the German shipment of supplies to Africa. I did not hear much of what my fellow course members did but gathered that some progressed from Beauforts to Wellingtons which must have cleared them from torpedo bombing to more orthodox bombing work. Some of them ended up in India - Colin Wood in one letter told of being in hospital in India with dysentery. I have already quoted the words of the song 'God holds the key of all unknown' and I was conscious of this right through. My letters home often ended with scripture quotes of assurance. This was partly to reassure Mother and Father but they also reflected my own conviction that higher hands were directing my ways. I always sought out Christian fellowship and found that this was a positive way of maintaining my spiritual faith. Nonetheless, it was good to feel that this time was now over, whatever the reasons in the overall picture may have been, and I was back to doing something.

My posting came about four days after the opening of the 'Second Front' with the invasion of Europe in June 1944. My letters contain no reference to this as such subjects were barred by censorship rules. A letter I wrote home at the time said that all cables from

the UK had been put on hold - that was why I could not send one to advise of my promotion to Warrant Officer. In any case the only news we had was what appeared in the press and on radio. The British people were heaving a sigh of relief that at last Hitler was going to be tackled in his own den, albeit with horror that such a dreadful exploit was necessary to achieve eventual peace.¹

On my way to Caistor I was able to visit Wilfred at his then-present station near Selby, where I met a family named Easton with whom Wilfred was very friendly. A 3-hour stopover in Lincoln gave me time to visit Lincoln Cathedral which impressed me greatly. It has a wonderful site on the only high ground for many miles on the Lincolnshire plain - a truly commanding position. I think I came to appreciate the architecture and design even more on later visits. On the station at Lincoln I met another W/O also going to Caistor - we were met by transport at the local station and taken to camp. Our billets were in Officers' quarters with single room, good bed, washstand and a wicker chair. After my early flights I commented that I was feeling at home in the cockpit again. The planes were Oxfords which I had flown on my early familiarisation on coming to England in 1942. While there I had a letter from Hilda and Gladys Claydon making the first mention of Hitler's 'Flying Bombs' which were directed at London. When their fuel ran out they crashed and blew up. The first one they saw was being chased by a fighter while they were on a Sunday School outing. The objective was to shoot them down before they reached the built up areas. "Since then we have all got a bit tired of seeing them," was the next comment. My comment: "True British nonchalance".

Up in Lincolnshire we were occupied with our own concerns. My first flight was on 15th June when I had a 55-minute dual with FO Kirkby. The next day after another 45 minutes dual I was sent off solo. From then till early July I did nearly forty-three hours flying, slightly more than half of it solo. Cross-country flights were interesting. Visibility generally was limited because of the industrial haze which was almost continuous - a great deal of smoke was discharged from the coal-fired factories. Just how bad it was locally depended on the direction of the wind. We found that railways were a very useful means of orientation - they were distinctive from the air and their curves and junctions were also easily identified by referring to our maps. One could seldom mistake one junction for another and so they were very reliable as reference points. Following a railway line was sometimes described as flying 'the iron beam'. One interesting flight as pilot was to RAF Eshott north of Newcastle. A fellow course member flew the return flight. This was a venture into unknown country but went very well.

I paid a brief visit one afternoon to Grimsby which lived up to its name. Not at any time an attractive place, it displayed a tremendous amount of bomb damage. It was an important port for fishing fleets and coastal freighters and, being on the East coast of England, was also very accessible for German bombers. It had suffered badly during the blitz some three years or so earlier but wartime conditions had not permitted large-scale restoration.

¹ Many years later a radar operator in the south of England at the time told me the channel was patrolled every ten minutes by anti-submarine surveillance planes of Coastal Command for some weeks prior to D-Day. The pilots had instructions on the sighting of a U-Boat to drop depth charges and report before resuming patrol - another plane with another barrage of depth charges would be on the spot in a few minutes. In this way, the channel was cleared for the invasion fleet and it was remarkable how few losses there were in the crossing. Once within reach of France it was a different story as enemy defences opened up on the ships and landing barges.

On 10th July my re-creation as a pilot was complete. My ratings were:

Twin Engined Pilot Above the Average

Pilot-Navigator Above the Average

I was sent on seven days leave pending posting. The officers on the course ordered transport to the station - a privilege not available to mere non-commissioned ranks - but they offered us a ride in with them. We arrived at the station at 2:30 pm, some of us to go north at 5:08 pm and others to go south at 6:40 pm - another illustration of the 'pleasures' of wartime travel. All irony aside, I was amazed at how good the train services were in England in spite of the war. They had, of course, settled down after the blitz period and Hitler had much more pressing problems to worry about than bombing Britain. I met up first with Wilfred at Selby and found that after spending quite some time at the Operational Training Unit instructing on Halifaxes he was being sent to an Instructors School to learn how to instruct! Then I headed to Liverpool where I had been invited to visit another of Wilfred's family friends, Mr and Mrs Harry Day. They had known Wilfred for some time and they gave me a warm welcome. They became firm friends and our acquaintance was renewed many years later in 1970 down in Cornwall.

I had come to re-visit the Kirkham family but learnt that the Bakers of the Scripture Gift Mission in London were holidaying only twenty minutes away. Next day I went out to Southport and spent the day with them on the sands, giving the children boat rides on the artificial lake which is quite extensive. A couple of days later I was entrusted with the task of escorting two of the children across Liverpool from Lime St. to Exchange Station. Southport was a clean, attractive seaside resort and the weather was good. From Southport one looks across the Ribble Estuary coming out from Preston toward Blackpool where the Blackpool Tower is usually visible. Wilfred turned up again. I commented in a letter: 'You know, he's getting quite beefy, and looking so well you would hardly know him.' Wilfred travelled on to Bristol and I went in to Liverpool. I visited the new Cathedral, started in 1904 and still under construction. I was evidently impressed: 'It is a most magnificent building. The hue of the stone used and the smoothness of the curves and arches being very pleasing to the eye. It will take another 30 years to complete.' I visited a sister and then a brother of the Kirkhams. I found a lot of pleasure in these visits as a kind of link between the families separated by twelve thousand miles with very little hope of ever seeing each other again. After each visit I wrote to the family in Invercargill to tell them the story.

On my journey down to London I was travelling with a young cousin of the Baker family who otherwise would have been on her own. It was her first long-distance journey. It was a strange situation of me pointing out features of her own countryside to her as well as telling her something about New Zealand. In London I called at NZ Base PO and the girl turned away with a knowing look, as though to say 'we were expecting you!' She came back with twenty-four letters and airgraphs! One was a letter from a grateful lady in Invercargill to whom I had written about her son who had been reported missing over Germany. Calais Radio had listed him as safe and I had cabled this news to his mother. It was the first indication she had that he was alive and she was grateful for my message. Another was from Thelma Patterson, later Ray Melhop's wife, to say that a young man from the

Georgetown church had developed rheumatic fever and died three weeks later.

My purpose in coming to London was to have my next medical. The result was very satisfactory and my permission to fly was continued. The height restriction of 8000 feet was lifted but I was still restricted from night flying and non-operational for the next three months.

A letter of 3rd Aug 1944 tells the family I was now at 'the foremost holiday resort of northern England - Blackpool I am billeted in a requisitioned private hotel, in a single room overlooking the Promenade. I'm half a mile from work, with a frequent tram service most of the way and the expectation of a bicycle in a day or two.' I spoke of my work conditions as good and my 'steed a trusty old warrior of proven worth' This was the Avro Anson, a twin engined trainer being used there as the flying classroom for pilot navigators to learn practical navigation in the air. I had nearly an hour of circuits and bumps before going solo, then had three or four navigation trips as second pilot before I was on my own. A couple of days after I started we were sent up to do a search along the flight path of a plane which had gone missing during the night. As I was starting up before take off the O/C Flying came along and got in as a passenger. I offered him the controls but he declined and just came as a lookout. The cloud base was only about 500 - 600 feet so we had to keep below this to see the ground and conduct the search. My plane was reported by someone for low flying! The O/C Flying knew all about it. I never heard anything officially, but was told by someone in the know.

On Sunday morning at church parade there was no pianist so I tried to fill in. The piano had no high B or C which was no problem for the first two hymns in flats. But the last hymn was in one sharp so there was no piano. I have never liked sharps in any case but with the vital absent notes it was not feasible to play the last hymn.

The Avro Anson was a pretty docile plane. It was a fairly old vintage with only a moderate turn of speed. This was probably an advantage for the trainee navigators as it gave them more time to make their calculations, which were always variable because of the different wind each day. Its age was evident in the fact that the undercarriage had to be wound up and down by means of a handle beside the pilot's seat. The pilot did not however, wind the wheels unless he was flying by himself. It was done by the wireless operator, of whom one was on every flight. The aircraft could fly on one engine with a reasonable load and the wheels up to reduce drag. It was easy to fly on take off and landing and smooth in the air. On one occasion one of the staff pilots had an engine failure just after take off on a test flight. He did a very clever job on full boost on the other engine of bringing the aircraft round and landing it. He must have been in shock when he put it down. The airfield at Squiresgate at the south end of Blackpool was not large, but was quite adequate. The area was subject to a lot of westerlies off the Irish Sea as fronts came through, but they brought clear skies. I learnt to love the Irish Sea on fine days when one could look north to the Scottish Coast at Dumfries and Galloway, south to the north Welsh coast and Anglesey, west to the coast of Northern Ireland and lying in the middle the Isle of Man. I also got to know it better than the navigators and on one occasion when a naviga-

tor was aiming for a peninsula on the Scottish coast, he looked up and smiled at the point of land right in front, and I wryly pointed to another point some miles to the right.

But many of the flights were pretty successful. They lasted from two to two and a half hours, and as pilot I had to remember to switch over to the second fuel tank. One day the port engine stopped about ten minutes from home. I was instructing the wireless op to send a Mayday, when I suddenly remembered I had not changed the fuel supply. I did so quickly and cancelled the Mayday before it got sent. The engine caught immediately. In fine weather the anticyclone would bring light southeast winds, which would drift up all the industrial haze from the Midlands and visibility would be very low. One morning the O/C Flying must have been late to the field, and we went off on our exercises with only half the runway in view. By this time I knew Blackpool very well and I kept in sight of the ground and set course over Blackpool Tower. About ten miles or so out I flew out of this fog bank and had forty miles visibility and a lovely day. My pleasure was short lived as we got a recall to base. Turning about I flew on a reciprocal course, and had to fly at about 250 feet to maintain contact with the sea. The Tower was 528 feet high so my eyes were flicking up and down from sea to ahead in case we came in by the Tower. In the event we crossed the beach just adjacent to the field, joined the circuit and put down safely. Some of the pilots lost contact with the ground on take off, and had to use radio beacons to let down and come in. They had been flying round in limbo, virtually, above the layer of cloud and haze for longer than I had been..

Aerial photography was also a part of the pilot-navigation course, and the favourite place for this was along the east coast of the Isle of Man. Most of this coast consisted of cliffs, with beaches down at the southern end. We would fly along at about 500 feet adjacent to the coast, and the pupil would photograph the coastline. This was fine on a calm day, but if the westerlies were coming across the island, the trip would be very bumpy. At one stage later on, Jessie and Harry with Jean and Margaret were holidaying on the island down at the south end, and I waggled my wings at them. I could not identify them from the air but they told me later that they had seen me.

I was always ready for work and often picked up flights just by being available until one month when my extra hours stood out and after that trips were rationed a bit more carefully. The work was very routine with a similarity in the flights each day. Late October I had a further medical board, and they came up with a repeat of the present grading. The checks were very satisfactory but they continued along the line of caution. So I continued on daylight flying only, which left me free each badminton night, as the winter season was now in full swing. Flying conditions deteriorated somewhat with the onset of winter, but there were many good days also.

Blackpool and Romance

As was usual when I shifted into a new location, I located a Baptist Church. The Station Road Church was about fifteen minutes walk from my digs and I went to the morning service on my first Sunday in town. The minister was Rev. Ralph Darvell. His text was 'Ye are bought with a price - you are not your own' and I appreciated his preaching very much. The church held a social hour after the evening service and I stayed on for this. The programme consisted of singing, recitations, jokes and Tatlers' Tales. The latter were pure Lancashire, usually in dialect, and were stories of the cotton mills in which the maintenance men were known as Tatlers. Two of the contributors to the recitations were Doris Bateman and Millie Haigh. This was where I would have heard for the first time Millie's poems like The Pied Piper of Hamlyn, The Bus Conductor, Ol' Mose and Cheering up an Invalid. Later I was to make my own contributions to the funny stories. The church folk made me welcome in true Lancashire whole-hearted fashion as I mentioned in my letter home. They had a lot of servicemen visitors - Blackpool was a recruitment and initial training centre so many of them were new to the Air Force. The town also had schools for fitters and riggers - airmen on these courses generally stayed longer and became well-known in the church. The presence of a New Zealander brought a new slant to the situation, especially as I was aircrew. This new interest had immediate impact as the Darvells invited me along to their home on the Tuesday. He was very interested in Baptist churches in New Zealand and asked a lot of questions about our work back home. The couple were very friendly and I got to know them well as time went on. I was also invited to the home of Mr and Mrs Birtwistle who had two daughters, Lydia and Phyllis, who were maybe a little older than me. They were also very friendly.

One of my early letters from Blackpool contained a first impression of the town as a resort. One hot day when I was flying just off the beach at full tide, I saw that all the visiting holiday-makers were crowded into the tiny strip of remaining sand. The 'Promenade' which

ran all along the frontage was several feet above the water and had a curved breakwater barrier at the shore edge. Normally the high tide came very close to this barrier wall and left little or no beach uncovered. This was the most crowded moment on the beach and as the tide receded the space would increase. Over time the tide would be full at different times of the day and more beach would be available to the holiday makers. That letter closed with the quotation 'Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, even Jesus Christ.' I must have been getting the essence of Ralph Darvell's message on that first Sunday.

I discovered that there were two Blackpools. The most prominent was the part along the Promenade which ran for four or five miles with the beach on one side and the entertainments, private hotels, pokie machines and souvenir shops opposite. Neighbouring these were another three or four blocks where all the Bed and Breakfast places were situated. Further beyond lay the other Blackpool - the residential part where the 'normal' folk lived.

Up until the war years the industrial towns in the Lancashire cotton belt area around Manchester observed what were known as 'Wakes Weeks' when all the factories in a town would close for the annual week's holiday. It was a regular thing to have special trains to the holiday resorts like Blackpool, Morecombe, Southport, St Annes and the like. In any particular week most of the visitors would have come from the same town. The folk were factory workers who spent the rest of the year inside and for the most part living in an industrial haze behind which any weekend sun would have been screened. They would arrive at Blackpool as white as sheets, pale from long hours working indoors all year with little exposure to sunshine. They relished the sun and the beach and in a few days appeared quite sunburnt from the unwonted exposure. They would crowd round the amusement stalls along the Promenade, the Tower Zoo, the three Piers and the Pleasure Beach with its roller-coasters and amusement booths. At week's end they would depart to be replaced by a fresh batch of 'white' people.

