

How I weathered the Storm

Dedication: For Family



Introduction

David sat wistfully looking out the window at the grey winter sky – it was winter and the clicking sound of the wind rattling the blinds on the wooden window frames competed with the background rumble of the Berserker traffic. He had stopped trying to analyse his melancholy because his daughter continually reminds him not to overthink things – but all he knew was that he felt sad, because of the past, and it concerned him to think he was losing hope for the future.

Churchill had called it the ‘black dog’ – a depression caused by regrets, self-blame and guilt for past actions that often had long-term consequences. In Churchill’s case it was the loss of over 100,000 young men’s lives in the landing at Gallipoli, beginning on April 1, 1914, a manoeuvre that, with hindsight, could not succeed when they were put ashore two miles north of their intended landing beach and faced with a precarious position at the base of cliff faces that gave the Turks an indomitable advantage.

In David's case it was a lack of self-belief and a myriad of things that had gone wrong in his life. In an effort to understand his part in the mix, he had searched his roots – he thought if he could understand the past he would have a better handle on how to snap out of it! What has caused him to suffer anxiety? He realizes his dilemma was nowhere near the proportion of Churchill's, yet it still affected his well-being.

He has lots of questions about the past. What was it that caused him to lack a belief in



himself and to give away his power to anxious thoughts and regrets?

What caused him to project his fears for the future onto other's relationships? He thinks back to May 1982, when he last saw his father, Robert Donald McRae alive.

Rob

It's May, 1982 and Robert McRae sits in his favourite recliner in the TV room. He leans back as he pulls the lever to elevate his stiff leg, with the footrest springing into place. 'I am grateful for this home' he thinks to himself, but he is still recovering from the flu. It has been over two years since he sold the business and now he has a lot more time to reflect. He feels restless and the blood is ringing in his ears, but he hasn't got the energy to get up and do something.

Most of the last two years has been spent outside, either in the shed he built himself with help from his brothers-in-law, (one next door and another used to live down the street), or in the little vegetable patch up in the back corner. There has of course been the time spent travelling with his wife around Victoria and up the East Coast, on outings to be with friends and music evenings or the occasional little project done for a neighbour or one of his three grown-up children. He has made his grandchildren many small toys out in his shed, and they

were very gratefully received, and he did make those shelves and do some repairs in the shop where his youngest son David works. Lately he has felt a little uneasy, missing the people he helped in his business, and the memories from the past have been flooding back and his sleep is often disturbed.

A knock at the door and it bursts open. It's David, talking really fast and full of his new job, travelling around bakery franchises doing the staffing, wages, routines and other administration jobs needed. He fails to notice his Dad's demeanour, and when he doesn't say anything he gets annoyed, feeling that his father doesn't approve of him; low self-esteem! He now lives in St Kilda, the same area that his Dad grew up, across the road from the Church that his family attended before and during the 2nd World War. He doesn't know this and his father doesn't talk much and isn't about to tell him about his past – the War and before! He turned his back on those experiences a long time ago, 'Don't look back, go forward', was his motto! Anyway, it's too painful, yet

lately a lot of those memories have been floating up from his subconscious mind.

David was 30 years old and still trying to deal with the repressed anger himself from his own childhood and teen years, feeling his father was so busy with scouts, lodge, army mates that he missed out on his attention and guidance, until he took David on a driving holiday to Sydney, just the two of them while his wife ran the business.

It was great, but even then his father didn't talk much about anything, and I guess David was only 12, and trying to cope with puberty and being a bit of a nerd. They spent a whole morning at the War Memorial in Canberra, David playing outside on the midget submarines while Rob was inside wandering around just looking at names on the walls. At the time David didn't understand what his father was doing, now years later, he knows just what he was doing; looking up the men who had died that he knew.

So this particular night there is a wide gap in connection between father and son: David unconsciously wanting to prove his independence from his father, yet still wanting his love; Rob, on the other hand is low in energy, and weakened in spirit, his main working life in the men's wear shop, where he felt useful to others and a provider to his family, finished. That night, a recipe for disaster!

David forgets now what they argued about, it was probably something trivial, but he still remembers vividly what he said to his father before he stormed out of the back door. '*What have you ever done with your life?*' That's it! The words are spoken, harsh, and unfair without any forethought of his father's sacrifices. Once spoken, like the arrows fired from the bow, the words are on their way, and can't be redeemed. David was still angry with him from his childhood, blaming his father for his lack of confidence. As he left in anger, he justified his actions walking down the driveway, but he never realized that he would not see his father ever again, alive!

Rob sits down again. He has plenty of time to sit and reflect. The effects of the flu kick in again, he feels hot and his mind starts to critically analyse itself, not consciously but the past perceived mistakes take priority. He asks himself questions: 'Did I do enough? Did I do too much? Why didn't I do more?' The questions repeat themselves as each experience flashes through his mind, and he struggles to let go of the mental images: the dart in his brother's leg while playing together when they were young boys; the last time he saw his brother Ian in Alexandria; the time he yelled at his section when he was injured at Balikpapan in 1945; the fight with his sister Elva over his money, that she and his mother had spent while he was fighting overseas; the time he and his wife Wilma fought in front of their children in the FJ Holden; and perhaps many more memories.

He turns the TV on again as his wife brings him a cuppa, but he can't concentrate. He wants to stand up and go for a walk, but the flu and his leg won't let him. They go over the

argument with his son and his wife tries to comfort him, but he ends up snapping at her. His blood pressure rises and it pulsates in his ears. The phone rings and it is one of his friends proposing a game of golf in a week's time. 'Yes, thanks' He begins to relax and feel cared about. A chance to get some physical release, and maybe he can chat to his friend.

On the morning of the 28th May, 1982, Rob is up early to get ready for the game of golf. 'I'll be home for lunch; we'll only play nine holes', he tells his wife. He drives himself to the Malvern Golf Club, to meet his friend. He waits for an hour, but his friend doesn't show, did he get the day wrong? No mobile phones back then!

Rob decides to play anyway. He is annoyed and frustrated but drags his stiff leg around the course. It is a hot day, and his blood pressure rises. Did the words of his son keep coming back to haunt him: *'What have you ever done with your life??'* Did he feel lonely and alone? If he had been well and less stressed he could have answered with many positive

experiences of how he had touched other's lives: how he had sacrificed for his brother, his own family; the people of North Melbourne near the Victoria Market; and the Scouting Community in Burwood.

His mother had pulled him out of University High School after his Merit certificate in Year 9 to help in the shop; he had wanted to be a teacher and his dream had been shattered. His younger brother was allowed to go to sea at 18 during the depression of the 30's, working for three years on the Grain Clipper Ships, while he had to stay home and 'hold the fort.' Does the eldest feel the pressure of responsibility? He worked for 30 years in his men's wear shop serving the community. Now he is tired, and the pain in his chest is coming back again. He experiences shortness of breath, and the pain in his spirit is almost as bad as the one in his chest. It's his time! All alone again!

Wilma is busy in her garden cutting flowers for the Condaire Nursing Home. She comes inside and starts to think about her

husband. Why is he so crabby at the moment? Have I done something wrong? He is so not himself. I'll make him a Cornish pasty for lunch. Later, she thinks 'they must have played 18 holes' when he doesn't come home, so she has lunch alone. I'll do the washing up and then take the flowers down to the Nursing Home. The front door rings. Now who can that be, she says humming to herself. A shock! 'Mrs Wilma McRae?' Two policemen at the door, asking if they can come in, 'Please sit down Mrs McRae', we have some bad news. Wilma feels faint and utters: 'Oh, Rob.....'



2 Iris Street Burwood

David

David was hard at it at the new bakery just opened up. There are only two of them there, one shop assistant hasn't turned up, and so he is serving a 'busload' of customers all wanting to get the new lunchtime specials being offered. David says to Peter, the manager: 'We should ring someone else, but no time, the queue is a 'mile long'. Just stay calm; we can only serve one at a time!' The phone rings and Peter gets it. 'It's your wife and she is crying' 'OK, a coffee scroll and the chocolate milk, today that's only \$2.50. Thank you; I'll just be a moment'.

David answers the phone, much to the dismay of the customers at the back, impatient to get served. His face must have gone white, because the customers in the front row stare at him as tears roll down his face. Immediate SHOCK!

He takes his apron off in a daze and mumbles to Peter, 'I have to go, my father just died'. He often thinks back to that day and wonders why he didn't keep serving, and how did

Peter cope by himself. Did the shop attendant turn up? Did a lot of people walk out? ‘I guess you never know how you will react in a moment of panic.’ He never even thought about it for an instant, he just took off his apron and walked out the back door. A few years later he gave Peter a job in his own shop, to make amends; ‘to square his actions’, the Mason’s motto.

As he was driving home to pick up his wife and daughter he struggled through tears to see where he was going. All of a sudden he thought of something said to him in a yoga training group, ‘Look after the Living’, and he became calm and focused on his mother’s needs. No more tears, plenty of time for that later. He didn’t realize how many there would be and how depressed he would get!

As he walked up the drive and around the back, his mother came out to meet him sobbing. All he could say as he hugged her was: ‘You were a good wife’, and it was true, for she had loved him and worked with him, supporting him in the shop,

even though David was often left at home alone. At the time he was determined not to dwell on his father's death, but over the next three months he nearly had a nervous breakdown, and if not for the baking job out at Ferntree Gully later in the year he may have. He couldn't cope with the admin job anymore and needed something physical to do to take his mind off his father's death, which he felt vaguely responsible for.

He thinks long and hard about the last words he said to his father, who he loved dearly, but never really came to know properly. How can I make it up to him? He knew his father and uncle had been in the Second World War, but first he wanted to know more about their earlier life, so he gets his grandfather's birth certificate and starts from there, where did they live?

Don

Don McRae, (David's grandfather) sits next to his wife, Vi at the Sunday service in St George's Presbyterian Church, Chapel Street East St Kilda, on 20th October 1940. He shuffles his feet to find a good position that doesn't put strain on his back. The Reverent McKenzie reads a prayer to a packed congregation, keen to find inspiration to deal with another war: 'O Lord, Who sees and knows all things, grant us grace in our limited vision, to rest upon Thy Wisdom and Power, which in due time will bring a solution at earth's perplexing and painful tragedies. Make us thus valiant in our faith to prosecute the tasks to which we are bound. Bless those who struggle for us in the far-flung area of battle. Give them the courage and strength to endure to the end; and out of the world's chaos wilt Thou cause to emerge a peaceful order of Righteousness and Liberty, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen'.

The Reverent McKenzie takes out his handkerchief to blow his nose, while scanning the faces in the first few rows; observing tears also in the eyes of many parishioners, and slowly takes out today's notices beginning with 'News of the Troops'. Don McRae pricks up his ears at the mention of his sons:

'Rob McRae has been on leave, and we would assure him of our felicitations upon his engagement to Wilma Youren and our prayers as he leaves Australia. Ian McRae is still a prisoner in Sweden, and our thoughts often turn to him. DJ McKenzie has finished the long trek to Bonegilla, and Mick McMullen is now stationed at Bacchus Marsh. Les Tardrew is still at Dandenong, and Fred Hale awaiting the great unexpected events in Palestine.'

Palestine! Don McRae swallows hard as he hears that place, for that was where Jesus himself was born, or was it Bethlehem in Jordan, he asks himself? So much fighting has been going on in that part of the world since the Crusades and

before! Little does he know that his eldest son, Robert, 25 years old, will be fighting in that very region that Alexander the Great conquered in September, 332 BCE, where men were killed and women and children sold into slavery.

Yesterday Rob boarded the 'Aquitania' in Sydney as part of the 2/14th Australian Infantry Battalion of the 21st Brigade, 7th Division. He was not sure where they were going, but they were bound for the Middle East via Adelaide to pick up the 2/27th and via Freemantle to pick up the 2/16th, the other two battalions in their Brigade.

The 2/14th had trained at Puckapunyal since June, having formed in May 1940 and was in good shape; however the 2/16th, after many months of training and their hard experiences in the mining towns of W.A., had been moulded into an impressive fighting formation. They were big boned and hard; most had shaved heads and they looked the tough fighters that they were to prove themselves to be, in so many bitter battles ahead.

When Don McRae had seen Rob off on the train to ‘Pucka’, he had noted the smiles of excitement and relief of the young men who were off on an adventure, and were responding to their country’s need. (Rob in the middle)



He wondered if they would now be feeling the seriousness of their endeavour as they boarded the ship, embarking on a sea voyage that would put them in danger even before they reached their destination.

His youngest son Ian Norman McRae, now 22 years old, had been captured by the Nazi’s at Narvik while on a British Merchant ship, the ‘Riverton’, and is now interned in Sweden.

Don remembers Ian was always down at the docks watching the sailing ships as they loaded up their cargos. He pleaded with his mother and father to let him go to sea but they were not swayed early on. He had been very sick as a child and his mother was against him going; she had always protected him. Finally Ian wrote to Gustav Erickson, the great Finnish sailing ship owner. He was an Aland Islander and had built up a fleet of the last great cargo 'tall ships' the world would ever see, before the steamships finally took over. One day Ian received the conditions for an apprenticeship, and had to pay a premium of 62 pounds 10 shillings to get it, some of which he had saved, and the rest donated by his father. He also had to supply a 100 pounds guarantee so that he would not desert the ship, which Don put up, much to Vi's horror.

Erickson's ships mostly sailed in ballast from Mariehamn in the Aland Islands to South Australia. By the time the ships got to the small town of Port Victoria many of the Finnish crew had had enough of the harsh conditions on board and jumped

ship. This meant that some young Australians could join up and fulfil their dream of becoming a “Cape Horner”.

Ian was 18 years old when he first went to sea in April 1937. His first trip was the ‘Great Grain Race’ to Falmouth, and he went to Adelaide to join the ‘Archibald Russell’, lying in Spencer Gulf, but when one of the crew of the ‘L’Avenir’ became ill, Ian was asked to take his place at the last minute. His first job on this sailing ship was to look after seven pigs, and he was paid 2/6 a week. He was an Able Seaman with the British Mercantile Marines in 1939, before he was interned in Sweden.

As Rev McKenzie gives his sermon, Don recollects his own life leading up to the ‘Great War’ of 1914 -1918. In 1914 Don was still single, eligible to go to war, yet he was still working on his father’s dairy farm, called ‘Glenrae’ in the Parish of ‘Allambie’ near Strzelecki in Gippsland, Victoria. When his father, called Donald McRae, selected the 122 acres in the Parish of Allambie in 1887 in the County of Buln Buln, he had

been only 8 years old, yet he still helped his father with the smaller jobs. Donald Senior and other neighbours had cleared the land, scrub cutting their selections and building log houses.

His father was a handy man, like most of the pioneers and he cut the timber for his house out of the forest and erected it with young Don's and his older sisters' help. After three years his father could apply for a lease and then had seven years to pay it off. Donald Senior also assisted to survey his block, and later, with the Government surveyor, he went to Tasmania and worked under him.



Blue Gum on Glenrae

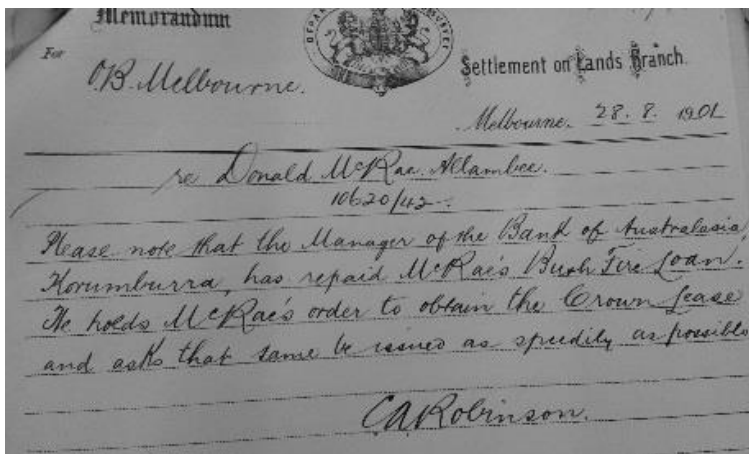
Other selectors at Strzelecki were the McIntosh, Ross and Witherden families, plus many other early pioneers of this hilly and heavily wooded country. Scrub Cutting involved hacking into the forest with axes. It was hard work! Some of the giant trees had girths up to fifteen feet at ten feet from the ground.

But most, forty or fifty to the acre, were two or three feet across. The practice was to fell all growth up to two feet in diameter, and either ringbark or sap ring the rest. Sap ringing meant cutting right back into the heavy wood, and could kill a powerful tree, centuries old, in six months. Another practice was to fell some of the giants, (standing twelve feet from the ground on a platform) in a strategic position to bring down much of the lesser growth in the crash. They would nick the trees lower down the slope on both sides and then when the giant tree fell it would cause an avalanche of trees going down the slope.