One of my letters records a long cycle ride along the promenade to Fleetwood which was some 8-10 miles to the North. Nearly all of this part of the Prom had a concrete barrier wall to prevent the waves from scouring out the sandhills and eroding the built-up area. Fleetwood was a fishing port and was the mainland terminus for the Isle Of Man ferries. At that time of year an evening flying detail would finish at 9:45pm still in broad daylight even though it was seven weeks past the longest day - Britain was operating on two hours of summer daylight-saving time. I got official word that Clem Scott from North Invercargill was a Prisoner of War - no doubt his mother got official notification but I sent her a cable to make sure.¹ I also had a letter from Mr Stibbon in Brandon saying he had received a long letter from my father about farming in New Zealand. My folks were very good in writing to people who had been kind to Wilfred and me. It was much appreciated by these folk.

One Sunday I had tea with Mr and Mrs Haigh who were very friendly, homely folk. Their daughter Marjorie was there and they had two other girls living at home who were on holiday at the time in the Clitheroe district. I later found they had cycled the thirty-odd

¹ I had earlier let her know of a message over Calais Radio of his safety. Calais Radio, a German-controlled station, broadcast a lot of information about missing airmen - these reports were usually correct but sometimes not.

miles to Clitheroe - the ride home was much easier as there was more downhill! On the following Tuesday I enjoyed a very pleasant hike along country roads to Lytham, coming back by train with some of the young people of the church. At Lytham we had fish and chips which was very much a Lancashire delicacy. Along the Prom I found Louis Tussaud's Wax Work Museum which had some very realistic models of famous people. I realised just in time that the attendant at the door was a wax model and not real! There was also a display of Russian antiques - Persian rugs, tapestries, ivory, mother of pearl, silver, gold and other trinkets, all of considerable value and many from the Royal Palace at St Petersburg. I played a game of cricket for the station to make up the numbers for a team - we were all out for 48 and the opposition passed our total without losing a wicket! I faced four balls for none. I enjoyed the games evening at the church hall where I was successful in a darts team. These evenings were good fun. I also did some small-bore indoor rifle shooting for the station team. At one of these matches I managed to make a very high score with a rifle on which the sights were quite inaccurate. We were allowed a couple of 'sighter shots' to test the alignment of the gunsights. From these I found that I had to aim at eight o'clock on the outer circle of the target in order to hit the Bull.. My two sighters must have been well aimed as they gave me the exact deflection to take. Others had real difficulty with this particular rifle that night. Beginner's luck!

I reported home that on two consecutive Sundays I'd had tea at Haighs. I explained there were two grown-up daughters at home. One who was a teacher thought Vera might learn as much about teaching at Otahū sole-charge school as she might learn at Training College. Her experience of College was that, although they did a lot of academic work, the amount of instruction on how to teach was almost nil. On a Monday night I rode out 10 miles or more to Hambleton for an evening with the Dilworth family. This couple are bringing up a young niece and nephew, children of Mrs. Dilworth's younger brother who had been tragically killed while the children were quite young. The children were lovely. Beryl was a very pretty little girl and I have met up with her brother David a few times in later years. The Dilworths also had their own daughter Margaret, who later married Millie's cousin Eric Culpin. The next week I had a cycle ride with Margaret to the village of St Michaels and then on to their home for supper. I had to ride home in the rain but had bought a plastic mac which kept me reasonably dry. I had taken them some chocolate and a cake from one of my parcels which proved very popular. This was one of the nice things about parcels from home - being able to give something out of the usual to those who had given us hospitality. The next week I had a very pleasant evening at Haighs. Arthur and Nellie Brammer were there and a Scots airman from Edinburgh. The following Monday the Brammers had the Haighs and me along for the evening. Arthur Brammer had been the Church Secretary, the Choirmaster and the Organist and for many years - I don't know how the church would have got on without him. Arthur Brammer was Florence Dilworth's brother and had a very dry sense of humour. My social life was flourishing. These evenings centred round a lot of music and singing. Arthur Brammer was very free on both piano and organ; his wife Nellie had an interesting light soprano voice and loved singing lilting Irish airs; Marjorie was very good on the piano, being able to play from music but also freely by ear. Florence was an elocution teacher and Millie had been a pupil of hers for many years, hence her skill in reciting. Much later Millie told me that her elocution lessons cost just sixpence a week. It sounds miniscule but would have been a material sum in those days.

The family will all attest that the study was well worthwhile as she entertained many people over the years.

As the end of the year was approaching it was growing evident that the teacher daughter Millie and I were enjoying each other's company more and more. We met up at church, at badminton which was played in the church hall, at fellowship hour, at young people's outings and, of course, in her home when I was invited there. I had begun taking her home from Badminton or Sunday night social, often by the longer way round. In December the Huddersfield Orchestra and Choir, very well known at that time, presented a performance of The Messiah at The Opera House in central Blackpool. As a thank you for their hospitality and friendship, I invited the three Haigh sisters to be my guests at this performance. One of the ulterior motives was to have a night out with Millie. As we were led to our seats, I stood aside to let the ladies go in first. Bother, I thought, Millie is at one end and I am at the other. But Winnie was aware to the situation and said, "No, you should be next, Ivan," standing aside to allow me in beside Millie. Whew - Bless you, Winnie! Of the three sisters she was the most sensitive to the feelings of others - a really lovely person. The Messiah was a wonderful performance with the well-known and well-loved soprano Isabel Baillie singing soprano. Winnie's action was an indication that others had been noticing the attraction between Mille and me. Over Christmas- New Year I took Millie to the cinema and on some bike outings and we shared our first kiss. Skating in Stanley Park was another shared time. The way our friendship was developing can be learned from these cryptic comments in Millie's diary which I did not see until after her death:

- 4 Jan Ivan came to supper and stayed till about 1 00 am.
- 6 Jan Ivan came to Badminton about four. Had lots of games and won most.
A very happy evening.
- 7 Jan Ivan came to dinner and tea.
- 8 Jan Ivan went on leave.
- 10 Jan No post for me.
- 11 Jan No post again.
- 12 Jan No post again.
- 15 Jan Letter from Ivan Good start to the day. Stayed in at night, washed hair,
wrote to Ivan.
- 19 Jan When I got home from school found Ivan in front of fire.
- 20 Jan Canteen, and Ivan came in and talked a bit. Wilfred was at Badminton. I
introduced myself to him.
- 21 Jan Geoff and Ivan to tea.
- 22 Jan Badminton. Ivan and I beat Jessie and Harry 22 - 20. (note- that was
some feat!)
- 24 Jan Ivan brought me home and asked me to go out with him on Saturday.
- 27 Jan Ivan called for me at 6 00 and we went to the Princess. Saw 'Show Busi-
ness' and a film about Flying Fortresses over Germany. Walked home
down Park Drive hand in hand. Ivan came in for supper.
- 28 Jan Ivan flying both morning and afternoon so did not come for tea.
- 29 Jan Snowing. Ivan went to London for a medical.

- 4 Feb Ivan came to tea. We left the Social Hour at half time and walked round (the long way) by Watson Rd. I recited "Ol' Mose".
... and so it went on till on ...
9 Feb Went to choir and walked home with Jessie. She advised getting engaged and married soon. Quite cheered me up.

Down in London Bertha noticed me getting a letter from Blackpool and quizzed me about 'a girl'. I was a bit cagey in what I said. I was not then a party to what Jessie had said. So a very happy time went on as Millie and I shared as much time as possible and talked about the pros and cons of her coming away to New Zealand. There were times when she suggested I get demobbed in England and find a job there. However, I had established my career in New Zealand where I had real prospects and my Accountants Professional qualification was not recognised in England. Also there would be a million or two Englishmen coming home from the forces looking for jobs, many of which had been filled for nearly six years by women. It would have been a very risky gamble.

During this time there had been mentions in my letters of the invitations to Haighs for meals and social evenings and of meeting up with their girls. Only two, Millie and Winnie, were living at home as Marjorie was in a Land Girl job at Cockermouth in Cumberland. One Saturday I was at a party of mostly Station Road folk at Miss Vera Metcalf's home, an older school teacher, where I was pretty successful in the competitions on the men's side. The Baptist Tabernacle in mid town invited Station Road young people to a pre-Christmas Social. Supper included hot potato pie, mince pies, apple tarts and a squeeze of 'ice cream' which was a very rare treat. The next evening was the Badminton Social at Station Road and I took along a cake which had just come to hand from home. Millie was of course present at these parties. I was there because of our friendship and also because I had become part of the Station Road gang. I had just had five [!!!] cakes from home. The following night I took a tin of peaches and a cake to Haighs where I had been invited for Christmas. At the last Social Hour at church before Christmas, Ralph Darvell wished everyone a Merry Christmas, 'including members of the forces who could not get home, especially one who is far from home and whom we have got to know as Ivan'. Later Geoff Langford and I went down to Ecclestone Road. When we came to go home we found our uniform caps hanging by the living room fire with a new penny, a few nuts and a small parcel in each. My parcel contained a propelling pencil. Geoff and I were there for Christmas dinner and also for tea. The turkey was a goose and the fare was augmented by what I had brought earlier. There were eleven of us - Mum and Dad, Millie, Winnie, Marjorie, Jessie the married sister with her husband Harry and their two little girls Jean (6) and Margaret (2) and Geoff and me. In my letter I talked about a hearty, sincere family, full of fun but withal sensible and with restraint although that was not true when the girls got the giggles. Millie, the youngest, was only two or three months older than me. A day or two later I was flying in the morning but was free in the afternoon and had another cycle ride with Millie who was on holiday from school. Then we had a day at Harry and Jessie's playing various games including table tennis in the social room of the Council Depot near their house.

I went on leave for a few days. Jim and Valerie had moved to Shortlands in Kent and

were nearer to Bertha and Mac. Bertha had her cousin Lillian Creese and her husband Berto from Argentina staying, both of them in the forces. I met up with Colin Wood who had just completed 35 trips in Bomber Command. While down in Basingstoke visiting my former landlady and friends I found a silver nutcracker to replace a very simple wooden one I had broken over Xmas-New Year at Haigh's. I was embarrassed to have broken it but they were embarrassed with the up-market quality of the replacement though I think it only cost me two pounds. I was really sad to learn that when Margaret was disposing of Marjorie's excess stuff after the sale of Waterloo Road the nutcrackers were included among the stuff to be sold. I would have liked them - I don't like nuts very much so I guess it would have been for sentimental reasons. During this leave I went on to Portsmouth to see Dot and her parents. It was her birthday so I got some drinking glasses. When she met me at the station carrying my case and haversack, she offered to carry the parcel. We both enjoyed the joke when I gave the same parcel to her to open on the Sunday. She went with me to call on Arthur Gardyne, the cousin of Mother's whom Wilfred and I had missed seeing in Carnoustie. On my way back I had an overnight stop at Longdon in Staffordshire with Mrs Burnett of the Red Cross convalescent place where I had spent many weeks and who had given me a strong invitation to stop over sometime when on leave.² I went on for a couple of nights in Keswick where the rain kept me indoors most of the time. I had a day visit with Marjorie at her farm. The return journey was by bus through Thirlmere, Grassmere and Windermere, from where I caught a train back to Blackpool. These places were to become well known and well loved in later days. I bought a music copy of the Revised Baptist Hymnal to give to the Haighs.

It was 21st Feb when I wrote to my parents: "It so happens that I have become very interested in a very nice young lady here in Blackpool and with whom I have been keeping company for some time. She is Millie Haigh, youngest of the four sisters whom you have heard me speak quite a bit about. Millie is a Christian, quite actively associated with Station Road church, as choir member, Sunday School Secretary, and since October a member of the diaconate and Baptist Missionary Soc magazine representative. During the week she is a school teacher. During the six months I've been here, I've seen quite a lot of her, at home, at church, at badminton, Social Hours, and so on. I have no snap of her but she is of medium build, dark hair, and wearing glasses. She has a slight cast in one eye, not very prominent with glasses. She has a strong sense of humour, thoroughly enjoys a joke, and has quite a practical turn of mind." I concluded, "How little I expected this when I came to Blackpool in August. "How unsearchable are his ways". "May the Lord bless you and keep you". So the die was being cast and the romance was coming out in the open. Mind you everyone at Station Road knew how the land lay.

One night early in April as Mr Haigh was about to go off to bed I told him that Millie and I were wanting to get engaged. "We were afraid of this, Ivan," he said. "Not that we don't like you - we do - but it is because you live so far away." Of course, Millie was well over twenty-one and was quite entitled to make up her own mind but it was a rather sad time for Emma Haigh and Millie had always been especially fond of her Dad. On the Saturday

² Many years later on a trip to England, Millie and I went through Longdon to see this manor house and I could hardly recognise the place. Progress and increasing traffic had made a by-pass necessary and it ran through between the manor house and the village. The by-pass exit had completely altered the entrance to the village.

night of that week we left badminton a bit earlier than usual to go to the County Table Tennis championships a little further along Station Road from the church. I had a ring box in my tunic pocket and Millie said afterwards that she could feel this lump on me. Outside her home, in the shadow of a bomb shelter in Eccleston Rd., I gave her the ring. It was the 14th of April 1945. I am amazed at my temerity in buying the ring myself but fortunately she liked it very much. Her diary records the event: 'Ivan gave me my ring. before we went in. Really beautiful it is. Mother unhappy about it.' It was a platinum ring, fairly slender, with five reasonable diamonds in line, the largest in the centre and becoming smaller each way. (Sadly it was later to be lost in the 1950s in Wellington St., Invercargill and we were unable to find it.) Mrs Haigh was in the dumps about the engagement but one day a Gypsy called at the door. Emma Haigh loved Gypsies as there had been a group of them living near her home when she was a girl - she used to talk of some of the lovely things they had and of how nice they were. This Gypsy said two things to her: "You will live to be ninety-nine" and "There is going to be a wedding in this house.' The next day she went into town and bought her own Mother-of-the-Bride frock - it would have cost her clothing coupons to do so. From then on she set herself toward plans for the wedding. She was also very chuffed about the living to ninety-nine bit as she had a zest for life and did not want to grow old. She showed her stamina and will to live life to the full as the years were to roll on, eventually living to be only two months short of ninety-seven.