They would slowly build up their herd of dairy cattle after planting a mixture of grasses, some they brought from the UK. This country was very mountainous and the height of the trees 300 feet high. In fact there was a Mountain Ash measured at 375 feet high growing near MacDonald's track east of Thorpdale, and acknowledged to be the world's tallest tree. So to clear the land was a monumental task but devastating for the native animal's habitat; possums, lyre birds, bower birds and koalas and wallabies. Don did not like this, as he did have a love for the environment.

On the 1st February, 1898 they had all been wiped out by the bushfires of Red Tuesday that ravaged South Gippsland, and Don and his father had struggled to protect their house and his mother and five sisters, yet they had managed to survive. Donald Senior had to go to the creek for water several times, and at one time was cut off by fire but somehow managed to get back to his home. Donald Senior had to take out a Bush Fire loan to start all over again.

The fires burnt out 260,000 hectares in South Gippsland, and twelve people died and more than 2,000 buildings were destroyed. Hundreds of settlers were burnt out and many barely escaped with their lives. Livestock and property, and native animals were devastated on a vast scale.



Just as the push for Federation was gaining momentum, Donald Seniors' father, Duncan McRae, dies on May 21st, 1898. It was reported in the Charlton Tribune:

'Much regret will be felt at the demise of Mr Duncan McRae, on Saturday evening last, at 6 o'clock after a brief illness, at his residence in West Charlton. He was one of the oldest

residents of the district, and had reached the advanced age of 77 years, and up to within a few weeks of his death, had enjoyed good health. Some ten or twelve days ago he was seized with dysentery, and became seriously ill. On Saturday his condition was so bad that Dr Rock of Charlton was communicated with, but nothing could be done for the sufferer, who expired at 6 o'clock the same evening, as stated, the first cause of death being dysentery and the second natural decay. The deceased was much respected. He was a native of Ross-shire, Scotland, and immigrated to Victoria with his wife about the year 1863. For some little time afterwards he lived at Scarsdale, and thence he removed to Evansford, and finally settled in the Charlton district 23 years ago. He leaves a wife and a grown up family of seven. The funeral yesterday in the Charlton cemetery was largely attended, the burial service being conducted by the Rev. J. Kirkwood.'

He was well loved by his family and community, and his daughter Mary Nancy Bish posted this Memorium:

In loving remembrance of my dear father, Duncan McRae,
who died at West Charlton, on 21st May, 1898:

*Though death hath snatched from view
A loving father, kind and true,
Death cannot from our minds efface
His tender smiles and loving face
His words, his actions are not dead,
But in our hearts are daily read;
Forget him? No, we never will,
In life we loved him; in death we love him still.
A fearful shock, a pain severe
To part with one we loved so dear;
Our loss is great; we'll not complain,
But trust that in Heaven we'll meet again.*



Julia, Donald Senior, Elizabeth, Charles 1898

In 1900 Donald McRae had selected another property of 195 acres, costing a total of 196 pounds, on Macdonald's track at Mountain View, about 20 minutes ride by horse. Don was now 21 and his father was hoping he would run this property, even though he himself had left the property in Charlton that he had selected, next to his fathers. For the next fifteen years Don worked at both properties, helping to set up the new dairy.

By the time the war in Europe had started Don was 35 years old and had been working on dairies for 20 years. When war had first been declared on August 4th 1914, it was widely rumored that the war would be over quickly. The leaders of Britain and France, were over-optimistic, and said their troops would be home by Christmas. So, everyone seemed to think WW1 would end after two to five months; governments, military leaders, and the general populations of the countries concerned.

Australians volunteered straight away. Three of the four McIntosh boys, who lived on the adjoining property, (two still

in their early 20s) signed up and Donald junior longed to escape the hard life he had experienced, but his father needed him to help run the two farms. He was hesitant and did not want to disrespect his father, who was heavily involved in the community of Strzelecki, yet he desired to get away from his situation, but with three of his sisters already married and two younger sisters still at home and his father now 57 years old, he felt the burden of responsibility on his shoulders. They had cows to milk and then the separating to be done each day, and then the pigs and calves to be fed, plus cutting hay on the other property and other jobs.

He did however rebel for a while and sought solace in the nearby town of Korumburra where he had found a girlfriend, a young milliner working in a nearby town. Her name was Viola Milne, and she was just 23 years old, 12 years younger than him.

Vi knows Don is older and works on a dairy farm, an essential service. She also knows a soldier makes huge

sacrifices, leaving his loved ones and family, risking health and life; however it is unlikely that he will go to war. It was a whirlwind and passionate romance in the midst of war and eventually they married, and Vi was pregnant. Donald now has two reasons why he can't go to war, the dairy farm and his new wife and Robert Donald McRae, his new son yet to be born. They married on November 9th, 1915 at Scots Church in Melbourne, far away from Strzelecki and Korumburra, and both their parents acknowledged their wedding in the paper:

MCRAE-MILNE On the 9th November at Scots Church, by the Rev. Dr Marshall, Donald, only son of Mr and Mrs. D. McRae, "Glenrae", Strzelecki, to Viola, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R L Milne, Gordon Street, Korumburra.



Robert Lyon Milne Worked at at McCowan's General Store in Korumburra

In 1915 Billy Hughes, the then Prime Minister, had decided to introduce conscription for 18 to 41 year olds, mainly because of the heavy losses at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, so Donald thought he may have to go anyway. However after two failed referendums and the proviso that only 'childless' married men were to be called up, he resolved himself to the fact that he would stay working in what was now an essential service, dairying, even though many dairymen had already signed up and gone. Three of the four McIntosh boys, on the adjoining property to the McRae's: one of the twins, Andrew, (close to Donald's age) and their younger step brothers, Tom and William, all volunteered to go. The boys plus a step sister, Christina milked a herd of 20 Ayrshire cows by hand and cream was sold to be made into butter. The skim milk was fed to calves and pigs, who when grown were sold to markets in Melbourne.

By May, 1915 news of the landing at Gallipoli was filtering back to the Australian population through letters and news

bulletins, not only the carnage of the Anzacs but the terrible conditions they had to suffer. Over 60% per cent of the allied force was sick with dysentery, diarrhoea, rheumatic and enteric fever. The younger two of the three McIntosh boys who signed up, Tom and William, who had both been at Don's older step-sister Allie's wedding, did not return from the war.

Donald had loved his friends, especially Andrew, the twin brother to John, and he had cut shrub and played tennis with the twins, because they were his age. Andrew McIntosh was the only one who did return but he was severely affected by poison gas used by the Germans. This made Don feel guilty and shameful, even though he knew the other twin, John McIntosh had stayed at home to manage the farm, for his father passed away suddenly in 1914, and his sister, Christina, also died that year of a ruptured appendix. So a family of seven was reduced to three by 1918. It was very common; such hard times! A much younger friend, Frank Ross also died

in the war in 1915; aged 22. This was a very unsettling time for Donald Junior, the beginning of his anxiety.

Don had been a hard working young man with five sisters, just like his own father. His mother, Mary Elizabeth, called Bess, had been married before, and when her then husband Alexander Nesbit was killed in a tragic threshing machine accident in Central Victoria, she was pregnant with his child.

Don's father, at 20, had in 1877 married Bess Nesbit, who was 22, and had a two year old daughter, Alexandria. Allie, (as she preferred to be called) was thus the eldest of five girls and one boy, and perhaps being the eldest, was very strict on her siblings. It was the age of the suffragettes and the McRae women had signed up to the idea of freedom and independence, how did the McRae men feel about it?

What added to Don's angst was when he had to go to nearby Korumburra. The pressure on those who didn't go to war was huge, and often a white feather was given to them especially by young middle classed women to say they were cowards,

and the bullying became so intense that the authorities introduced a 'rejected volunteer' badge. You could wear it on your lapel so you wouldn't get dirty looks. Most, who chose not to volunteer did so for practical reasons anyway. They had a young family to provide for; a physical ailment; or they had an essential business to run. Their community depended on them, yet despite this fact the giving of the white feather often made a young man even with short sightedness sign up and all too often forfeit his life.

It was also a difficult time for Donald Senior, and some time in December 1915, he had an accident on his property at 'Glenrae'.

West Gippsland Gazette January 1, 1916:

A Wonderful Escape:

'A remarkable accident befell Mr D. McRae, a well-known resident of Strzelecki, in the early part of this month; as the result of which he is still an inmate of the Warragul District hospital, and his escape from death was little short of

miraculous. The notoriously steep hills around Strzelecki have in many cases got small projections of rock covering their surface, and while standing at the crest of one of these hills near his home Mr. McRae either fainted or became giddy, and losing his balance fell down sideways along the hill and rolled to the foot of the declivity, a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile. Naturally he was fearfully battered and bruised, and when found by Mrs. McRae, who had gone to look for him, he was barely conscious.

With the aid of a neighbour's sleigh the injured man was taken to his home and put to bed. Such is the invaluable boon of the telephone in these outlying centres, that Dr Fraser, of Korumburra, reached the home even before Mr. McRae had been placed in bed. Although black with in-numerable bruises, Mr. McRae had no limbs broken but it is thought that one lung has been pierced probably with a broken rib. Great fears were entertained for his recovery, as he is over 65 years of age, but an iron constitution gave him sufficient strength to allow him

to be brought to the Warragul hospital, where it is now hoped he will recover. The accident is a most remarkable one, for although cattle will sometimes slip and roll down the hill nearly always being killed, we have never heard of a similar accident occurring to a human being.’ He was reported in the paper as being over 65 years of age, however he was only 59 at the time, and papers often get it wrong.

Acceding to his father’s wishes and with Vi willing to give it a go, Don moved to the other property in 1917. It was called ‘Coonara’ and Don and Vi stayed for four years. However by 1921, they had three children, two boys and a girl and the milking routine is a very hard life for a young mother, and Vi wanted her children to go to school.



Ian and Rob 1920

So they sold the farm and moved to Drouin South. Rob perhaps started at the local state school in Drouin South in 1922, the same year the railway line came to Strzelecki. However as fate sometimes intervenes, Don's back gave way moving the huge heavy milk churns, either on his own dairy or the Butter Factory in Drouin. He had to take extended leave from work. He had developed a degenerated disc disease due to excessive muscle strain – shrub cutting on two properties, and lifting heavy milk churns.

Vi longed to get back to the retail life that she experienced in the milliners shop in Foster, so they moved to the big city in 1924 and Don worked as a confectioner in Fitzroy North, a job he was not that crazy about. The confectionery shop in Nicholson Street was purchased in 1924; the same year his grandma, Julia McRae died aged 98, on May 19th. She was also well loved by her family and community, now at Piangil West in the Mallee, where she moved after Duncan's death 26 years ago. These kind words were written about her:

'The late Mrs Julia McRae was one of the oldest pioneers of the district. She was 'an upright and loving woman' who died respected and loved by all who knew her. She always had a smile and a cheery word for all. The late Mrs McRae retained all her faculties up till the last, and could read and write without glasses. Had she lived till July she would have been 98 years of age.

She was a typical Scot of the old school, large of heart and kindly disposed, and beloved by all who knew her. She came of a long lived family; report having it that one of her brothers lived to the great age of 114 years.

Her remains were laid to rest in the Presbyterian portion of the Nyah cemetery, the Rev. Mr. Hamilton, of Nyah, conducted an impressive service at the house, and also read the burial service at the graveside.'

In 1928 Don and Vi and the children moved to another confectionery shop at 241 High Street, Prahran. The McRae children now attended Hawksburn State School; only a 1km

walk; or a 5 minute ride from the shop, where Rob got a full

241 High Street 2015



attendance certificate
for two years in a row,
1928/1929.

Both the boys joined
the Prahran Scouts in
1929, and Elva, the
youngest, took up ice
skating. During the
school holidays Ian
and Elva would go up
to Piangil West to visit

the Scottish relations, while Rob would stay and help his
mother in the shop. Ian got to know Donald Senior's younger
brother, Uncle Farquhar quite well and so developed an urge
to explore his Scottish Roots, after hearing the tales that had
been passed down to Farquhar.

Ever since he moved to the Strzelecki district, Donald Senior had been very community minded and had taken an interest in anything that was for the progress of public life: he was on the committee that organized the building of the Strzelecki hall in 1905; he was also prominent in the formation of the Strzelecki Telephone league, and attended the first meeting, but preferred to allow others to form the committee. He was very involved on the committee to bring the railway line to Strzelecki, and at a time when it appeared as though the proposal would not go through, he went to Melbourne and in the company with Mr. John Mackay, M.L.A. they waited on the Railways Standing committee, and were instrumental in getting its sanction to proceed.

He had also been a consistent worker in his Church also, and helped his younger daughters and wife with the milking and farm chores. When his son and family sold their farm he was disappointed, especially when they moved to Melbourne. Wanting to please his wife, who had worked very hard, they

decided to also sell the Allambie farm in October 1927 and move to Melbourne. It was a huge wrench for him leaving Strzelecki where he had been a prominent member of the community and he never adapted to city life and collapsed into a deep dark depression. He died the following year on July 18th, 1928, only a few days after getting pneumonia at his daughter's property in Bennison.

The following year Rob went to University High School (1930) and was there for two years only, because his mother pulled him out of school at 15 to help in the shop, mainly due to his fathers' bad back and weak heart, plus it was the beginning of the depression years. At the end of 1933 Ian, age 15, left Uni High to work at Ernest Joachims (clothing warehouse) in Flinders' Lane, but had made up his mind to go to sea. They had both joined the 5th Battalion of the Victorian Scottish Regiment in 1933, and so had begun their training for war, not that they were to know that.

Don did not take well to the life of a shopkeeper, and was soon running an SP Bookie out the back of the shop, and left the running of the shop to his wife, older son and daughter. Until 1931 Aussies were legally only allowed to make a bet with an on course bookie. However, from 1931 we saw the rise of the SP bookie throughout Australia.

Don would often hang around pubs and clubs, conducting his business from there; did he like a beer? Punters would not be able to get a fixed price on their bet until after the race was run, at which point he would be told the average odds of each horse from a range of on course bookies. Starting price bookies were technically illegal in Australia but flourished none the less thanks to society's needs at the time and police corruption, until the TAB (Totalisator Agency Board) was opened in 1961. In the 1930's you could be fined up to 50 pounds, in default three month's imprisonment if you got caught taking bets.

Vi was being run ragged running the shop and helping with the SP Bookie racket. She often said: 'If I go to gaol, at least I will be able to sleep'.

Don and Vi 1944



The Victorian gold rush was a hectic period in the history of Victoria, Australia, between 1851 and the late 1860s. Among the last bushrangers in Victoria, was the Kelly Gang led by Ned Kelly, who was captured at Glenrowan in 1880, two years after they were outlawed. The Milnes immigrated right into the middle of this period, starting in South Australia before moving to Portland Victoria.

The Gunditjmara Aboriginal population living in the Western districts of Victoria had lived in the area for at least 30,000 years before the white man came and had developed a deep connection to the land and had established permanent settlements and villages in the Portland area, but had been massacred by European whalers and sealers and pastoralists sometime between 1800 and 1830.

Vi's father, Robert Lyon Milne had been born in Adelaide in 1854 to George Milne and Elizabeth Cumming, who had both come from Banff, in the north of Scotland, 70 miles to the

East of Inverness in 1853. George was a draper's salesman and worked in Hindley St, Adelaide, while Elizabeth was at home with Robert and his three older siblings: William, Catherine and Margaret. They only stayed three years in Adelaide before moving to Portland where George unfortunately died of Consumption (or pulmonary tuberculosis) in 1857 at the age of 29.

Elizabeth Milne was on her own now and destitute, so she enlisted the help of the Portland Benevolent Society. On Jan 22, 1859, suffering from rheumatism, Elizabeth was granted 20/- (shillings) per week, reduced to 5/- per week in May. In October she told them that the work she occasionally got was not enough to support her four children, and so she was granted 12/- per week. On the 7th January a mysterious letter from a Captain R Milne thanked the Society for their assistance and engaged to pay all monies supplied to Mrs Milne.

The mysterious Captain R Milne was actually another much older Robert Lyon Milne, who had helped the aboriginal ‘freedom fighter’ Yagan, in Perth in the early 1800’s, before his death. He also went by the name of Robert Menli Lyon, using an anagram of Milne as his middle name.

He wrote lovingly of the Aborigines at Swan River: *‘in simplicity of manners, generousness of disposition, and firmness of character, they very much resemble the ancient Caledonians’*. He had a great empathy with them and collected the first reliable information about Yagan’s people. He tried to persuade the settlers that compensation should be paid to the Aborigines for the taking of their land if justice was to be done and racial conflict avoided. At a public meeting at Guildford on 26 June, 1832 he warned the settlers:

‘Reflect. You have seized upon land that is not yours. Beware, and do not, as a people, add to this the guilt of dipping your hands in the blood of those who you have spoiled of their country’.

So it is quite possible that the very man who helped the Swan River aborigines and also helped Elizabeth Milne repay her monies to the Portland Benevolent Society was a friend or relative of the family, who they named their second son for in Adelaide, born 26th August 1854, and who had accompanied George and Elizabeth Milne, on board the ship between Melbourne and Adelaide prior to his birth. He was obviously a very kind man, who cared more about people than money and offered to help the Widow Milne and her four children.