Arranging weddings was very difficult after six years of war. Shops had been drained of surplus or pre-war stock and catering was very difficult also. I believe they went to several visitor hotels and cafes before settling on The Cramonde on the Prom just round the corner from Station Road - even then it was a fight to get a reasonable menu and they were not keen to cater for big numbers. The fact that none of my family from New Zealand would be present helped in that respect. In the end the menu was helped when the Cafe were able to get some blackcurrants. Blackcurrant Tart always brought back memories to us down through the years. Travel difficulties also made it difficult for guests to participate. Clothing was rationed and when Millie enquired about extra coupons to help with a wedding dress they more or less laughed at her. It was the same with food coupons to assist the cafe with the reception catering. One day at school one of the teachers said to Millie, "My niece has a wedding dress she might lend you." This didn't appeal to Millie. Somebody else's dress! Somebody else's style! However, the lady persisted until Millie said she supposed she could try it on, thinking it would not fit - she could never take in or let out another person's wedding dress and that would be that. But it fitted neatly and in the end she agreed to use it. That is how in 1945 she was able to have a white wedding dress in spite of all that Hitler had done. I was not fully aware of these problems at the time. My part was to apply to the CO for permission to get married which was a mere formality. It had been arranged that we could live at Eccleston Rd so I also had to apply for permission to live off-station. We included Jim and Valerie Elder, Frank and Dot Elder and Bertha (Jim and Franks sister) and Mac Davies in the guest list - Jim and Mac were unable to come but the others did. It was lovely having this representation of second-cousins from the Elder family at my wedding in addition to Wilfred who was Best Man. I think Marjorie thought that Wilfred was literally the best man! That was a complication that was developing - Wilfred and Marjorie were all eyes for each other.

So the wedding preparations went on and the day of 27th June 1945 eventually arrived.

Millie Haigh

Millie was the fourth of four sisters born to Herbert and Emma Haigh. Both her parents were from fairly large Lancashire families. Bert Haigh's parents lived in the cotton mill belt to the east of Manchester and his father was a policeman. In this role he was posted to various places and the family moved from time to time. I met only one of his family, his brother David from Ramsbottom near Bury, who was the manager of a paper mill. Uncle David and Auntie Nellie came regularly to Blackpool on holiday and it must have been a really difficult task for Emma to cater for this invasion. David had two children, Ron and Dyls, and we kept in touch with these two over the years.¹ Other than for Uncle David there does not seem to have been as much contact with Bert Haigh's family as there was with the Kirbys. However, although the contact was spasmodic they were all known to the Blackpool family and visits were made from time to time.

Millie's mother Emma was born in Blackpool in the Star Inn, an old and well-known landmark quite close to the South Shore area of Blackpool, where her father was the licensee. John and Jane Kirby had lived in Preston before this and six of the family of ten were born there. There were five boys and five girls with two sets of twins. One of the first set, Esther, died at age four - Emma was a twin with her brother Harry. John Kirby was known as Honest John. He would not serve any woman in his bar nor would he serve anyone who was drunk. During spring tides they used to open the front and back doors and let the sea flow through the inn - nowadays there is a concrete promenade and sea wall which prevents the tides from flowing inland. Near her childhood home there was a Gypsy camp

¹ Ron Haigh was a very clever man and rose, like his father, to be the manager of a paper mill. As competition grew in the paper industry he concentrated in supplying niche markets. For instance, they manufactured disposable surgical gowns for theatre use. Later his mill was taken over by the English branch of Cortaulds and Ron was asked to stay on in a consultant capacity. At one stage a problem blew up, and the manager was phoning the Head Office experts of the company trying to get an answer. Someone asked where he was phoning from. He was told to go along the passage to Ron Haigh who quickly solved the problem for him. 'Ron Haigh knows more about paper making than you or I will ever know', he was told. Sadly Ron died some three to four years ago. Known to have heart problems, he was visiting his doctor when he took a massive attack in the doctor's surgery and could not be revived. Dyls and her husband John Allen are still well and happy, living in Southwell, Nottinghamshire.

and Emma was used to be very fond of the Gypsies who seem to have been a settled group in that area. She talked at times with awe of the beautiful china and other things that they had in their caravans or homes. She never seemed to consider how they might have acquired these. She went to school opposite the railway station. In her last years she still remembered the songs and rhymes and even taught them to her grandchildren Jean and Margaret.

Emma was a twin. She and her twin brother Harry were not particularly close as might be expected of twins and obviously were not identical. When I went to Blackpool Harry had died but Millie talked of seeing his widow of whom she was quite fond. The sixth member of the family was born blind and was known as Blind Jack. He died in 1920 when he was 40. Emma's mother Jane Kirby died about 1894 when Emma was only thirteen. There were four sisters in Blackpool. The older sisters, Hannah and Jane, kept the family together. John Kirby had relinquished the Star Inn, probably because of his wife's illness, and moved to 375 Lytham Road which was a grocer's shop with living quarters. The house was really two semi-detached houses with a common dividing wall which had been opened at one point to give access between the two - given the size of the family this had probably been of necessity. I gathered that the boys worked from home for some time before they married. The two sisters never married and operated the grocery shop. There were some quite large houses in Lytham Road which had been a well-to-do residential district. The youngest sister Annie was married to Sam Culpin, a hairdresser, and they had two children, Julie and Eric. The four sisters were close. It was the usual thing after church on Sunday for the Haighs to go to the Culpins for supper or vice versa. Millie used to talk of her younger years when she would be walking home between her parents with an arm tucked into each, half asleep with her eyes shut. The Kirbys were a Christian family. Aunt Jane (known as Ginnie) was taller and slim and was a bit of a starchy Christian - children had to behave in her house! Aunt Hannah was in Jean's words a 'dumpling' and was softer and more lovable. Ginnie gave up her life to her family with a strict sense of duty and was faithfully helped in this by Hannah.

Bert's father was a policeman and moved about from station to station. Bert was born in Barrowbridge near Bolton and others of the family were born in Pendleton, Farnworth and Bolton. Bert was a railwayman for 51 years in the employ of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, generally known as the LMS and sometimes rudely known as the 'Ell of a mess'. For all that it was a good railway of its day, operating from Euston Station in London up the west side of England to places like Liverpool, Manchester, Blackpool, Lancaster and along the West of Scotland to Glasgow and further north. Bert was a guard before he became Foreman Station Porter at Poulton le Fylde, some twelve miles or so from Blackpool. He was a capable man and was worthy of rising through the ranks in the company. He did once accept a transfer to a station nearer Manchester but Emma was so homesick for Blackpool that he asked to come back. He could well have become a Station Manager or even higher but he declined to go through the promotion route which would have involved a process of experience-oriented shifts. Emma was what was known as a 'Sand Grown 'Un' being someone born within the sound of the sea. Bert was a pipe smoker and though she did not smoke Millie always enjoyed the whiff of pipe smoke when she came into the

house as she knew her Dad was home. His smoking and the late night bicycle rides home from Poulton after the last train eventually brought on Bronchitis and Emphysema which caused his death at the age of 69.

At a very young age, Millie was found to have a cast in one eye. Her mother was recommended to an oculist in Southport near Liverpool and consideration was given to trying to straighten it surgically. This is a very tricky operation. The situation was that she had two separate images, one from each eye. Her brain learned to block out one image and use the image from her dominant eye. This can be coped with when the eyes are divergent. If the correction were not to be exact she would have been left with two very adjacent images which would tend to result in blurred vision. It was decided to take no action but she always wore glasses from that time. In her school years these were very economical steel-rimmed frames which gave her rather a Pixie look in her teenage pictures. She was a very attractive girl in her mid twenties when I came to know her and her character and intelligence soon captured my attention. She was a person with ideas and was a very lateral thinker. Organisations with which she has been associated with over the years have found this very much to their benefit.

Millie was a very bright girl. She did very well at school and took her 11-Plus examination at ten years of age. She passed but not sufficiently well to qualify for Grammar School. She went to what was known as Palatine School which was geared for the slightly less intelligent pupils. At the end of her first year there she again sat the 11-Plus, securing a very good pass and qualifying for the Grammar School. At the Grammar School pupils were streamed and as she had come from Palatine she was put into the second stream. Initially she found the work hard as the Grammar School was ahead of Palatine in the work syllabus and she needed to catch up. Eventually her performance earned her promotion to the 'A' class and she went through successfully from then on even though she was nearly a year younger than the rest of her class. She was highly regarded by teachers and pupils and in her Upper Sixth year she was elected Head Prefect.

A chance encounter in the school corridor with a girl she did not know particularly well brought to her knowledge the fact that the Education Committee of the Blackpool Borough Council operated a loan system for students going to Training College. She made a successful application and went to Edgehill College in Ormskirk near Liverpool. Without the loan the family would not have been able to send her there. During her two years in College her sister Winnie sent her half a crown a week for pocket money. This tells something of the kind of person Winnie was. She had taken a position in the office of the Blackpool Cooperative Society, a large cooperative grocery and general goods store, and she would not have been earning very much.

It was at Edgeware College that she first made friends with one of her lifelong pals, Renee Edelstone. Renee became known at college by the nickname of 'Pedal', sometimes lengthened to 'Pedal-eddle'. After her marriage and shifting to Scotland Irene Mackenzie became Renee and no longer appreciated the old nickname. The College had a practice of matching a first year student with a second year student and Renee became Millie's 'Col-

lege Mother'. Training College taught school subjects to a greater depth than at Grammar School but Millie felt that they taught very little about teaching and the art of managing a class. True, they did go out to schools to observe and to teach under the supervision of the class teacher but often on those occasions the class teacher would take the opportunity of marking class work and left the pupil teacher very much to her own devices. After graduation she was allocated to Wheeler St. School in Manchester in a generally working class neighbourhood. She was teaching infants. I recall her remarking on her amazement that these five-year-olds would all go to sleep for half an hour or so after lunch, lying on thin mats on the floor. They had a cat in the infant school. One afternoon the teacher noticed that the cat obviously wanted to go to the toilet so the teacher asked one of the kids to take it outside. Soon the child came back with the cat and proudly announced, 'She's done it, Miss, she's done it!' Millie always came home on a Friday night and went back to Manchester on Sunday nights. As the daughter of a railway employee she qualified for a very low fare indeed. It must be remembered that she had her loan from the Education Committee to pay off. While in Manchester she made more lifelong friends, such as Judy Bayley, Carmen Miller and Jenny Porter, although she did not see much of Jenny till later years. Before I went to Blackpool in 1944 she had applied for a transfer back home and had obtained a position at Claremont School. The Head there decided to give her the A Class of nine- or ten-year-olds. She found this class very good and expected that the next year she would have to take her turn with a lower ability class. However, he asked her to continue with the same class and take them to the 11-Plus exam - this was quite a compliment. She developed a very good relationship with the Head, Mr Illingworth. He was very particular about spelling. Perhaps for good reason, for her glowing report at the end of the year read something like: 'The groundwork laid so well during the year has born (sic) fruit in the results.'

Millie was very active in the church. She had taught Sunday School, was a member of the Choir of which she was the treasurer, was in the church Badminton Club, was Secretary of the Womens Missionary Committee and had been appointed a Deacon shortly before I met her. There was a bit of a joke about joining the choir because there was an audition! Since the choirmaster was a close family friend this ordeal never eventuated.

All of the Haigh family had been very active in the church. Bert and Emma had been foundation members of the church when it was formed about 1909 and Emma had been very active in the Women's activities and had regularly attended the midweek service. Their marriage was the first to be celebrated in the new church. Bert was a shift worker and could not have done justice to a regular responsibility. However, he was a very enthusiastic member of the Order of St John. On one occasion when he was at Central Station there was a disastrous fire with a number of casualties and he was in the forefront of emergency medical aid. He was appointed an Honorary Serving Brother of the Order of St. John and had a medal to mark the event - this was the highest honour that a 'commoner' could receive in the Order. He was presented with the honour in May 1924 in London. On one occasion his eldest daughter Jessie had a slight accident which her father bound up but thought she had better go to the doctor for it to be checked. When she came home she was asked what the doctor had done. 'Nothing', she said, 'He asked who had put the dressing on'. When

I said you had done it he just said, ' Well, if Bert Haigh did it, there's no need for me to do anything. Off you go, lass'.

Another long-term commitment of his was to the National Union of Railwaymen's local committee. He was Secretary of the Blackpool No 1 Branch for twenty-one years and he kept his books meticulously. He was a very neat writer and this was reflected in the records he kept. Executive committee meetings were often held at their home and men would bring in subscriptions for him to handle and record. He was also Secretary for the Railwaymen's Convalescent Homes and the Railway Ambulance Corps.

Millie was very fond of her Dad and he was very fond of her. He was careful and methodical over his finances. His pay during those pre-war years was only about three pounds a week and he would hand this over to Emma. She was very poor at budgeting her money and was always waiting for the next week's wages. In addition to his wages he received tips from passengers for handling luggage and other services. From this source he obviously set up a savings fund. When the opportunity came to buy the rented house in which they were living he was able to come up with something like three or four hundred pounds - Emma would never have been able to do that.

Millie was endowed with a very high intelligence, did very well in her chosen field of teaching and was a well rounded personality. It is not much wonder that the New Zealand airman with no firm other attachment was smitten and eventually married her and brought her to New Zealand. One of the best day's work he did in his life.

Millie had three sisters, all older than herself. They were a very tight knit family and enjoyed their family life very much. Money was not plentiful in the family and this meant there were not sufficient resources to enable advanced educational opportunities. Their father was only a railwayman and his full wage only just kept the family going. Emma was a good manager of her home, though she lacked budgeting skills. It was difficult of course to budget with a very small income. She made clothes for the girls and made an annual visit to the very well-known Blackburn market. These markets are a popular and abiding feature of English life and offer very good bargains. As a Railwayman's wife she would have been entitled to a token fare so the trip itself was not expensive. I recall Millie saying that they all had new frocks for the Sunday School Anniversary at Station Road Church each year.

Jessie was the oldest of the family, born on 3 July 1912. She must have been a very attractive young girl with quite a vivacious nature. Her mother would have been happy to have kept all her girls at home but Jessie was ready to enjoy a somewhat wider life. She left secondary school fairly early and found employment with Boots the Chemists in their Cosmetic department. She quite loved her job. Her enthusiasm was recognised and she was sent to Elizabeth Arden in London where she received training in the marketing of Elizabeth Arden products. She attracted boyfriends and I gather that this was not quite welcomed by her mother. Eventually she married Harry Fish who was somewhat older than many of her previous boyfriends. Harry was really a lovely fellow. I met him during my year in Blackpool and grew to like him very much. He was very caring of Jessie

and their two girls, Jean and Margaret, and became well liked by the family even if Jessie's choice of an older man was frowned on at first. He was employed by the Blackpool Borough Council in the capacity of caretaker and guard and he and Jessie lived in a 'tied' cottage at the entrance to the City Depot. At times he acted as chauffeur for the Mayor. Sadly, shortly after the war, he developed Leukaemia at a time when there was not nearly as much known about this disease as is known today. He was quite ill when Millie and our two boys went to England in 1950 and died at the age of fifty later that year after only about 12 or 13 years of their marriage.

Facing his terminal situation, Jessie made use of one of her gifts by enrolling in night classes for Tailoring and Dressmaking with the intention of qualifying for teaching these subjects. She did this by dint of very hard work and at some expense to her girls as it involved being out of the house on evening class nights. Jean, at the age of about 12, became baby sitter for her younger sister Margaret. By this means Jessie was able to do part-time teaching for a number of years and eventually gained a post at Palatine School where she stayed until her retirement. As the Depot house was an employment-related perk she had to vacate this on Harry's death. She and the girls lived in a Council house at Bispham for six years. Then her Uncle Fred's wife died and Jessie was able to move in with him in return for giving him care. On his death some years later she was able to take over the house at 3 Kingsway which remained her home until she went into Abbeyfield House in Lytham. She reached 87 years of age and died when I was in England so I was able to be at her funeral. I was invited to say Grace at her funeral tea.