However eventually it was resolved to withdraw Mrs Milnes allowance because the committee had heard she was *'living in an improper way'*. She was pregnant to a James Robertson who owned the Portland Iron Store, who she eventually married and had two boys with.

When the Gold Rush was over and the bushrangers gone Vi's family moved from Portland in the late 1880's, looking for a fresh start after losing a baby boy to accidental suffocation. Her father, Robert Lyon Milne had married

Phoebe Jane Hayfield, and they eventually had eight children, four boys and four girls, but three of their boys died as babies.

As a result they moved from town to town every four years until they finally settled in Korumburra in 1901. They went north from Portland to Numurka (1888) and then south to: Alexandra (1891), where Vi was born, to Violet town (1900), and finally to Korumburra by 1901, where they stayed until 1916.

They would have had to travel by coach pulled by horses or walk. You could travel with Cobb and Co., or own your own coach. In the late 1800s in Australia, coaches varied from very basic to very comfortable, depending on what a family could afford. Perhaps with Robert being the step son of James Robertson, the owner of the Iron Store in Portland, since the age of 11 years old, meant that Vi's parents, could afford to buy their own coach and horses.

Don and Vi

Vi subtly nudges her husband in Church and he takes a deep breath in through his nose. The three of them stand for the benediction and slowly leave the Church. As they pass Rev McKenzie he smiles and says quietly: 'Keep the faith', tears come to Vi's eyes and she says: 'We should never have let him go!' Donald grimaces and keeps moving.

Vi was referring to her youngest son going to sea at 18 years of age three years ago. If his father had not supplied the 100 pounds guarantee so that he would not desert the ship, he would not have been able to go, but his father did not want the same thing to happen to his son that had happened to him, so he set him free. He sold the Confectionery shop; he was 58 years old and wanted to retire, so they moved to Brighton.

The thirties was a difficult time all around the world, but especially for the Jewish people in Europe. Hitler was making them well aware they were not welcome; they could not own property and were being displaced from their homes to other

countries. Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe were forced to wear a badge in the form of a Yellow Star as a means of identification, intended to humiliate and to mark them out for segregation and discrimination. If they had known what was coming they would have left Europe all together. Hitler was rebuilding Germany's army (which had been decimated in WW1) with Submarines, Luftwaffe and Panzer tanks.

Ian

In 1937, the Archibald Russell with Captain Sjojergen sailed from Port Germain, South Australia to Falmouth, right at the southern tip of England, with a cargo of wheat in 98 days. It was a great grain race between the Archibald Russell, and the other great grain ships. Ian had been on the L'Avenir, and when he arrived in Falmouth, he wrote a long letter home to his parents on June 17th, whilst waiting for orders:

'Dear Mother and Father,

Here I am in England after a passage of 95 days. We arrived on June 6th but I have only just received your letters so I could not answer before. We have been waiting 11 days now for orders but every day brings forth new rumours as to where we are bound: Glasgow, Avonmouth, Liverpool, London, Belfast or Dublin? Where shall we go? However it won't be long now before we are at sea again if only for a few days. I think

everyone will be glad though because we are not able to go ashore here in Falmouth as it is only an order port.

When we arrived, “Killoran, “Pommern” and “Lawhill” were already here but “Killoran” left after two days and “Archibald Russell” took her place. “Pommern and “Lawhill” also have gone now, both to London so only “L’Avenir” and “Archibald Russell” are here now.’

When Ian finally joined the L’Avenir, he had begun his experiences of what the ocean life was like on a windjammer. His parents of course were wondering how he would adapt? He goes on:

‘However I suppose you are anxious to hear how I am getting on and how I like the life? Fine for both questions. I know now that this is the life I am cut out for and I think you will notice the difference in me when I return. I have grown almost an inch but I have not filled out very much except in the face. I am also very much stronger and eat like a horse. You had better tell Rob to go into training or I will be

“towelling him up”. You should see me carry a bag of wheat or a great bucket of coal for the galley now. No trouble at all.’

The food on board consisted mainly of salted horse, smoked cod, tinned goods and bread, sometimes full of weevils. For fresh meat there were pigs on board that at some time would be killed, which usually involved a comedy of errors as they tried to slit its throat until the pig was eventually shot. Most of the Australian sailors found it difficult to enjoy the Aland treat of blood pancakes, which were extremely high in iron; the blood acting as a binding agent like eggs, but tasted a bit metallic.

The apprentices were given no concessions and were sent up aloft from their first day aboard ship. Standing on ropes 195 feet up they had to quickly learn their way about before they were expected to hoist and furl sails in the dark and wild weather down south. When he first started his voyage, he was somewhat of a greenhorn, and the crew didn't like him taking

photos of them without their consent, but it didn't take long for them to have respect for his ability. Ian writes:

'Now the voyage: We left Port Victoria on March 3rd with "Pommern" and we kept company for 9 days but in the end she beat us by 5 hours. Before I go any further I would like to tell you about Port Victoria. It has one street, an ice cream shop and a ship chandler and is like the Never-Never with a few blacks lounging about. Tell Elva to imagine a town three times as dull as Piangil and you have it.

To continue with the rest: After we left Spencer Gulf we soon came into the west winds and travelled along in great style. The first storm came just south of New Zealand and we took in all sails until we only had the lower topsails set. Plenty of seas came on board and one busted in one wall of the smoking saloon; and took overboard about 15 ft. of teak railing. The German apprentice, a boy called Bever, was at the wheel and he thought the second mate had gone as well but he turned up again drenched to the skin and not in a very good humour as

you can imagine. We set sails again the next night and I loosed the mizzen royal. Loosing sails is always an apprentice's job as we are supposed to be young and active. You have to be because when the royal yard is hoisted up there are no more ratlines left, this is sort of rope ladders to climb on and so you must climb hand over hand on the royal backstay. I am pretty slick at it now and can usually be the first on deck when we are finished overhauling the buntlines.'

The ships rounded Cape Horn, the deadliest waterway in the world, where the wind roars through Drake's Passage with no land mass to slow it down.

'We had two more storms on the way to Cape Horn but they were only a repetition of the first; plenty of water on deck and very cold. I used to wear 1 pair of underpants, one pair of grey pants and my overalls, 1 singlet, 1 shirt and those two navy sweaters and then my reefer coat on top of that and still be cold.

However we still had plenty of fun. You can always laugh at someone else sliding over the wet deck and coming down with a thud or else being just under the railing when a sea comes over. Strange to say I couldn't laugh when it happened to me. One day I was filling a bucket in the well deck and one came over so that I had to swim around in about 6 ft. of water. I went around for about 10 minutes before I could grab the handrail and pull myself out. The second mate stood on the flying bridge and nearly died laughing. I could have "ate" him.'

Keeping watch on-board sailing ships was a boring and tedious job, but the worst watch station was on the "weather" (windward) side of the bow. The sailor who was assigned to this station was subject to the constant pitching and rolling of the ship. By the end of his watch, he would be soaked from the waves crashing over the bow. A sailor who was assigned to this unpleasant duty was said to be "under the weather." Sometimes, these men fell ill and died as a result of the

assignment, which is why today “under the weather” is used to refer to someone suffering from an illness.

‘Cape Horn was passed in fine weather but after passing the Falklands we had a fight with a cyclone. We had to take sail quickly but four were blown out before we could make them fast. Our watch (the starboard) did most of the work, worst



luck. We would clew up the sails first on deck and then the whole watch would go from one mast to the other making fast.

The sails flogged like the devil and some were almost in ribbons when we had them made fast. They shook the yards like anything and every time we got some sail under us on the yard the wind would take it away again. To make matters worse it began to hail and we were soon all soaked. I have ripped my oilskins in the rigging so I will have to get a new set in Mariehamn.

My sea boots also were full of water from a sea on deck so that every time I lay over the yard it rushed up my legs. All hands were called at 4 in the morning and we made fast the foresail and mainsail. Our watch had only 2 hours below. The steering cable broke and we 'hove to' for about 6 hours until it was fixed. Then we bent new sails in place of the old ones and after two days we were able to set them again.'

No doubt many of the young starry eyed sailors wished they could jump ship but this wasn't an option and they had to

accept the fact that they were on that ship for the next three or four months whether they liked it or not. That is why they had to pay a guarantee of 100 pounds, and however dangerous and difficult it was, they had to stay not to forfeit it. There were five apprentices on Ian's first voyage, a German, two Aussies, a Swedish Finn, and a Scot.

'Whenever we have to wash clothes (by the way I can wash now) we get into the well deck with a bucket apiece and a pile of dirty clothes and have a great time.