An amusing incident which occurred the day she died is worth repeating. I was in Scotland with Eric and Margaret and returned to Mari Vale late on the day of her death. Margaret and Jean had been busy with the details of registering the death and making arrangements for the funeral and it was decided to go to The Croft for dinner. There were seven or eight of us and the waitress had taken our orders. She came back to ask Eric how he wanted his steak done. On the spur of the moment with his mind on other things he could not quite think of the term 'Well Done' and blurted out 'Cremated!' As Jessie was to be cremated this quite broke up the party and enabled everyone to relax.

Jessie claimed an acquaintance with Violet Carson, the Ena Sharples of early Coronation Street. Violet lived next door to a friend of Jessie's in Poulton for whom Jessie had been house-sitter during her holidays. Jessie was Secretary of Station Road Baptist Church when it was closed and the building demolished. She did a tremendous job of supervising the disposal of the materials from the building, the interior furniture and other artifacts and of course the land. She was a person of considerable ability.

Winnie was the second daughter of Emma and Herbert, born 15 March 1914. I got the impression that Winnie grew up a bit under Jessie's shadow. She had a very sensitive nature and Millie felt that she might have got the backlash at home from Jessie's adventures in romance. She was also a very intelligent girl but again left school fairly early to start contributing to the family purse. Like all her sisters she was brought up in the atmosphere of Station Road Church and was involved in all the church activities. She obtained a posi-

tion in the Blackpool Cooperative Society where she worked in the dairy office. She was employed there all her working life and eventually rose to very a responsible position. It is probable that her gender prevented her from advancing to an executive level as she might have done today. She was for many years Senior Wages Clerk and this must have been a very demanding job. 'The Co-op' had a wide range of departments and branches including butcheries, grocery stores and an Undertaking Department so there would have been a wide range of rates and hours to calculate. For many, many years this would have been a manual undertaking and she was often late home on payday.

Fairly early on she became involved with the Scouting movement, first with the Brownies and later in the Cubs. She continued this interest all her life and rose through the ranks until she became District Commissioner for the Blackpool and Fylde District. She was very lovely with her young Cubs.

Winnie, as I said, had a very sensitive nature. I think Millie was more akin with her than her other sisters. She had a knack of choosing the right gift for birthdays and Christmas and was also aware when others were not so happy. She was a lovely person and I was very fond of her. It was a great joy to have her stay with us in New Zealand for a year in 1954.

Winnie was an Asthma sufferer. I am not sure at what age this made itself apparent but it became more and more serious as she got older. Any type of cold or infection would set it off and she frequently needed to have days at home on sick-leave. In her later years she had to use a machine called a nebulizer fairly regularly. An hour or so's treatment on this machine would give her relief which would last for some time. It was finally a severe asthma attack which triggered her death in her sister Marjorie's arms as an ambulance was coming to help. It was lovely that Ron and Lesley were in England at the time of her death and Ron had the privilege of saying Grace at her funeral tea as I did later at Jessie's.

Marjorie was two years younger than Winnie and was born on 26th April 1916. One of her great gifts was her music. She not only learned to play the piano but could also harmonize an air without a score. When I came to Blackpool her talent on the piano led to many a musical night centred on her playing. The Haighs often entertained airmen stationed in Blackpool, and they frequently unearthed some very good voices among them - not counting myself I hasten to add for at that stage I could not follow a part.

When I first went to Blackpool Marjorie was working with the Land Army for a family called Bell at Papcastle in the Lake District. She carried out a full range of farm duties in this role. The Land Army was an organisation enabling women to maintain local farm production in England in support of the war effort. She had previously worked in the office of a shoe manufacturing company owned by close family friends. The office was situated just over the lane at the back of her home and for years Emma Haigh took morning tea across for the office staff. Marjorie was very accurate to the point of being fussy and it was a joke in the office that Marjorie would double-check the Ready Reckoner.² She must have been

² For the information of younger readers a Ready Reckoner was a comprehensive set of printed multiplication tables designed to save a lot of complicated calculations of the order of for example the cost of 525 pairs of shoes at 17 shillings and 9 pence each.]

a very conscientious worker. I believe that the opportunity to join the Land Army enabled her to leave an embarrassing situation as the boss, a man with a dry sense of humour, was accustomed to making snide remarks which today would be classed as harassment. After the war when the role of the Land Army collapsed she enrolled for a 'pressure-cooker' course of teacher training at Harrogate in Yorkshire. She then taught infants for many years in schools near Blackpool which enabled her to live at home.

Marjorie took up the pipe organ, taking lessons from the organist of the Anglican Church only a block or so from Station Road Church. Eventually she earned her Letters on the instrument and this skill enabled her to deputise for Arthur Brammer on the pipe organ at Station Road.

When Millie and I were engaged and my brother Wilfred came to meet my in-laws-to-be, he and Marjorie met and became very attracted to each other. He visited her at Bell's farm in Cumbria and spent a day harvesting for them on one of his leaves. They came up to Keswick for a day out while Millie and I were on our honeymoon there. The romance did not lead to marriage. The reason was not disclosed but I think that her mother was so upset at the thought of Millie going to the ends of the earth that Marjorie may have decided she could not add to that woe.

Marjorie once said to me that when I married Millie I became one of the family. There was whole-hearted acceptance of me in that sense from the beginning. Marjorie eventually left her estate equally to her sisters' families, dividing into five the share falling to Millie who had predeceased her in order to give me a portion. I was very touched by this.

It is of passing interest that, although our family lives so far away, one or other of us was actually in England at the time of each of Millie's sisters' deaths. Ron was there when Winnie died, I was in England myself when Jessie passed away and Susan visited England during Marjorie's last illness although she had to leave for home a few days before the end.

I admired all of Mille's sisters and became very fond of them.

Wedding and Honeymoon

It was 27th June 1945. It was a nice day. There had been showers overnight but the clouds were clearing during the morning and it eventually turned into a nice afternoon and a lovely evening. Wilfred and I were lodged with Mr and Mrs Spencer. She and her daughter Enid were in the choir and they were both among the regulars at the church. She made a fuss of us. Mr Spencer asked for our shoes and shined them up "good and proper". She was pressing our uniforms and shirts and made sure we were fit to appear. Bless her, she was really nice. She ran a boarding house and Wilfred used to stay there when he visited Blackpool. Enid had a truly beautiful voice and from time to time sang solo in church. She later married and she and her husband became missionaries. The Spencers moved to the South Coast and we never saw them on any of our trips Home.

Millie had a busy couple of days leading up to the wedding. She had bits of sewing to do. Wilfred came and took Marjorie up town shopping. Millie made out a 'cake list' of people to whom a piece of cake was to be sent. The day before the wedding we took the cake to The Cramonde. We met Bertha and Valerie at the station. Later we met Dot and Frank's train and they came to meet Millie and her family. They had come all the way from Devon, travelling from 7am till 9pm. Mr and Mrs Day from Liverpool, Wilfred's friends and now ours, came for the day and were able to get home that night. Millie said she stayed up till 2am pressing and packing. On the Wednesday, The Day, she was up at 8 o'clock, finished packing and locked her case and took flowers to the church. Then she had to get dressed with Winnie and Marjorie helping or hindering. There was a lot of giggling and badinage. At one stage Millie thought to herself, "Should not these girls be helping me?". They were too busy getting themselves up!

She made it to the church escorted by her Dad. She said afterwards that as they passed the Royal Oak clock she was surprised to see it was only just two o'clock. She was

in the church just three or four minutes past. Wilfred and I had come from Spencer's in a taxi with Bertha and Valerie and after chatting with some of the guests went into the vestry with Rev Darvell. Then we came out to wait at the front of the church and it was a thrill as Millie came and took her place beside me. Millie had requested Arthur Brammer, the organist, to play Handel's Water Music before the service, this being one of her favourite pieces of music. Mr Darvell took the service very nicely and Wilfred produced the ring with no hesitation. The registrar, Mr Jump, was there in person with the official register and after the signing it we came out to the front steps of the church. Margaret Snape, a fellow teacher at Claremont School and a lifelong friend, handed us a letter addressed to Mr and Mrs Elder from her Headmaster with his good wishes. The photographer was rather terse with little Margaret Fish, one of the flower girls, and she dissolved into tears and would not be consoled. Jean looked to be on the verge of tears too. I think she thought that Auntie Millie was getting into a car then and there to go off to New Zealand and she would not see her again. A press photographer took pictures for the local Gazette and Herald. This one was good as it held all of the immediate families. As we entered the car to drive away there was a chorus of voices calling "Miss Haigh! Miss Haigh! Miss Haigh!" They were girls from her class, one of whom handed her a Cupid doll. School was still "in" so they should not have been there - and anyway she wasn't Miss Haigh any more! The official photographs at a studio in town were not a great success. It was the photographer's half-day and he had come in specially and was keen to get it over with as soon as he could. After the photographs we gathered at the Cramonde for the reception.

Here's the menu for the Breakfast: Tongue and Salad, Blackcurrant Tart and Ice Cream, Cakes and the Wedding Cake. Mr Darvell, in a nicely worded speech, proposed the toast to The Bride and Bridegroom and I hope I suitably replied "on behalf of my wife and myself." Mr Brammer spoke to the Bride's parents and Mr Day to the Bridegroom's parents. Here is a quote from my letter home. "He did it very nicely begging leave to draw the company's attention away from the Bride for a few moments and to remember those who, through distance, could not be there. He suggested that, subject to the difference in time, they would be thinking of us that day and Millie and I know that you would be." There was no reply to that speech but the telegrams followed immediately and the first one was from my parents.

I quote from my next letter. "You will be as pleased and thrilled as we were when you know that your letter no 183 addressed to Eccleston Rd arrived on our wedding morning. We read it together at the reception and we were really delighted that that one of all should have come through so speedily. In ten days! It was really wonderful." So it was home to Eccleston Road for Millie to get changed and for us to get away to our lodging for the night - The Royal Oak Hotel at Garstang. The reception broke up immediately we had left and descended on Eccleston Road to see the presents as people do on wedding occasions. So the house was pretty crowded as we prepared to be off. We had intended to go by train but as we were late for that we decided to go by bus. The taxi driver asked where we were going and I said I would tell him after we were started as there were many ears listening! At the bus station where we had a wait of ten minutes or so, we saw the Dilworths in the queue for the Hambleton bus nearby. We did not attract their attention! After checking in at the

hotel we went for a longish walk by a field path almost to Scorton in the long evening light. The skies had cleared and the wind had dropped and the evening was really lovely. After the rush, bustle and excitement of the day it was wonderful to relax, each with the person we most liked in the world. No supper was available by the time we got back to the hotel.

The next morning we had porridge for breakfast and scrambled eggs. We caught a bus for Lancaster about 10 o'clock and went on by train to Keswick, arriving in the early afternoon to find that Mrs Wilson had a nice lunch ready for us. Mrs Wilson was catering for us but we had a bedroom and bathroom two doors up the road. My letter about this day ends, "Altogether we had a lovely day on Wednesday. Both Millie and I enjoyed every minute of it and we both thought that Mr Darvell conducted the service very nicely and feelingly. His speech at the reception too revealed very sincerely his regard and affection for both Millie and for me and he put very nicely the good wishes of one and all."

Keswick has always been a special place for us since 1945. It was a special place for Millie long before that as she often went there for holidays. Most of them were with parties staying in youth hostels. She had an Ordinance Survey map of the Lake District which was very precious to her. We took it to England on our later visits, though we were not then up to the hill tramps she had done in her younger days. She used to tell of one occasion when she was walking with the 'slow' group and was one of the last in it. The whole group would stop to rest and most would get up and start off again just as the laggards reached the rest spot. She told Winnie as she sat down on a stone, "I'm staying here for five minutes no matter what" or words to that effect. On our honeymoon, she was revelling in introducing me to her favourite holiday area.

After some lunch on our first day, we walked out to the lakeside of Derwentwater at Friars Crag and then across towards Crossthwaite where there is a very old Parish church. Following some tennis next morning we headed towards Watendlath, famous for Judith Parrish, but got turned back when it started to rain. I had no coat and got fairly wet before we reached home. The next day we took sandwiches and headed up Catbell, a sharp ridge on the west side of Derwentwater. It was a stiff climb up a series of rises with gentler slopes between. At the top of the ridge, which extended on for some considerable distance, we had wonderful views down either side. Skiddaw was higher to the north, over 3000 ft. There were two lakes in view, Derwentwater and Bassenthwaite, and at the head of the first the Jaws of Borrowdale and beyond that some of the higher peaks of the Lakes District. Again the cloud thickened around the tops and it threatened to rain so we descended down to Borrowdale and walked right round the lake to home where we arrived very wet indeed. On Sunday we went twice to a Congregational Church where the preacher had been a missionary in Papua New Guinea. A telegram on Monday advised that Wilfred and Marjorie would be arriving on the 11 o'clock train. We walked up Latrigg, the footstool of Skiddaw, and Wilfred and Marjorie enjoyed acting as love birds as we sat in the sun facing South. We, of course, were the staid married couple! Wilfred and Marjorie returned to Blackpool by train in the evening.

It was fine the next day when we took a bus to Seatoller from where we slowly

walked up one of the steepest roads in the Lake District. After the first kilometre it levelled out up to the pass at Honister Hause. The road drops very steeply down from there but we left it to take a steep mountain track on to Fleetwith Pike. The track ran along the top of the Pike and we stopped in a sheltered spot near the top to have some of the lunch we had brought with us. This spot was only a few yards back from a very steep drop of probably 1500 feet to the valley floor below to which the road had descended. On the opposite side of the valley the ground climbed very steeply up to another high ridge - all very spectacular. After lunch we wound our way down the very steep west shoulder of the Pike to Lake Buttermere. We passed a cross where someone had fallen on this descent and died, so we took great care. At lake level we followed the road round the edge of the lake to Buttermere Village a further two miles or so. It was about eight miles back to Keswick, firstly up a considerable climb, then for about six miles down a gradual fall. We had been promised a chicken dinner that night at Mrs Wilson's at six o'clock. That was our incentive to stride out in order to make it in time and we finished very tired. In such ways we spent about ten days in Keswick, taking walks, rowing out to an island in the lake with our lunch, playing some tennis and generally exploring among the hills, lakes and valleys, all while enjoying each other's company. On the Monday we returned to Blackpool for a couple of nights and then headed to Manchester. As we changed trains at Preston we met Carmen Miller on the platform. Millie used to travel with her at weekends when they were both teaching in Manchester and over the years we visited her a number of times at her home in Manor Rd, Fleetwood. Dawn was with us on one of these visits and ever after Carmen always asked after her. I think she was delighted to have met one of Millie's children. In Manchester we visited Wheeler St school at which Millie had taught and met some of the staff she had known. Then we went out to Altrincham for a night with Judy Bayley. Judy was a Domestic Science teacher and lived in a school-owned house in which she carried out practical housework and cooking classes. She did not have a double bed so for the newly-weds she 'widened' a single bed by means of chairs aligned along the side of the bed with cushions as a mattress! At that stage we hardly needed the extra width but at least it ensured that one of us did not fall out of bed! Then to Broadbottom where we met Margery Hull, at whose home Millie had lived when her school was evacuated during the early days of the war. Also in Manchester we found in Lewis's home merchandise store some double bed sheets and matching pillow cases "off coupon." We snapped them up for Millie's trunk on the journey to New Zealand. Back in Blackpool and at work I received good wishes from unexpected people on the station and in the mess who had seen the picture in the Blackpool Gazette.