The S.E. Trades deserted us and so we were 70 days to the Line but after passing that we got the N.E. Trades strongly and sometimes we made 13 knots. By the way I missed the ceremony of "Crossing the Line", so I am safe now.'

After crossing the equator (called the line), new sailors receive a notice to appear before King Neptune and his court, represented by the highest ranking seamen, who officiate at the ceremony, which is often preceded by a beauty contest of men dressing up as women, each department of the ship being required to introduce one contestant in swimsuit drag.

Afterwards, some may be "interrogated" by King Neptune and his entourage, then during the ceremony they undergo a number of increasingly embarrassing ordeals: wearing clothing inside out and backwards; crawling on hands and knees on non-skid-coated decks; being swatted with short lengths of firehose; being locked in stocks and pillories and pelted with mushy fruit; being locked in a water coffin of salt-water and bright green sea dye; crawling through chutes or large tubs of rotting garbage; kissing the Royal Baby's belly coated with axle grease, hair chopping, etc., largely for the entertainment of the seasoned sailors. Lucky for Ian, he escaped these initiations. He continues:

'In the Tropics we had a fine time. I saw many flying fish and dolphins and also one whale. The flying fish are fine to watch; they rise out of the water and go at a great bat for about 30 yards or so before going into the water again. When I was at the wheel I could



see plenty of them. It was no work at all to steer, only a turn now and then and at night everyone nearly slept on the wheel. We all slept on deck and everything was fine.

When we came to the channel, fog came and the Captain could not get a sight for seven days. It was goodho on lookout, pumping away every minute or so on the foghorn and knowing everyone else was cursing about the noise. The fog cleared at last and we were able to fix the position at 12 o/c and at about 3 we sighted the lighthouse at Land's End. From then on it was "all hands stand by" all the time until we reached

Falmouth. Everyone was in the rigging making fast sails when the anchor was let go and the cheers that rolled across the bay would have wakened the dead.

After all hands had finished, I had to go again in the rigging making fast any gaskets we had missed. Now we are anchored here and everyone except two night watchmen is on day work. There is hardly any work to do now however and the ship



looks fine. The brass is all cleaned again and there are only some backstays and a few other parts of the rigging to paint.

The movements of the ship are rather in the dark at present, but after discharging the cargo we will go to Mariehamn and remain there for about a month or so. The apprentices must stand by the ship for 4 pence an hour out of which we supply

food. I think we have 2/6d per week to spare so we will live richly. Things are cheaper there I think. From Mariehamn we go to Copenhagen to dry dock and refit and from there I think to Durban, South Africa to load maize for New Zealand. From New Zealand we come back to Good Old Aussie to load wheat again. I hope to be there in February, so I will be looking forward to seeing the family again.

We heard also about the sinking of the “C.B.Pedersen”, she was sunk by a collision with a steamer off the Azores. She had no sidelights but all the boys got off safely. I think at that time we were somewhere off Cape Horn.’

The four-masted barque ‘C.B. Pedersen’ collided with the British steamship ‘Chagres’ in the Atlantic Ocean south east of the Azores, Portugal and sank. All 32 crew were rescued by the ‘Chagres’.

Ian’s mother Vi had been terribly worried about how he would fare on the long dangerous voyage, and had a

particularly worrying dream one night. Ian tries to reassure her by saying:

'Mother asks what I was doing on April 23rd at 3 o/c. I tried to work out the times, and as near as I can remember I was leaning against the wheel in a flat calm. There is not much need to worry about me, I'm like a bad penny and will always turn up (not my toes).

Well now I will close as I have not much time to catch the boat in the morning, but I will write again from whatever port we discharge at. I hope Father is keeping well and I hope you all have good health and good luck and look forward to the time when I can see you all again.

Your loving son, Ian'

While the fleet was laid up in Finland he got sudden orders to quit the L'Avenir and join the Archibald Russell (see pic) under Captain Sjogren, a man



who, in Ian's words: *'rampages when it is calm and is in his delight when he has to sail the ship in the valleys and on the alps of a fierce sea'*.

This had been Ian's dream ship and he had read many stories of the history of this ship. Once, 15 men, a whole watch, had been swept from her decks and not seen again. No wonder his mother was worried.

They sailed to Port Natal (Durban, South Africa) with a cargo of timber in 87 days. From there, in 1938, the Archibald Russell sailed from Lourenço Marques (South Africa) to Port Lincoln, South Australia in 31 days, arriving in April, 1938, where Ian had leave to see his family in Melbourne. He had twice crossed the world under sail, and survived. His family were relieved to have him home but knew that his ship was loading wheat in South Australia, and in a few days he would pack up again for Adelaide, for the salt tang was now in his blood.

On May 10th 1938, he again joined the Archibald Russell and sailed from Port Germain, South Australia, with a cargo of wheat, headed for Cork, Ireland. Their voyage to New Zealand was plain sailing with a good wind, but from there they ran into trouble. Vi would certainly be worried if she had known what lay ahead for Ian. He describes it all in a letter home, written in September 1938:

'The day after I wrote from Port Germain the top gallant mast was set up, and we sailed in the evening. A good wind took us right down the Spencer Gulf, and held until we picked up a strong westerly. This held until New Zealand was reached, but from then on the ship had to fight all the time against head winds. The ship was just like a swimming pool, but I can tell you it was not weather for bathing. The temperature of the water was below zero and snow-storms covered the rigging, sails and those parts of the deck which were not awash with ice. I remember a couple of times we took in the upper topsails particularly well. Our hands were

so cold, it was impossible to feel anything, and we had to beat them against the sail as hard as we could to get the blood to flow.

The worst weather we experienced was from June 2nd to 4th. The wind came from the South East, and began to blow a full storm. During the day we took in sail till we lay to under three lower topsails and fore topmast staysail. We, the starboard watch came on deck at 7pm and had to clear the ends which had washed out of the wash ports (you do this in order that the banging of the wash port will not cut them in halves.) The lee railing was many feet under water and the cro' jack yard nearly touching the sea, so it was not safe to be caught napping on the main deck. (A cro' jack yard is a square yard used to spread the foot of a topsail)

'It wasn't long before everyone was wet through and cursing heartily. About 9 o/c, a tremendous sea came over the weather side so that the ship was white from fore to aft. Johannsson and I were right at the lee railing pulling in an end, but we

managed to catch hold of each other around the capstan, while the others swung themselves up over the main fife rail near the mast. I was so long under water that I wondered if the sea would ever finish coming on board, but after a while I managed to get a breath, and then when the water had cleared we clattered up on the fife rail. Almost immediately, there were two whistles from the poop. (A high deck on the aft of the ship) The sea had smashed the starboard life boat to smithereens and had taken the canvas shelter with the Captain in it, right to the lee railing. The shelter was like matchwood, and the Captain just saved himself from going over the side by clutching the rail. The second mate went about eight feet in the air, and hung on a quarter of the way up the jigger topmast stay. But that wasn't all the damage – under the break of the poop, the port poop accommodation ladder was washed away, the starboard rainwater tank stove in, a meat safe and two harness casks swept over the side and also the mizzen fife rail carried away. We started and lashed down the wreckage

and then the 'Old Man' said to take up a middle buntline for the fore lower topsail, which we would make fast when the other watch came on at 12 o/c.

We started, and finished about 12o/c; it took that long on account of the wind and inky darkness. When the port watch came on deck we began to clew up and I had bad luck, or in a way good luck again.

It was impossible to haul on the ropes against the railing, so they had to be led under the fo'c'sle head. I had a snatch block, and hooked it on a stanchion under the lee bulwark ready to pass the clewing through. Just then, the railing dipped under, and I was in water up to my neck, but managed to keep a hold on to the snatch block; then she ducked again, a long way under, and I was washed right overboard. I got hold of an end which was hanging over the side, and hung on like grim death until some of the boys came and hauled me back on board again.'

His mother and father would be wondering if they had made the right decision to let him go to sea after reading this, yet it had been during the depression years and things had been difficult. By 1933 one in three Australian breadwinners was unemployed. For men who faced constant rejection by employers in the inner city, they had no choice but to pack a swag (or 'matilda') and travel to country areas in search of work. Swagmen were entitled to receive food-ration coupons at country police stations if they could produce a traveller's ration card showing that they had travelled at least 50 miles during the week. If not, they went hungry or had to cadge for food. Ian had often seen these men looking for work along the docks, living at Dudley Flats and he had also seen his father's business in confectionery fall by the wayside, such that Don decided to go into betting on horse races.

Ian goes on with his adventure on the Archibald Russell as if it was nothing to be washed overboard.

'Eventually we got the lee side clewed up, and then all hands lay aloft to furl the sail. I was on the weather yardarm, and we had a devil of a struggle to get the clew in. We almost had her four times, but every time she got away, but by 4 am we had everything snug and so down to deck. The starboard watch had worked the whole of our watch below, and it was now our watch again. However all hands went in as we could do nothing more on deck. Our half deck when we entered looked as if a cyclone had hit it – the big sea had broken up the skylight, and every bunk was full of water. The water had



Shipmates after the storm

escaped out of the spout in the wall, but on the other side in the petty officers' quarters there was about 4 ft. of water on the floor.

At 8 am just as we were to turn in again all hands were up to re-stow the cargo, which had shifted, and both watches were kept at it until the list was reduced about 3 pm. All in all, we worked 24 hours without a spell.'

After 54 days they came to the Horn, and because they only got Easterly winds they had to do a lot of tacking. They had to have a double lookout on the fo'csle head to avoid the problems of the Drift Ice Belt and it took them 10 days to pass the Falklands. He goes on with his letter:

'As soon as the Falkland's were passed, things began to look a bit rosier, we were able to dry our clothes, bunk clothes and shave. I had a corker beard, and real curly moustache. By the way, I had better say the provisions were OK, and the primus was even better. It was great to come in at midnight wet, and

freezing and get some hot cocoa or coffee, and something warm to eat.

The South East Trades came strongly, and we did well to the Line, but the North East failed us and we have had light airs, and calms until a few days ago. Ninety five days out we saw our first steamer, and since then they have been coming along fairly frequently. About 3 days ago we got a strong South Westerly, and did 11, and 12 knots all the time, that was as much as our hand log will record, the patent log was lost long before we passed the horn. We passed one steamer, and the 'Old Man' was in high spirits. Now all we want is a decent slant to get to Ireland. Well until we come into Cork I can't post this, or add any more to it, but I will write and tell you what I think of the place when we get there. So far, we have been 132 days, and I hope it won't be very much more. I will post this as soon as we come in, when I know the exact address.

Until then we live in hope of a good wind.

Ian

*P.S. By the way I'll be writing to Old J.S (Jonathan Swift)
myself'*

The reason he was writing to Jonathan was to get an introduction to the Blue Funnel line of steamships, and he did at some stage do some voyages with them, but when Ian left the Archibald Russell he joined the Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSNC) in Liverpool, a commercial shipping company that operated in the Pacific coast of South America, and was the first to use steam ships for commercial traffic in the Pacific Ocean.

Seamen were aged from fourteen through to their late seventies and signed on to sail aboard a ship for a voyage; when they were paid off at the end of that time they were free to either sign on for a further voyage, or to take unpaid leave. The PSNC eventually wanted Ian to go for his ticket as an officer, but his apprenticeship wasn't to finish until January 1941, so he joined them as an Able Seaman and sailed to

South American ports on different voyages. He served on the cargo ship La Paz until he was discharged from it in October 1939, and he then signed on for another voyage. PSNC would regularly sail from Montevideo to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, on their route. In 1939, the PSNC delivered mail, whereas other Merchant vessels regularly transited between Montevideo and Great Britain, carrying meat, grain and other essential supplies. Ian happened to be at Montevideo after war was declared in September, 1939. Hitler had invaded Poland with his 'Blitzkrieg' on September 1, with six Panzer divisions, more than 3,000 tanks; while the Luftwaffe's accurate stukas (JU 87's) hit the airfields.

Ian had been given the option of sailing with the Company and risking attack, or staying ashore and enlisting in the Armed Forces, but he wanted to finish his apprenticeship.

British Merchant ships now began to keep the United Kingdom supplied with raw materials, arms, ammunition, fuel, food and all of the necessities of a nation at war, enabling

the country to defend itself. In doing this they sustained a considerably greater casualty rate than almost every branch of the armed services and suffered great hardship, with German destroyers and U boats looking to sink them.

The Battle of the River Plate took place on December 13th 1939. The battle in the South Atlantic was the first major naval battle of World War Two. Ships from the Royal Navy's South American Division took on the might of Germany's Graf Spee which was successfully attacking merchant shipping in the South Atlantic.

Ian was on his merchant ship in the neutral harbour of Montevideo Bay, when the Graf Spee was torpedoed and limped into the mouth of the River Plate. The German captain, Langsdorff requested Montevideo for two weeks' time for repairs, but he was only granted 72 hours. When the time came, the ship was in no position to combat the large British fleet that must have assembled outside the port, waiting for him. After berthing the crew aboard German freighters at

Montevideo, the Captain scuttled the pocket battleship on 17 Dec. 1939.

One of Langsdorff's first acts in Montevideo was to release the crews of the merchant ships he had sunk during her most recent voyage. Out of nine merchant ships sunk, none of the crews had been killed. The merchant seamen said Captain Langsdorff was a perfect gentleman, and they received good treatment from him.

Like captains of old, he committed suicide to go down with his ship. Before pulling the trigger, he wrapped himself in the colours of Imperial German, not the Nazi swastika. "For a captain with a sense of honour," he wrote in his suicide note, "it goes without saying that his personal fate cannot be separated from that of his ship." Sounds like he had had enough; perhaps he knew what was coming.

In March 1940, Ian transferred to the ore ship, Riverton, under Admiralty orders and headed for Norway to pick up iron ore for the war effort. Immediately after the outbreak of war in

September 1939, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, all announced their neutrality, as they had successfully done since the middle of the nineteenth century. Germany agreed to this and said they would not invade their territory, but qualified this statement, 'as long as they didn't help the British'. Hitler wanted a continuation of German trade with those neutral countries throughout the war, they especially still wanted to import iron ore from Sweden through the Norwegian port of Narvik, because in the winter the Baltic ports froze solid. The ore had to be transported by rail to Narvik in Norway which was ice free, and then shipped to Germany through protected neutral waters.

On the morning of the German attack in the first Battle of Narvik, there were over 20 merchant ships in the Norwegian Ofotfjord. Narvik is nearly at the end of the fjord and it was here that the merchant ships would load their iron ore from Sweden. The following British merchant steam ships were there: the Blythmoor, the Mersington Court, the North

Cornwall, the Riverton, and the Romanby, plus eleven German, one Dutch, four Norwegian and three Swedish steamships, getting ready to load or leave the harbour. The British Merchant ships were carrying the Swedish iron ore to Cardiff, near Bristol. Two Norwegian coastal defence cruisers, the Eidsvold and the Norge, were protecting the merchant ships.

Ian MacRae was an able seaman on board the Riverton checking fire-fighting suits on April 9, 1940, as the crew relaxed below before loading the Swedish iron ore into the cargo holds. He was helping the third officer who was in charge of all lifesaving and firefighting equipment. They had already checked that the lifeboats were properly stocked before they left Southend at the mouth of the Thames River, and there had been no incidents so far, their convoy having come through the U boat patrolled Atlantic unscathed.

Right now a light snowstorm was making visibility difficult for them; however Ian was a seasoned sailor, having faced the

wild storm on the Archibald Russell; he was surefooted, hardy and wiry and used to risking his life to deliver the cargo, in those days of wheat and timber. Transitioning to the steamers was a new experience and now he had more responsibility even though he was only 21 years of age – his birthday coming up in just over a week and he was looking forward to some letters from home and perhaps a night out with the crew in Bristol. Little did he know that all hell was about to break loose as seven German destroyers had entered the fjord. He was focused and relaxed as he could be in the freezing weather, word had not spread of the German advance all up the coast on Norway.

The Germans had got wind of the British intention to mine the entrances to the fjords, so in order to protect their source of iron ore, and not be blocked by the British; they secretly planned their own invasion of Narvik. On 1 March 1940, even before Ian had set sail from Liverpool, Adolf Hitler had

ordered the invasion of Norway, codenamed Operation Weserübung; so much for Norway's neutrality!

The first time they realized there was something wrong was the sound of guns firing. Just outside the harbor, the Norwegian cruiser Eidsvold engaged the German destroyers by firing a warning shot across their bows. The German destroyer Wilhelm Heidkamp then fired four torpedoes, two of which broke the back of the Norwegian ship. Eidsvold quickly sank, taking all but eight of its crew with it into the frigid waters of the fjord. They heard the loud explosions and saw flashes of light through the falling snow. Ian ran carefully to the bow of the ship and peered through the clearing gloom and looked on in shock as he saw the Eidsvold sinking in the distance.

Inside the harbour the Norge was steaming towards the destroyer firing its guns. The third officer ran to the bridge and gave the alarm 'Enemy Ship Sighted', but by this time most of his shipmates were pouring up on to the deck. The destroyers

sunk the Norge after sending seven torpedos, and then preceded to machine gun the survivors who were in the water swimming towards the nearest ships.