I told the family back home what we had given each other for wedding presents. I gave Millie a handbag and a small handy-sized Bible. Millie gave me a pair of cuff links and a tennis racquet. The Bible is intact but all the other things wore out and were discarded. I said in a letter home. "I must confess that we missed you all a lot at the wedding. We both enjoyed it very much indeed, but we would so much have liked it if you could have been there. Mr Darvell, in his prayer, remembered you, and the distance that lay between, and just at that moment I was thankful that we were in prayer, for I had to blink a bit for a few moments." One of Millie's friends was saying that it was really strange and marvellous to think that, but for the war, and but for so many little happenings, we would probably never have met. I remarked that we just rejoiced that out of it all, we had this joy.

While writing this story, I have marvelled at the depth of Millie's love for me, a fairly ordinary person, and that she should have been willing and brave enough to have faced the major upheaval in her life to come to New Zealand. There were aspects of this she did not fully understand at the time - like virtually robbing her parents of their future grandchildren - but I think she would still have made the same decision. I learned later that the family were up and awake here in New Zealand at 2 o'clock in the morning thinking of us and putting up their own prayer for our happiness. Allan reminded me, not long before his death, of being awake in Kew Hospital with all his family except Roland, at the exact time of the wedding. I was impressed with this as our difference in ages meant that we were not so very close. (His family all had Scarlet Fever at the same time.)

At Eccleston Road Winnie moved into the smaller bedroom and let us have her bigger room and double bed. It was also the sunnier room. This must have been a sacrifice for her though at the time we did not think it would be for long. I got permission to live out and applied for repatriation and for a passage for Millie. They made it plain that it was unlikely we would be able to travel together and we reconciled ourselves to that. However, they seemed to indicate that it should not be too long a delay. With VE Day passed and the cessation of hostilities in Europe the seas were suddenly safer and without the need for ships to sail in convoys the departure of ships had been considerably freed up. In addition the faster ships could sail at their own cruising speed whereas the convoys had been forced to travel at the speed of the slowest. I think this had a very great effect in speeding up the repatriation of servicemen.

Repatriation

We continued in the weekly round of life. Wilfred was already at Brighton waiting for shipment back home but kept getting short leaves and coming up to see us - or to see Marjorie! She was still in her Land Army job at Cockermouth but seemed to arrive from the north every time Wilfred turned up from the south - funny that! We enjoyed a visit to Harry and Jessie and the children. The girls were reciting to us with Margaret who was not yet three not bothering about words. At tea time she suddenly came out with the word 'marvellous' referring to something on the table so it was not because she couldn't talk. The weeks got busy - Deacon's meeting on Tuesday, midweek meeting on Thursday night and choir practice on Friday. One Wednesday afternoon there was a Sunday School picnic on the beach at Ansdell. Jean won a couple of prizes and Jessie was second (!) in threading the needle. I won the cricket ball throw - a light rubber ball - and won a jar of brushless shaving cream. In between these events Millie received her Wife's Allowance book with four weeks arrears - she thought it was something this getting married!

Flying-wise things were very quiet. One day we had a flight to Limavady, near Londonderry in Northern Ireland. I flew over and navigated back and was highly pleased with the result. A couple of days later I had a return flight to Leuchars near St Andrews in Scotland. This was a great opportunity to see more of the country from the air including the Lake District. I was posted to Northern Ireland for a ten-day course but when I told OC Flying of my imminent repatriation it was cancelled.

About mid-August No 3 School of General Reconnaissance at Squiresgate was being closed down. This move started to come into effect and I flew one of our planes up to Leuchars. We were allocated billets which were at first sight disappointing. Then fifteen of us caught a train three hours later to return to Blackpool. We changed at Edinburgh, at Carstairs and at Preston and arrived in Blackpool at five in the morning!! I took a taxi home

and was soon in bed. H Q at Blackpool had also been advised that New Zealanders were to stand by for repatriation. Four days later I flew another plane to Leuchars, this time to stay. In September Millie suffered an apparent tummy upset which turned out to be morning sickness. This raised a concern about whether the pregnancy would affect her time of sailing. We had been informed that they did not like wives who were over four months pregnant to travel. Later this seemed to be ignored and it may have been a relaxation arising from the end of the war. Wilfred was cooling his heels in Brighton and getting fed-up. However, he got short leaves on one of which he went up to Cockermouth and helped with the harvest. I'm sure the Bells were grateful and I'm also sure Marjorie enjoyed the company.

I was no sooner settled at Leuchars than I got leave. I left Leuchars by the 6pm train for Perth where I got a train straight to Preston and with a change there managed to arrive in Blackpool at 5am - these long night journeys! However, nothing is permanent. Two days later I got a telegram recalling me to my unit. So off I went on Friday back to Leuchars, arriving that night only to find that I should have been going to Brighton that day for repatriation. On Saturday I scooted round the station before things closed down for the weekend to get all my clearances - nearly twenty signatures - and packed my gear. A rather nice and strange thing happened as I was saying farewell to some of the chaps of the unit. As I was saying cheerio to one chap and shaking his hand, he said, "Thanks for coming." I was taken aback at first but quickly realised that he was saying thank you for coming over and helping us. It was nice of him to think that way. Once again I travelled overnight down to London and then on to Brighton arriving about noon on Sunday. Next day the whole place was in an uproar with a draft imminent and chaps like Wilfred being recalled from leave. I managed to get a 48-hour pass to go up to Blackpool to collect some personal gear. I took the night train to Blackpool, arriving about dawn. The next day I mended three or four punctures - my own and Winnie's - and attended to other clearing-up matters. We had a lovely afternoon tea with Jessie and Harry and the girls but came home early as Millie had decided to come south with me. We went down on the afternoon train to Jim and Valerie at Shortlands in Kent arriving mid-morning. Early next morning I was in Brighton. I had some trouble with my kitbag which had not arrived and returned to London to check for it at Kings Cross station and Victoria without any luck. So I spent three or four hours with Millie at Shortlands before going back to Brighton in the evening. The kitbag turned up the next morning. After parade that morning I was dismissed until Saturday morning so I went up and had a look round London with Millie and called at RNZAF Headquarters. They told us they expected that Millie would be able to follow me within a month or so. Millie had intended staying down south until I sailed but this news decided her to go back home on the Monday so that she could put in train her preparations for her permanent departure.

On 23rd Sept I sent a quick aerograph home reporting that I was on board. I had been drafted to an advance party with the job next day of directing the mass of airmen to their dormitories. Thus it was that I met Wilfred as he came up the gangway and he handed me a parcel from Millie with some oranges, a couple of grapefruit and a letter. Being on the advance party was a big advantage as I was able to select a hammock near a porthole - a source of fresh air. Later as we approached the Red Sea we wedged one side of a fruit

box in the porthole so that it protruded out into the wind flow and deflected extra air into the cabin. Mention of the hammock recalls the fact that the non-commissioned airmen were all in hammocks which were very close together. There was not over-much space for kitbags but we seemed to manage. The quarters were only used for sleeping as we were on deck for the remainder of the day.

The hectic days before my return home got under way prevented any round of farewells to friends who had been so hospitable over the war years. I boarded the ship four years and one day after I had sailed from Auckland in 1941. Millie and I had planned to go up to Scotland to see Mother's cousins but that plan went out the window. It was a pity. My unit had been transferred to Leuchars but I did not do any flying from there. My flying ended there after the final flight from Blackpool. I had completed a total of 866 hours 30 minutes flying either as pilot or as co-pilot.

So the long voyage home began. We were on RMS Andes, a ship for the South American run which had just been completed in 1939 or 1940 and had been commandeered for troopship purposes without ever having made her maiden voyage. She was a fast ship but there was nothing fast in the way they quietly manoeuvred her 26 000 tons out from the dockside into the stream. I recorded that it took from 3:15 till 5:30 to get from the dock to Plymouth Heads and the open sea. Two Lincoln bombers flew over as we were leaving the dock and four Sunderland flying boats gave us a spectacular 'shoot up' further down the harbour - a tribute to the boys from 'Down Under' who had come to help in the survival of Great Britain. It was Sunday 22 Sept 1945.

The atmosphere in the open cabin where our hammocks hung very close together was pretty thick by morning. On the first morning I was a bit woosy but I got up on deck and five minutes later was right for the rest of the voyage. We could see the lights of Spanish towns at Cape Finistere and Portuguese lights off Cape St Vincent. We didn't see Gibraltar much to my disappointment, passing the Rock at about one in the morning. I said that our ship was fast - she was covering about 500 miles a day at a speed of about 21 knots. We were enjoying lovely weather and we were soon into khaki shorts and shirts.

As we passed through the Mediterranean along the coast of Algeria - places like Bizerta, Pantellaria and Malta (although we didn't see that either) - our thoughts went back to the recent bitter war in North Africa and the see-sawing battles against the Afrika Korps in which so many of our New Zealand and British Eighth Army soldiers had been engaged. These events were very fresh in our minds at that stage.

We stopped at Suez and the Egyptian bumboaters soon ranged alongside. I bought a leather humpty for sitting on, to be filled later at home. Then there was the interesting slow sail through the Suez Canal - ships have to make a very minimal bow wave to avoid undermining the banks of the canal. I understand the canal is below the level of the surrounding land and from a distant view one sees only the superstructure of the ship - it looks very strange. Once through the canal and into the Red Sea we entered the Gulf of Aqaba to pick up some 4 000 NZ and Australian troops. The the ship was now full - very full. Our

voyage was non-stop from there to Melbourne. In the Red Sea it was hot - very hot and sticky. The ship was moving at about twenty-five miles an hour and there was a following wind of about the same speed so we were virtually in still air. Sleeping was difficult. Even our deflector could not bring air in to the cabin as there was no air-flow past the port hole. Conditions eased as we left the Red Sea and headed out into the Indian Ocean. At this stage the voyage entered a period of ennui. Day after day was so much the same - nothing to be seen but sea. True, we were making good progress but the ship was crowded, the weather was still hot and there was so little of stimulating interest. We eventually left the Indian Ocean, rounded the south-west tip of Australia and entered the Australian Bight. I was sorry for the West Australian airmen and soldiers. They could see the south coast of WA, their homes so close to us, but they had to go on to Melbourne and then travel back by train all the way across the Nullabor Plain to get home. As we crossed the Australian Bight the weather changed to a very cold southerly. Standing by the rail one night, I heard a New Zealander commenting on the sight of land - 'I always wanted to see an iceberg close up.' It was well into October and the spring was well advanced but these temperatures did feel cold so soon after the Red Sea heat. We were back in our 'blues' and I noted that for a change the two blankets in my hammock were not quite as warm as I would have liked. I don't recall if I had dismantled the air flow deflector in our porthole but I suspect so.

During the voyage a Bible Study group had been organised and about twenty or so of us would meet in a corner of a lounge fairly regularly for discussion. One of our leaders was Arthur Gunn, later a Presbyterian minister, and members included Colin McKenzie, Harry Yeoman, Wilfred and me. Colin also entered the ministry later. I also played quite a bit of bridge with three others and Wilfred and I met quite often and talked about the changes we would see back home. Wilfred, being an officer, was in a proper cabin though it was crowded too. One thing I feared as I came home was the possibility of putting my foot in it by asking after or speaking about a family member who had been killed. In England we often did not get much news of casualties in the army in North Africa and Italy and later in the Pacific. It would have been so very easy for me not to have heard of someone's death. By being careful I managed to avoid any very bad blunders.

Our ship spent a day in Melbourne after the quickest trip by a passenger ship from Southampton - I think 28 days. We spent twenty-four hours in port and were given shore leave. It was a sight to see shops with plenty of goods in them and to see the bright lights along the street even though we were there in daylight. As we crossed a street Colin slipped on a banana skin. He stopped in his tracks, looked at it and said in a surprised voice, 'I've heard of people slipping on a banana skin but never seen it. I haven't even seen a banana for four years and I have to go and slip on the first one I come upon.'

We left for New Zealand. After the speed of the trip from England it was soon obvious we were on a 'go slow'. We learned that we could have reached Lyttelton on Monday morning but it was Labour Day and a public holiday. The Railways were so heavily involved with special trains that day for race meetings, excursions and such that they could not cope with troop trains. This was a big disappointment. Our first landfall was through Cook Strait in a north-west gale with huge waves. Standing at the tip of the bow, we could see

the keel of the ship rising out of the water as we crossed each crest. We were travelling downwind so they caused us little discomfort. We South Islanders were fortunate that the ship went first to Lyttelton - North Islanders had to travel to Lyttelton and then back to Wellington before their journey home could be completed. A train was standing alongside the ship and those for the south were soon on board and starting the triumphal journey home. I believe our train carried only those going south of Christchurch. Bert Gardyne has written about his war experiences, including his homecoming. His wife Ada had gone up to Christchurch to meet him and was standing on the Christchurch station platform when his train went straight through without stopping. She managed to send a telegram to him on the train at Oamaru and he was able to stay in Dunedin overnight - she came by train the next day. On these trips every major station had the local bands out. There were scones, buns and cream cakes laid out on trestles on the platform and at each place there were hugs and tears as the locals met their families. It was a long day as the stops were all longer than regular trains observed. I said it was a triumphal journey and so it seemed. Wilfred and I saw Vic's girlfriend Winnie at Timaru, Uncle Fred and Auntie Lizzie at Oamaru, four of my father's sisters at Dunedin together with Auntie Fanny and four cousins. At Palmerston I was surprised to see Murray Malloch and he saw me again at Clinton as he was travelling south. He was looking forward to getting the extra help back in the office.

We reached Gore about 10:30 pm to find all the family at the station along with Uncle Will Gardyne and Auntie Olive and other friends, some of whom came home with us. We got to bed at nearly 4 in the morning. I found that the family had 'appropriated' Millie's studio portrait and had given it a prominent place on the mantle shelf in the lounge. At a family reunion when it was said how nice it was to be all together, someone said, "No, there's one missing," referring to Millie. It was interesting that they kept quoting phrases out of Millie's letter which seemed to have been almost memorised. That was nice for me.

Over the next few days we went through an orgy of visits and welcomes. Wilfred and I were asked to say a few words at a Youth Service in the local church. I've no idea what I said - perhaps something of my awareness that I was in the hands of God and that nothing could happen to me without His knowing. Someone must have been praying for me as I never lost my confidence in God in spite of the events and the illness I experienced.

Local events were soon to catch up with us. Allan rang from Balfour on a Saturday to say that Linda's father had died after a short illness. Then about 10 o'clock there was a call from our neighbour Teeny Aitken to say her brother George had died. They had been tailing lambs when he complained of tiredness and being unwell. He went to sit on the sledge for a rest and when they looked again he had fallen over dead. Mother and Wilfred and I went across and with another neighbour removed his working clothes and 'laid him out.' Then I helped Teeny with a number of phone calls and telegrams. I presume in due course the undertaker came and dealt with him. We had only been home about a week when these events happened. We also visited Sam Paterson, a neighbour whose health had deteriorated badly. He had lost six stone in weight and looked a shadow of his former self. They were appealing for the urgent return of his son from Italy on compassionate grounds but in the event Hugh did not get home in time. He finally arrived on the same

boat as Millie but his father had died.¹ Sam had been a WWI veteran and had struggled on too long on the farm with inadequate help during the war years stretched beyond his strength. He was, in fact, a World War II victim. Help during the war years was very scarce.

Worse was to come. Mother stayed nights at Aitken's after George's death but phoned on Monday morning to say that Alex had taken a bad turn and would Wilfred and I come over to lift the head of his bed as per doctor's instructions. The doctor came out and diagnosed a severe stroke affecting the whole of his right side. It was the morning of George's funeral so Wilfred and I helped get things ready for that which was at 11:30 am. At that time funeral services were held at the residence, following which the hearse led the procession to the cemetery for the interment. Before the service I dashed home for a shave and a change of clothes. After the burial in Gore there was time for a couple of errands then we had to make a hurried trip to Waikaka for Linda's father's funeral. I don't have a record of Alex's death date but I think it was just a short time later during which he was very helpless. It was arranged that Wilfred would take over the west half of the farm with the home on it and Bob Weir would take the lower half. Bob had to erect a home and buildings on his farm and in the meantime lived in the old house at Springdale. Both of them got Rehabilitation Loans at low interest rates to make the purchase.

A great change of atmosphere came with a visit to Uncle George and Auntie Vi at Rankleburn. They were our favourites and we always found Rankleburn very interesting. Uncle took us round most of the property which was a credit to him. He went into it with Uncle Andy about 1920. Andy sold out to form a cartage business in Tapanui and Uncle George had carried on alone.

Two stories from Rankleburn. The property was large with very big fields. His teamster set out one winter to plough 80 acres of grass. The field consisted of a long ridge between two main gullies but with minor gullies intruding on each side of the ridge. He was ploughing away going in and out of the lesser ridges between the small gullies on his way round. When he started he was able to do one round before lunch and one round in the afternoon. After a week or two some of the smaller side ridges were fully ploughed and the rounds became shorter and took less time. The second story. One morning Andy asked the teamster, maybe not the same one, why his nose was like Christchurch. He couldn't guess so Andy told him it was because it was on the biggest 'flat' in New Zealand. The man did not see the joke. That evening when he came home he told Andy he had nearly fallen off the discs about eleven o'clock when he saw through the joke - Canterbury plain = 'flat' = a dunce or a dumbell. Their daughter Ngaire had grown from thirteen to seventeen while I had been overseas so was greatly changed. She loved the farm and helped her Dad with all kinds of jobs. She had her own horse and a dog which was very fond of his mistress. She used to carry the dog with her on the horse. They were very interested to see the photos of Millie and of the wedding. This was the case with all the folk we visited. Wilfred and I did most of these visits together as we were both freshly home.

One Friday I met Mr Malloch in Gore and we looked over some offices in which he

¹ It was Sam's son Jim who had been killed in the battle of Britain and whose grave I had visited in 1942 in Orpington, Kent. Jim was one year below me at primary school at East Chatton.

was considering setting up a Gore branch. If he did so he would require someone there permanently and he virtually indicated he would ask me to do that. Telling that to Millie, I commented that Gore was a prosperous small town of about 5 000 people but Invercargill was much bigger at something over 21 000. With hindsight, it is interesting to note how they have expanded over fifty years even if there has been some shrinkage more recently. I spent the weekend in Invercargill and was welcomed warmly by pre-war friends, many of whom later became our joint friends.

When Bessie was going to Dunedin for a 'kitchen evening' for a friend who was getting married she asked me to make up a competition. I made one up on English cities. Examples:

The famous lamb is not from here - Canterbury
Many a landgirl may not like them - Cowes.
Strike a light , it's as hard as rock - Flint.

So the rounds of visits and welcomes continued. The biggest was a welcome evening at Knapdale to F/O Gilbert Wright, F/Lt Wilfred Elder and W/O Ivan Elder. When the opportunity was given for anyone to have a say an old friend of the family congratulated me on bringing home a bride and expressing the hope that Mrs Elder would soon be here also. To my surprise I was asked to reply to the welcome on behalf of the three of us. I duly thanked them for the welcome and the good wishes for Millie but did not add that she would be bringing a baby with her, one way or another. (At this stage it looked as if Millie would not get away that year and would then be too far advanced in her pregnancy to be considered.)

A letter from Millie told of her taking the opportunity of resigning as a deacon. She said Mr Darvell replied 'with a very pretty speech, saying all the usual things very gracefully. He made me laugh once or twice in the course of it. For instance, he said "Of course we have all watched the course of your little love affair with very great interest !!! He said some very nice things about you too, sweetheart - that they knew you were a good Christian and that if you hadn't been they'd have been more loathe to have me go over there."' She said Mr Darvell was hankering to take the SS Anniversary services in Gore sometime! By this time, 28th November 1945, Millie had received the notice of a berth in the Otranto leaving on 6th Dec. We were both very chuffed about this. I was able to get letters to her at Port Said, Fremantle, Melbourne and Sydney. The story of her journey belongs in a chapter of its own.

Millie's Story

My journey to New Zealand in December 1945

by Millie Elder.

Recorded by her on tape from the notes of an address to the Gore Women's Club

After the war Ivan came back to New Zealand on a troopship, leaving on September the 21st of 1945. It had been a shock to find that I would not be allowed to travel on the same boat but at least we were assured that I would be following very soon. But September came to an end and October came and went and I had heard nothing. As we got further into November I was more and more anxious because I knew that the War Office had another ruling - any wives who were more than four months pregnant had to stay in England until the baby was born. This was now going to rule me out. I was not very cheerful company in those days - in fact an old letter tells me that I cried for three days. My family got concerned about this and finally they told me that I really ought to pull myself together because I wasn't doing myself any good, nor the baby.

Gradually I did pull myself together and I went back to teaching at my old school Clairmont. I had only been there two days when the telegram arrived. Here it is, I have it in my hand right now. It says: *Do you accept passage on troopship embarking approximately 7th of December. Emphasise austerity accommodation. Reply immediately by priority telegram. RNZAF Headquarters, Strand, London.*

Well, what a blow. Was the offer just too late? I didn't know what to do. So that night I talked it over with my Dad when the rest of the family had gone to bed. He said something like this. "Well Millie, it won't be very nice for you travelling just now but it could be much more difficult next year going all that way by yourself with a very young baby." That sounded sense to me, so the next morning I sent off my priority telegram from the corner post office. It said firmly: *'Passage accepted. Send particulars.'* But I added honestly *'Is it understood shall be more than four months pregnant?'*

I don't know what our post mistress thought of that one. My father thought that I

had spoiled my chances - but I hadn't. I did follow the telegram with a message from both my doctor and my nurse. Anyway, in a very short time a fat letter arrived with a travel warrant and instructions about the luggage and so on. The sailing date had been brought forward to the 6th of December which was only about two weeks off.

I had a cabin trunk from my college days and in addition to that we filled two very solid, very very heavy packing cases with all my worldly goods. The bigger case alone weighed more than my baggage allowance of 200 lbs weight but we decided that we would pay excess if we were asked. Then it was back to waiting anxiously for a final letter to tell us how to get to the boat. Now I would have to leave home on the 5th to be ready to sail on the 6th and even by the last post on the 4th of December this important letter had not come. We decided to get the morning train to London and just see how things went on from there. My father and my sister Marjorie were coming to see me off. Another sister, Winnie, took a day off work to be a comfort to my mother who was very, very upset.

The heavy luggage had gone the night before and about a quarter to eight in the morning we set off. I turned to wave once but I didn't dare to do it again. A few steps down the road we met the postman and he had the precious letter. This was a minor miracle for he was about 20 minutes earlier than he usually came. So we read the letter in the train. It told us to make use of the Railway Transport Office if we had any problems and these people were marvellous. They lent us a corporal who took us to a transport yard and there they put my big heavy luggage into an open army truck and we three went with it plus a lot of soldiers. In no time at all we were bowling across Waterloo Bridge to Waterloo Station. There the heavy pieces were checked straight to the boat and we caught the next train to Southampton.

All three of us were able to use the overnight accommodation provided and we met lots of girls who were to be on the boat the next day. In the morning my papers and passport were all checked and after lunch three green buses took all the people from the town who were going to the boat down to the docks. There she was – our boat, the Otranto. A ship of the Orient Line and very fine she looked in her green paint with white trim and two cream funnels. She looked huge to us as we stood on the docks. I had to crane my head right back to look up at the bridge. Our families were allowed on board and were invited to afternoon tea. My people were impressed. Marjorie wouldn't have minded being a stowaway and I think my father was relieved to be able to carry a reassuring report to my sad little mother.

The ship didn't sail that night until about half past eight but at five o'clock my family had to leave to catch the train home. I waved them goodbye from the ship's rail and as I turned away I suddenly felt quite awful, totally alone and isolated and bereft in a way I had never felt in my life before and very conscious that this was a major turning point in my life. Which of course it was. My diary says for the umpteenth time that week that I was in tears again. But there was a lot to do. Nearby was a girl called Peggy that I had met the previous evening and we decided that we would stick together. I had been given that day a boarding card which said "Mrs M Elder, 1st Class, Cabin C11, Berth 8" and someone had written "Lower Berth" at the bottom in red crayon. Peggy and I were interested to find out

what those austere conditions were going to be that we had been warned about. Well the cabin was a shock. It wasn't at all like the kind of ships cabin that you are probably imagining right now. It was more like a long, narrow dormitory with ten double bunks down the long sides. Ugly bunks they were too, made of unpainted grey metal. In the centre of the porthole wall was one hand basin with hot and cold water. And you won't believe this but it was quite true, we were each allocated one hook and half a drawer for a journey that was to last 38 days.

That was a little bit grim but even that wasn't what I was worrying about at that time. There were several girls already in the cabin who had their cabin luggage but my trunk was not there. What's more, I hadn't seen it since the day before on Waterloo Station in London and moreover there was a rumour going round that some luggage had been lost on Southampton railway station. So I went out into the corridor where I found a steward and I asked him if he had any ideas. Well, he said, it could be in the baggage room. But the poor fellow was already trying to do about six jobs at once so Peggy and I went off to find the baggage room to look for ourselves. The door was open and we went in. It was full of big to huge pieces of luggage and we climbed over some and squeezed behind others and shoved aside other pieces until we were quite exhausted. Actually it's only a few years ago that it occurred to me what a stupid thing this was for me to do in my condition at the time. Well, we were beginning to despair when we finally spotted my trunk under a lot of other stuff away in a far corner and after a while a couple of stewards brought it up to the cabin.

Meantime we had been called to boat drill and this we took quite seriously because the war was not very far behind us and these had been dangerous waters. After boat drill it was time for dinner. Now the first class dining saloon was really lovely, no austerity conditions there. It was a big room, painted white and furnished with round tables each seating eight. Glass and silver were both sparkling, everything looked very elegant. Lining the wall was a row of young waiters, one for each table. But it was the menu that really brought a sparkle to our eyes. There was one at each place setting, beautifully printed under the ship's logo. What we read, we just could not believe. It was to be a six-course meal and some of the food we had not seen since before the war. All the girls on my table decided we would begin at the top and we'd eat our way right through to the bottom. Of course we couldn't - we weren't used to meals of that size. My diary says I had soup, fish and the meat course and then I took an orange and went up to have my coffee in the lounge. The first class lounge was very comfortably furnished with lots of big leather armchairs, small tables and a beautiful grand piano – no austerity there either.

Well it had been a very tiring day, physically and emotionally, and we were all ready for bed. To our surprise the bunks were very comfortable. I was very grateful for that red crayon which gave me a low bunk without any argument. I had another perk - in the side wall alongside my bed was a wall heater. In the dark this gave off a cosy red glow which was very welcome on those cold November nights are you remembering that this is a Northern winter? My diary says that I was soon asleep. Well maybe I was but I didn't always get to sleep very quickly - sometimes when I got in bed it was a time when I felt terribly homesick.

Anyway the next day we explored the boat and got used to the routine. Just along from our cabin was a row of bathrooms and I loved the baths onboard ship. They were huge. The taps were huge too and the water gushed out from them like a torrent. However, there were two problems about them. The water was salt water and if you filled your bath well up it was quite difficult to stay sitting on the bottom without floating. Also our toilet soap wouldn't lather so we had to get special soap from the ship's shop.

Day followed day, followed day and there was sea - and sea - and sea. I was actually content myself because I had had a very busy time getting ready and it just felt good to sit and do very little or exactly what I wanted to do. I had taken plenty of books to read; I had two wedding present tablecloths to embroider; I had my baby knitting to start; I had lots of letters to write; and in any case I quite enjoyed just sitting and talking to people. Not everybody was content. The main problem was that there was nothing arranged for these women to do and this was nothing at all like a cruise ship. There was just nothing planned and some of these women moaned about this to Norman who was a ship's officer supposed to look after us. Also the ship was a dry ship. After all, could a troopship be anything else? Some of the girls got fed up about that but I'll say more about it later.

As we came to Gibraltar we certainly were looking forward to seeing the famous rock. After all, the straits were presumably narrow so though we weren't stopping we thought we'd see something. Sadly the daylight faded as we got close and we went through in the dark, only able to see a few lights on shore to port and to starboard as we passed into the Mediterranean. Even this was a bit of a disappointment too. We'd all seen picture postcards of bright blue skies and brighter blue water but that December the sky was cloudy so of course the water was grey and there was quite a sharp wind. However, a big excitement was coming up in just a few days. At Taranto in Southern Italy we were to take on board our main body of troops. Up till then the ship had been very lightly loaded with passengers. There were only a few servicemen and even fewer civilians apart from about 100 of us war brides, as we came to be called. Quite a few of us had young children and babies. It's quite probable that all the rest of them us were pregnant but nobody could have told that at that stage.

One of the teachers from the school I had taught at in Manchester happened to be serving in the British Navy at Toranto at that time and I asked Norman if there was any sense in sending a letter. "Yes", said Norman, "you write it and I'll get it over." So I wrote it and off the letter went. We did not go right into the Port but anchored out in the stream. The soldiers came aboard in landing craft that day, 150 to 200 at a time. They came and they came and they came the whole day from eight in the morning till almost eight at night. We began to wonder where they were putting all these soldiers - the ship felt to be bursting at the seams. Nearly 3000 came aboard that day. Well of course the ship was never the same after that. Though there had been nothing planned for our entertainment, we had at least been able to get good exercise walking around the decks. But now there were men everywhere. At first it took courage to go out on the deck at all because as soon as we appeared there would be all sorts of noises - cat-calls, wolf whistles and so on. But gradually we all got used to each other and things settled down. There were quite a few changes in

the dining room. Lots more tables appeared and these were filled with army officers. There had to be two sittings for meals. Women who were unaccompanied and had no children all had to go in the second sitting and this of course suited me because I didn't have to get up so early in the morning. The food remained at the very high standard that had been set the first day. We did lose the beautifully crisp breakfast rolls that we, who had been starved for butter during the War, so enjoyed plastering a quarter of an inch thick with butter. We also lost the big starched dinner napkins but those were a detail. The eight girls on my table had been getting on very well together and we asked the head waiter if we could keep our table and also if we could keep our young waiter because we found him to be excellent with quite a sense of humour.

Well, in the time that it's taken me to tell you that, we've sailed well down the Mediterranean towards Port Said. We had got a new cabin maid from Italy. She was a nice little thing but nobody could talk to her because she didn't speak English. It turned out that she was Polish and she actually spoke five languages - just not English. She was rather lonely so at last I spoke to her in French and I discovered that she was going to get off the boat again at Port Said. She was to meet her mother and father in Palestine. She had not seen them for ten years because the war had caught her as a student in Paris.

At Port Said she left the boat. She perhaps went on the boat that took our letters because we had been told that we could mail letters from Port Said. I had four letters ready to post to Ivan and a whole lot ready to post to my family and friends in England including, I think, some Christmas cards. We didn't stop at Port Said - the boat just carried on into the canal and the ship dropped down to half speed. Immediately we were surrounded by a crowd of small boats from which the owners were trying to sell us souvenirs. They were pretty little boats with a graceful curved sail - I think they were called furlookers. Twice in the canal the ship had to stop entirely to let other boats go past in the opposite direction. One of these boats was a troopship about the same size as ours. I think it was called the *Georgette* and it was full of soldiers going from the Middle East back home to England. All of us crowded the rails on both ships to see if we recognised anybody on the other boat. While the ship was stopped the men in the little boats were trying to sell all their wares. It was difficult because we were so high up and so far from them in the water. At last somebody had a bright idea and two of the boats were hoisted up on the derricks, right up from the water onto the ship and there their owners did a roaring trade. I bought a purse, a cigarette case and a wallet and we all had a lot of fun.

At the end of the canal we came to Suez and there we stopped for two days. The first day we took on oil and water and the second day we were to take on even more troops. As we were coming into Suez during the evening, I was standing at the ship's rail looking at the sights of the port. I had a terrible fright when suddenly right behind me there was an enormous crashing noise. I happened to be standing just in front of the place where the anchor chain was all coiled up on the deck and when the anchor was dropped into the water this chain rattled down into the sea with a tremendous noise. I nearly jumped out of my skin.

We had been warned to stay off the deck whilst the ship was taking on oil and coal and water because the stewardess said it wouldn't be very pleasant. She was right because our porthole had been open during the night and the smell of the oil was really quite sickening. The second day the ship took on about 800 more soldiers - where on earth did they fit them? By this time the weather was much hotter. One day the stewardess had said "I'm going to take all your blankets off the beds today". We all squealed "Oh no!" but she was right because from then on we could hardly bear the sheet. The ship's officers changed into their tropical whites and they all looked very glamorous.

Its time I told you more about the daily life on board ship and the atmosphere of the place. I seemed to have three lots of friends and the strange thing was that these friends didn't mix together, staying quite separate. There were the eight girls at the table and we got on splendidly for the whole voyage. There was one change - we lost one somewhere because we finished the journey with seven. All the meals were very pleasant and that young waiter looked after us beautifully. If for any reason we weren't feeling well he really mothered us. That was one lot of friends. In the cabin there were actually ten double berths and there could have been 20 beds but I doubt if there were more than 10 of us. Of course that's plenty. One of the girls, Barbara, had a little baby called Joy and I often was grateful for what my father had said because really it was not easy for these young mothers looking after small children all through that long voyage. For one thing they had always to eat with the children and they were on duty for 24 hours in the day. If they wanted to do the baby washing or their own laundry they had to find somebody to babysit. Of course we were all happy to look after babies while their mothers were busy. However, it must have been quite a strain because these babies were in cabins where there would be up to 10 other people and those mothers must have been trying very hard all the time to see that the baby didn't cry. I came to have a real respect for all the girls in my cabin. Across from me, in the top bunk, we had got a new cabinmate about the time that we were in Suez. We were told that she was a daughter of Lord Latham, a member of the aristocracy if you like. My diary says rather rudely, "nothing about her would give this game away, no air of quiet distinction, indeed she seems to be rather less reserved than the average English girl." But as we got to know this girl better I gave her 10 out of 10. She was obviously very much in love with her husband and she just couldn't wait until the journey was over and they'd be together again. Those were my sentiments exactly and as I say I gave her full marks. I gave full marks for the other girls in my cabin too. Many of them, most of them indeed, weren't having an easy time at all. Several were two or three months pregnant and they were still getting morning sickness. When this was added from time to time to sea sickness they were very miserable. Indeed, they were quite ill. When we had been about 16 days at sea the doctor was called to Cath who had been in bed most days at that time. One girl called Maisie had to go to hospital because she had very bad pains in the night and she nearly had a miscarriage. It all sounds rather depressing but these girls weren't downcast. In fact as I think back to them now I think of them as gallant. I don't know where any of them are now but wherever they are today I'm sure that they have been jolly good New Zealand wives and mothers.

Now the third lot of friends were the ones I spent the day with on deck or where

ever. This was a group of about six - Betty, Pearl, Edith, Peggy, Mary and me. This was the most oddly-assorted group of people you'd ever meet. How I came to be with them I just don't know but my diary lists these names from start to finish. Betty and Pearl were among those women who grumbled early on because there was nothing to do and also because it was a dry ship. Early on they brought a couple of ship's officers into their argument. One was Jimmy and one was Percy. Percy was the third officer and I'm wondering now whether it was part of his job to see that everybody was kept happy. Well Betty and Pearl soon discovered that the ship's officers had their own supplies of drink and it wasn't long before they were going down to the officers' cabins for drink and parties. Underneath all that, believe it or not, they were quite nice girls. I think they had been in the forces for five or six years and during that time they'd lived in camps so possibly their behaviour was not all that surprising.

We had not been many days out at sea before everybody seemed to know everybody and all that was going on. The ship just seemed to be like a village. Once the troops were aboard we heard that they didn't think much of some of these English girls and frankly I really wasn't very surprised. Jimmy seemed to me to have rather a drinking problem. I don't think I ever saw him completely sober and sometimes he was really quite drunk. Percy was different and he came to be a useful sort of friend. He told us all sorts of things we were wanting to know about the ship - when we were going to arrive at places and how long we would stay and what would happen while we were in port. He told us how many miles the ship had gone each day and when we would be expecting to arrive and so on. Also he lent me books. I don't know whether these were his own or from the ship's library but I was getting through a lot of reading and I was grateful for them. They were the kind I like to read by people like Warren Deeping and other authors we were reading at the time.

Around about the 17th of December a message came over the tannoy inviting anybody who wished to join a choir to practice carols for Christmas - so I joined the choir. The choir mistress was a Mrs Sullivan, wife of an Anglican Clergyman who was coming over to New Zealand to be the Dean of Christchurch cathedral. He later went back to London to be the Dean of St Pauls Cathedral. Mrs Sullivan was very musical and she soon had us knocked into shape. On Christmas Eve we went right round the boat singing carols. We began at the hospital and then we went to various places among the soldiers' quarters. I was quite appalled to see how crowded those soldiers were - sardines in a tin had more room than they had but they were really cheerful. After all they were going to be home in two or three weeks time and their spirits were high. They joined in with the carols and they sounded great. The last port of call was the First Class Lounge and when we got there, there was already a crowd around the piano. Nearly all these men were drunk but they greeted us boisterously. And, oh yes, they were more than happy to join in with the singing but it sounded just awful. It bordered on the blasphemous and the padre who was in charge decided rather wisely to cut that part of the carol singing short. The choir had been invited to a special supper of sandwiches and coffee which was rather nice. Unfortunately I missed a time change and hadn't altered my watch so I got there rather late. Apparently quite a number of other people did too which was a bit disappointing.

Now Christmas day was good news and bad news. Actually I was really terribly homesick all day but the ship, I must admit, did its best. We had all been given a parcel - just imagine 4 000 parcels. Where on earth had they stored these? My parcel was really quite a good one. It had a tin of pears, cream and condensed milk and biscuits and cake and chocolates. I was really impressed. I gave most of it to the soldiers because I don't think that they got fed as well as we did. I was at the morning service up on the boat deck where the choir sang again and with all the men's voices behind the choir the music sounded really beautiful. The padre who took the service started to tell the familiar old story of Joseph and Mary making the journey to Bethlehem and for the first time in my life I realised how very uncomfortable that journey must have been for Mary. Fancy being joggled about on a donkey when your baby was almost due. She'd left all her women friends behind; she didn't even know where she was to spend the night and her future was uncertain. Poor Mary. Strangely, as my mind was saying poor Mary, a warm little glow came into my heart. In the afternoon Father Christmas came to the children. This was a most pleasant little interlude. There were quite a number of small children on board, little toddlers most of them. It was just as well they were all young ones because some wag had written 'Joe' on the back of the Father Christmas outfit in white cotton wool. That evening I got ready for dinner rather early and I was sitting out on the deck with Mary really feeling pretty homesick. But there was an absolutely glorious beautiful tropical sunset, very very brilliant indeed. As we were watching this, over the tannoy came music from the Messiah. Mrs Sullivan had put on one of her records and that was a very lovely half hour. The meals that day were even better than usual - they certainly could not be faulted.

By the next day, Boxing Day, Christmas was at an end – full stop! This was absolutely amazing to me because in England Christmas is very special and it lasts at least a fortnight as you go round all the parties at all your Aunts' and Uncles' places and all your different organisations. On the ship Christmas was over by 12 o'clock on Christmas Day.

Somewhat about this time, we gained another cabin mate. This was a woman who was a colonel in a rather classy nursing division called the QAIMNS. - I think that stands for Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service or something like that. This person was really quite bossy. The first day that she was with us she turned the light off at bedtime when some of the girls were still reading and some of them were still getting ready for bed. That didn't make her very popular. It was as I said very hot by this time and during the night I got up to splash my face with cold water at the hand basin. This colonel was standing there and she grumbled to me about the hand basin and said it was filthy. Well filthy to my mind means dirty and the hand basin certainly wasn't dirty. But with ten girls sharing the cabin it was probably what you might call cluttered, as well it might be. However, I wasn't feeling like talking never mind having an argument so I just went back to bed and left her. We found out that this woman had been in several cabins and she just kept moving on. She was always complaining about something. Often that the babies were crying in the cabin - well babies do cry, don't they? But she didn't stay long with us because the next morning when we came down to get ready for lunch she was already packing to move off. We weren't sorry to see her go but we did wonder whether she'd ever find a cabin to suit her. Later we heard that they had finally found for her an empty six berth cabin - where

they found that I don't know but she was really better being by herself.

Now about this time we came to Colombo where we stopped to take on oil and water and probably fresh fruit and vegetables. Again we were out in the stream and there were lots of boats in the harbour, quite big boats, two hospital ships among them. One of these sailed during the morning. Once again there were lots of small boats clustered around the ship from which the owners were trying to sell their fruits. By this time it was just too hot and I was far too lazy to go and get somebody even to buy some for me though I would have liked that fresh fruit.

A few days after Colombo we run into quite a bad storm and I was really very seasick. At that stage of the pregnancy - I suppose by that time I must have been almost six months - it isn't funny being seasick. In fact it was pretty awful. I suppose I should have gone to the doctor but I didn't think of it at the time. It was really quite important that we should get something to eat but this was difficult - either we just couldn't make it to the dining room or we got there and perhaps had one course and then had to dash away to the bathroom. I used to think if only I could keep my eyes away from the porthole, which was one minute full off water and the next minute clear of water, up and down and up and down, if I could stop looking at it I would be alright but somehow that didn't work.

During those days we found the best place to sit was right at the front of the boat in the V of the prow and we would sit there on the deck and let the rain and the wind wash and blow over us. I was intrigued to find that the bridge, which had seemed at Southampton to be towering away so high up above the water, was getting liberally splashed with sea water. That was really quite interesting to me. Eventually we ran out of the storm and to our little waiter's delight were back on ordinary meals again. By the way, I should have told you that it didn't take us long at the beginning of the voyage to get quite used to six-course dinners and most of the journey we quite easily managed all six. He was a great little guy if you were off your food. On Christmas day I felt rather queasy and he said to me quite seriously, "If you're going to leave out the soup and the fish, I shall bring you two desserts" - and he did and they were both delicious.

There was good news as the storm finished, brought by Percy who used to be the news boy. He said that we were to land at Freemantle and would be able to get off the boat and have a day in Perth. Of course we were all quite excited about this. I made up a parcel of some of the things that I had bought in Port Said and also again at Suez where I had bought some more souvenirs. I put in a purse for my mother and a cigarette case for my father with some duty-free cigarettes and some sweets that we hadn't seen in England for a long time like sugared almonds and turkish delight. I made all these into a neat little package. We all had to go through an immigration check before we were allowed to land and of course this took quite a long time. We'd been told that we would have to pass a medical. I was wondering what this was going to be like but it turned out to be quite amusing. The immigration enquiries had almost finished and just as I was going out of the lounge onto the deck again one of these officials took me by the hand. My diary says 'he took me by the hand and he gazed into my eyes and he said, "You are well, aren't you?" "Yes," I said "Perfectly well" And

that was my medical examination.

All this was quite early in the morning and then a lovely thing happened. I heard my name over the tannoy and when I went to the orderly room the old RSM in there handed me a letter from Ivan - the first letter I'd had from him for many months!! It was a lovely letter. Among the things that he mentioned was that he had booked a holiday in Queens-town for us for about ten days after I would be arriving in New Zealand. This really started the day off beautifully.

Well I suppose it takes a long time to get so many people off a boat but eventually Mary and I stepped off the gangway and immediately a man put his hand on my shoulder, pointed to the parcel and he said "What have you got in there?" Well I really thought it was none of his business but I told him what was inside it and he said, "And what are you going to do with it?" I said, "Well I'm going to post it. I'm going to find a Post Office and I'm going to post it to my family in England." Well, he took the parcel off me and he turned it over and over, looking at it with sort of x-ray eyes, and he said "I think you'd better come along with me" and he called another man in uniform alongside him. So I called up Mary and they took us to a car and drove off. It was really quite strange but they pulled up outside the Post Office and as soon as I had handed my parcel over to the man on the other side of the counter these two uniformed fellows drifted off. By that time I had realised that they were just customs officers. But then the man behind the counter took the parcel and he too was turning it over and over. In the end he accepted it and it was posted to England for 3 shillings and 8 pence.

Mary and I went back to find a bus or transport and off we went into Perth where we had a most beautiful day. Perth of course is a very beautiful city and we really enjoyed every part of it. The shops were amazing to us. Shops in England by the end of the war were pretty empty and there were only the standard utility items to be seen there. But the Perth shops were stocked with all sorts of things. They didn't seem to think that there had been a war on. I bought two pairs of shoes and two pairs of stockings. We were very amazed at the fruit - there were strawberries there and peaches and apricots. Peaches were selling for sixpence apiece - peaches in England had been wrapped up in cotton wool and they were sold for 7 shillings and sixpence each.

Mary and I gradually made our way down to the park by the side of the river Swan. If you've been there you'll know that it opens out into a basin which is rather like a lake and we sat there by the water and ate our fruit and had a lovely leisurely rest. I remember that we were idly watching a man who was sweeping up leaves. That seemed to me very strange because sweeping up leaves I think of as an Autumn job and this was the middle of the Summer - but there he was sweeping up leaves.

We went back into town and had afternoon tea at a lovely little English alcove, arcade really, off the main street and there we met up with Betty and Pearl and one or two of the others. I suppose by about 7 o'clock I was really tired out. We were ready to go back to the boat but we found to our dismay that there was to be no transport until half past nine, a

full two hours away. However, there were a number of girls by that time who had gathered together wanting to get back on the boat. Among them was an army officer's wife and she went round to see what could be done. We did get back to the boat and you'll never guess what we went on – we went back on a fire engine of all things!

Once back on board, Mary went down to dinner but I just couldn't. I put all my gorgeous packages on the bed and just gloated over them and really enjoyed the rest of the evening. Gradually all the four thousand passengers came back on board, and they were coming back and coming back and coming back. I understand that some of the men had to be winkled out of hotels and other places. During the day, I must admit, we had seen some of them rolling around the streets and we had seen quite a number involved in fights. I did hear that there were one or two that they never managed to get back on board but that might just have been a rumour. Well of course we're pretty near the end of the journey now and we were very much looking forward to arriving back home. My diary runs out a few days after Perth but I can remember that I spent many of the last days packing and re-packing my trunk, trying very very hard to find room for several things which I had had to carry in extra parcels when I had got on board at Southhampton. I was successful in doing this so I was jolly pleased.

We finally heard that the boat was to land in Lyttelton on the 13th of January and our rather fussy little stewardess had said, "You girls will have to get up very, very early in the morning because there is to be a group of immigration officials who are going to come onto the boat way out at the heads, quite a distance away from Lyttelton. They're going to come aboard there so that all that paper work can be done before we land at the Port." So we all got up very early and eventually these men came and they went through our papers and when my turn was completed I stepped out onto the deck. We were still quite a few miles out from Lyttelton but guess what happened then on the deck. I ran right into Ivan Elder of all people!! He had, rather cleverly, stayed the night at Wigram Air Base where he had heard about this boarding party. He managed to stay alongside them and had come aboard the boat to the head of the harbour as well. Well we had a very nice five minutes there on the deck and then Ivan asked, "What were you going to do now?" I said, "Well I was going to go down to breakfast," and he said, "You'd better go, its going to be a long day." So I did go down to breakfast and the girls at my table were as jealous as could be. "Are all the husbands coming aboard?" they all asked - but of course they weren't, just Ivan. The nice little waiter said, "What have you done with him?" I said, "He's up on deck". "You go and fetch him", he said, "and I'll get some gear and set this empty place." I told you there were only seven girls on the table by that time. So I went and got Ivan and he came down to breakfast and of course it was just great - it was just marvellous. I was up on Cloud Nine!

By this time we were just about into Lyttelton and we picked up the hand luggage and eventually we came down the gangway. Once again as I stepped down I was accosted!! This time it was a photographer and he wanted a picture for the Auckland Weekly News. "Oh no," I said, "I'm in no shape for a photograph." "Oh come on," he said "It would just be head and shoulders". So he talked us into it and he took our picture with another couple. Now I had never seen that girl on the boat all that journey. In fact I realise now that there

were lots and lots of girls on the boat that I never really got to know. Anyway the photograph was taken. I had never seen that couple before and didn't see them again for about 40 years. Two or three years ago at Christmas time they turned up at a choir practice and were practising for the Christmas singing. By that time this young airforce officer was a retired Archdeacon of the Anglican Church. His name was Neville Selwood and his wife was Bette and they were in Queenstown taking the place of the Vicar over the long summer holidays. We got to know them at that time and they're really a very nice couple.

Right, well. The train was waiting there and we got in, along with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of soldiers and we spent the whole day in the train travelling down from Christchurch to Gore. It was really a very special day because as we stopped at every station, dozens and dozens of these men rushed off the train into the waiting arms of their mothers and wives and sweethearts. It was all so exciting. It felt like an historic occasion, all these men coming back from the war. On all the more important stations like Ashburton, Timaru, Oamaru and Dunedin there were pipe bands playing and there were women with endless trays of pikelets with cream and raspberry jam. I remember them especially as I had never encountered those before. Ivan and I spent the day talking and talking and talking and talking and, of course, all the while I was so busy looking out of the window too and seeing what this country was like that I had come to live in. We caught up or tried to catch up on the four months that we had been apart. It would have been about 8pm or even later when we got into Gore. Again there was a big crowd at the station but eventually we got through to the family car which took us out to the family farm. One thing about the journey that I do remember were the hundreds of rabbits that ran across the road in front of the car. We got out to the farm and there the family was waiting. They had made a very special supper and they had baked a special cake and they had iced it and it said "Welcome Home." And that was where I began to live the New Zealand part of my life.

Post Script.

I've just played this recording through and I realise it needs a bit of extra comment. I should have said at the outset that I was not only relying on memory. I had a day-to-day diary that I'd kept from about the 3rd of December right through the voyage till towards the end. I also had some letters that I had written to Ivan that are still in the house. But whilst everything that I've said in this talk is true, in some ways maybe it gives the wrong impression. The talk was prepared to give to the Travel Club in Queenstown and I needed to limit it to an hour at the most, which means that the whole journey had to be condensed into that time. Now the journey was 38 days which is about 5 and ½ weeks. The story sort of gives the impression there was something happening all the time but this is not true. At the time the journey seemed to be absolutely interminable. All of us were just waiting and longing for it to come to an end. There'd be an entry in my diary that says "This boat has only done 397 miles yesterday". Ivan came home on the Andes and his boat did a record trip so our boat by comparison seemed to me to be slow. Percy used to get a bit concerned that I thought his precious boat was slow but there's an entry in my diary that says "I could just do with getting behind this boat and pushing it!!"

Then too, most of the people really had problems of one kind and another. I came

to feel rather sorry for Mary for instance. She was from Yorkshire and her Yorkshire accent was really quite strong, much stronger than my Lancashire one. The girls made fun of her - I thought it was rather mean but they did. Towards the end of the journey, Mary seemed to me to be getting quite jumpy. A little incident that was quite trivial she made into a really big deal and wasn't speaking to people for two or three days. I finally tumbled to the fact that whilst the rest of us were longing to arrive in New Zealand, Mary wasn't so sure. She wasn't married. She had been engaged to a fellow called Tom for five years during which time they hadn't seen each other. Now she was coming to New Zealand presumably to be married and I think she was pretty nervous of what was going to happen when she arrived.

All of us knew that life was never going to be the same again for us as it had been before we got on board the boat. We weren't sure, to be honest, how we were going to fit into this new life. So everybody had a few stresses and strains. The interesting thing I find now is that when we got off the boat, not one of us, not any girl that I ever saw, took any names and addresses of other girls which now seems to me to be quite incredible. So I don't know where any of these girls are. There are other things that I don't know. I don't even know, for instance, whether they all travelled first class. If I was given a first class ticket, why should they not have been given one? I just don't know. In a recently published book about war brides, one girl who said she travelled on the Otranto talked about conditions which seemed quite different from what I had found. However this girl was wrong to my knowledge on other particulars. For instance, she said that we arrived in New Zealand on the 2nd of January which was absolutely out because we definitely arrived on the 13th. So if she was so badly wrong on that maybe she was relying on memory and she had remembered some other things wrongly.

As I said before, I had three groups of friends. There was an eight and a ten and a six and that adds up to about 24 out of 100. I honestly don't know why I didn't meet more. I suppose I'm conscious of having met possibly another 10. It could be that the rest of the girls were in a different part of the boat and of course being on a different sitting for meals I wouldn't have seen them very often.

It seems rather strange to me now, thinking back, that on a boat on which there were 4 000 passengers as well as probably about at least 1 500 to 2 000 or more crew, that really a lot of the journey seemed to be a lonely one. Yet I must admit now that the people who organised the trip did do a good job and they made the journey as comfortable as they could for us. The staff on the boat really took very good care of us. I was interested to read a little incident that was reported in my diary towards the end of the journey. I suppose by this time many of the girls were looking as though they were pregnant. One night I went into the lounge to find it quite full. I looked around for a seat and finally found one. One of the stewards came right across the lounge from the bar quite concerned because I was sitting in a part of the room that was hot which I thought was quite incredible. They really did take care of us as well as they could.

Another thing that I find surprising now is that the journey cost us nothing. I didn't pay anything at all for my ticket and nor did Ivan. So presumably we had this journey, this

first class journey as it was in a lot of ways, at the tax-payers expense. That rather cautious comment on the original telegram that said "Emphasise austerity conditions" did make us worry initially about what we would find but apart from the crowded conditions in the cabin there really was nothing austere about anything else. The rest of the ship seemed to be operating as normal so far as we were concerned. It certainly wasn't like that for all the poor old soldiers who were in crowded quarters. But for the girls who were on the boat our conditions were comfortable.

It was an epic journey and I have found it quite interesting, all these years later in 1992, to read back and think about a voyage which I haven't really given much thought to for many a long year. It's quite interesting to go back and read about your thoughts when you were just in your twenties.

Since there seems to be still some tape left on this side, I thought I might as well add other things that I have left out on this subject. One thing that I have not mentioned is a problem that I had with being thirsty. This was really quite a difficult one for me. I couldn't drink tea because it made me feel sick and the water on board tasted funny to me too. I did have coffee after dinner at night but what to drink during the day? Although the ship was a dry one there were bars selling soft drinks and I think they must have opened at English pub hours. I know that I was always more or less standing outside the door just longing for them to open. I was having a giggle the other day to think that I must have been like Seth in Emmerdale Farm, waiting for the Woolpack to open and always being about the first customer. The drink that I had just about all the time was grapefruit juice - a double grapefruit juice with ice was my regular order and the men in the bar soon got to know that. It was really delicious and I made it last as long as I possibly could and then I'd go in and buy another. What I would have done without those grapefruit juices I really don't know.

On some troopships there were many more than a hundred war brides. Really I think that was probably a small number - one boat carried as many as 600. I realised after a time that there must have been a great number of women who came to live in New Zealand at that time and I read recently an estimate that there could have been a hundred thousand women who married New Zealand servicemen during the war and came to live here. I must admit that the figure surprised me - a hundred thousand is a big number. Then I read that this was almost balanced by 80 000 New Zealand girls who married American soldiers and went over to live in the States after the war.

By the way there was a sequel, as some of you know, to that taking of the photograph as soon as we landed in New Zealand. The picture made the centrefold of the Auckland Weekly News which at that time was a big sort of weekly magazine that many people in the country took regularly. There were usually about eight glossy pages in the middle of this magazine that were all photographs and on the centre page of one edition there were pictures of the landing of the Otranto. There's a picture of the boat there with all the men crowding the rails, the men who still had to wait to disembark in Wellington, and there were pictures of people who had been on the boat. Now the picture was first published in the paper, as I say, in January of 1945. Much more recently there have been books made of the

more interesting of the photographs from these weekly news magazines of bygone years and these have been bound in decades of the 1930's and 1950's and 60's. I was interested to see that there came eventually a book of pictures from the 1940's. Would you believe it, there is this page of pictures of the Otranto. So lots of our friends in Queenstown here saw this and said, "Oh I saw your picture the other day." There it was once again after probably 40 years at least.

One thing I didn't mention when I was talking to the travel club - because as I say I did have to keep this story within bounds for time - I didn't comment on what my father said when we were discussing this telegram and whether I should or should not try to accept the passage that the telegram offered. As I think about that now and about what my father said, virtually that I would be better to go this year than next, I realise that it was very big of my dad to say that because he knew the situation in the house. He didn't want me to go and he knew that my mother was feeling desperate about it. If I had stayed till the following year and the baby had been born in England, of course they would have been there at the birth and they would have seen the baby and would have been able to enjoy his first weeks, possibly even his first months. This was to be their Grandchild after all. In actual fact they saw very little of that baby that was to be. We did go home in 1950 and were there for 3 months. By that time there were two - David and Ronald - and my father really loved those little boys. But harking back, he gave up any possibility of seeing that baby when it was new-born by giving me this advice. He must have worked it out that really it would be better for me to go and for Ivan and me to be together when the baby was born and for the baby to be born in New Zealand. I still think that it was big of him to give me that advice because he must have been pretty certain that I would take it.

Well there probably is still a little of this tape left but I'm going to finish here. I'm rather pleased - at least it gives me a kind of satisfaction that this story is now on tape because even Ivan knew very little about that troopship journey. My children knew even less and my family in England also, so it's good that it is at last written down. There doesn't seem to be much more to say. I sometimes wonder how the rest of the hundred thousand war brides managed. From the war brides book it sounds as though many, many of those marriages were very, very successful and I'm quite certain that if they had been as happy in their marriages as I have been in mine, well they have been very, very fortunate women.

And so now I'm closing here - there's just time to say goodbye for now and God Bless from Millie.

Footnote from Ivan.

There was a further sequel to the story of the picture in the Weekly News. At the time of the 150th anniversary of the first immigrant ships to Otago in 1998 and the founding of the Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Synod commissioned a CD ROM of the History of Otago and Southland. I had intended buying one of these but had done nothing about it until I attended a procession of floats in Dunedin followed by a fireworks display. I noticed a caravan promoting this CDROM and thought, "Here is my chance." Entering the

caravan I found they had set up three or four monitors loaded with the CD. A man showed me how to work the mouse as I had never used one before. I clicked on one picture, and had then just clicked onto a second spot when, Lo-and-Behold, I was looking straight into Millie's face. The same picture had been used to begin the history of the period 1945-98 and my eye had first lit on her face. I thought her children should have a copy and bought four. This was a year or more after her death.