This was an experience that Ian would remember kindled his hatred of the Germans, and initiated a resolve to join the war effort. More destroyers were entering the harbour now and docking at the nearest wharfs to unload their troops. Ian realized this was an invasion, and they had no protection.

After a brief negotiation and seeing the vulnerability of the civilian population and his own forces' unpreparedness, the Norwegian command surrendered the town to the Germans without a fight. Eventually the crews of the Riverton and Mersington Court were taken on board the Jan Wellen, previously a whaler, now an oil tanker; before being taken ashore to be imprisoned on a top floor of a café, overlooking the Narvik harbour.

The following morning, the destroyers of the German invasion force were scattered about the fjord making repairs or

refuelling. One of the destroyers guarding the entrance to the harbour left its post at first light without waiting for relief, and so the British destroyers, the Hardy, Hotspur, Havock, Hunter and Hostile were able to sneak into the harbour and when they arrived, it was on.

In total, 11 merchant ships (six German, one British, two Swedish and two Norwegian) were sunk in the first battle. Two German destroyers the Wilhelm Heidkamp and the Anton Schmidt were both sunk, but despite this the British thought they were out gunned and left. The Hardy was so badly damaged they had to beach, while the Hunter was sunk outright, and many sailors died. The harbour water was twelve degrees below freezing and the tide in Narvik was very strong, so many drowned. The survivors of the Hardy had to jump into the sea and swim for shore.

As Ian watched from the windows of the Café, he thought to himself how lucky they were to have survived. Forty survivors from the Hunter ended up joining them in the Café, and he

found out that most of their crew had died. He also realized that the men from the Hardy who reached the shore would have had their clothes freeze to their bodies and the odds of their surviving were not good. Things were grim, but some were still alive.

As fate would have it some did survive and they were given clothes by Norwegian civilians and later, after walking fifteen miles to Ballangen, they were picked up by the second wave of British destroyers, who entered the second battle of Narvik on April 13th. Eventually the Café was packed with survivors from Merchant ships and destroyers, but there was very little food to eat, all they were given by their guards was bread and water, and then dog biscuits. Their cargo ships were captured and tied up at the wharfs, except the Romanby who had already been sunk.

In the second battle the Germans scuttled the North Cornwall and the Mersington Court, whereas the Riverton and the Blythmoor were sunk by British torpedos. The Riverton and

North Cornwall sat listing in the harbour waters and would take three days to sink. Ian was a prisoner of war, in a very inhospitable climate, and along with his shipmates had to watch their ship eventually sink. There were a couple of hundred Merchant Navy seamen by now in the café and it was very cramped, and as they could not open the windows, the air was stale. They had no blankets and it was cold and it was not easy to sleep. Yet as they had witnessed the second battle of Narvik, they held out some hope that they would be rescued, as ten German destroyers were sunk.

However as Ian awoke the following morning he saw along with the other prisoners of war, that the harbour was empty, apart from the sinking and damaged ships. The battle still raged from the air as British planes continued to bomb the harbour front, but the British destroyers had left. Were they needed in France or did the British think there were more German soldiers in Narvik than there really were? It is intriguing to think what might have happened if the British

and Norwegians had managed to hold on in extreme northern Norway. It would have taken fairly small forces to keep the Germans from advancing up the peninsula, especially with British control of the sea. In the short term, this resistance would have deprived the Germans of the valuable Swedish iron ore coming through Narvik. Over the long term, this would have also deprived the Germans of valuable naval and air bases, which were later to harass the arctic convoys to Russia after June 1941.

All the survivors knew was that they were captured and subject to the will of their guards. What kept Ian positive during this nightmare was the willpower he had developed at sea, and the thought of his MacRae ancestor's Scottish motto:

Fortitudine, which means to endure with fortitude.

Since being in the UK he now signed his surname MacRae instead of McRae, like his Highland great great grandparents had. Ian thinks back to the conversations he had with his

father's uncle Farquhar, about his Scottish heritage, and the motto of the MacRaes.

Ian and Farquhar shared the same birthdate: April 19th



Duncan and Julia

In 1850 Ian's great grandfather, Duncan MacRae had married Julia (also a McRae), who was born at Brahan, Inverness in 1828. They married at Dingwall, on the southern Cromarty Firth, north-west of Inverness, known as the Viking capital of Scotland; very much open to the North Sea and Norway's Vikings.

They however were living at Reraig, on Loch Alsh, to the east in the Scottish Highlands, on a croft. On the crofts they cut hay, grew corn and potatoes, looked after cattle; but the Highlanders felt they had been replaced by the southern newcomers and were often miserable in these crofts, feeling their father's clan lands had been taken by sheep.

Duncan MacRae was lucky enough to have been an apprentice to a Blacksmith, because most of the residents were receiving charitable relief. Over the next 10 years between the 1851 and 1861 census, Duncan and Julia MacRae had four

children. The first born Hector, named after his paternal grandfather as is the Scottish tradition, unfortunately died as a baby.

The others were: Margaret, born 1854, named after the maternal grandmother; Christina, born 1855, named after the paternal grandmother; Donald, (Ian's grandfather) born 1857, named after the maternal grandfather; Mary Nancy, born 1859, named after Julia's older sister.

On the 15th October, 1863, Duncan and Julia and her mum, and the five children began a voyage from Liverpool to Melbourne, the Voyage took 63 days with 146 crew and 589 passengers, on the Great Britain steamship. Duncan's parents had passed on and perhaps this made the emigration somewhat easier.

The SS Great Britain was designed as early as 1839 using a revolutionary design for an iron vessel, and launched in July 1843. She was half as much longer than any battleship in

Queen Victoria's service and in 1857 had been refitted with three massive masts, each made from four tree trunks bound together with iron bands, and she was the first ocean going ship with an iron hull and a screw propeller.

Perhaps much suffering and bitterness was caused by this departure as these highlanders were perhaps compelled to leave their native land, however there can be no doubt that the move would bring to them many benefits even though they would face hardships in Australia. They would have been a little shell shocked and sad to leave their native country, yet they probably had a feeling of anticipation and hope as they would have known the goldfields in Victoria were booming and the likelihood of immigration would have been discussed many times in the past 10 years. They had been told that Duncan would have no problems finding work as a blacksmith and perhaps good prospects of finding gold.

By the time the McRae's would arrive, there would be 64,000 diggers working 300 mines in and around Ballarat. Victoria had grown bigger than NSW and Melbourne had replaced Sydney as the largest city in Australia. There were approximately 4000 pastoralists with 20 million sheep occupying more than 400 million acres of Aboriginal land stretching from SA to central Queensland.

Aboriginal land had been decimated by colonisation and now the gold rush; how did Duncan and Julia feel about the plight of the aboriginal people, were they as compassionate as Robert Lyon Milne? Duncan and Julia now had a journey of nine weeks to think about their prospects in Australia, and there would be plenty of immigrants all discussing the same thing. Perhaps all they could think about was whether they could find Gold, and make a quick fortune?

The gold rush was a second wave of dispossession for Australian Aborigines in Central Victoria, many of whom had

already been forced from their land by pastoralists. The massive influx of diggers onto their land and the ensuing environmental destruction had a lasting impact. Indigenous communities fought a losing battle to save their culture. In the more settled areas where gold was first found, the Aborigines' battle to retain their traditional culture was already lost.

The diggers had taken over their camping sites, disturbed wildlife, destroyed habitats and decimated sacred sites. In those areas what was left of the tribal family units would fix camp on a squatter's run or on the outskirts of the diggings and eke out a living by doing odd jobs, trading fish, game, or Aboriginal implements and by begging and prostitution. Some people at the diggings were believed to take pleasure in inducing Aboriginal people to drink liquor. It was a precarious existence and its effects showed in the pot-bellied appearance of the undernourished children, yet the white invaders were

growing fat on the sale of the proceeds of gold, beef, mutton and wool. How did they live with themselves?

Duncan and Julia would have heard that the conflict with Aborigines had died down and in fact the Aboriginal Reserve at Coranderrk was being set up near Healesville with 100 people. Coranderrk's first manager, John Green, worked closely with Indigenous leaders to build housing and plant crops of hops, wheat and vegetables on the site.

The Great Britain went by way of the Cape of Good Hope around Africa and then to Adelaide, Port Phillip Bay and Melbourne, and Ian had been told by Farquhar that this ship was a bit like Noah's Ark, because she carried 150 sheep; 40 pigs; 550 fowl; 444 ducks; 100 geese; and 50 turkeys to provide fresh meat for the nearly 600 passengers and 150 crew members. The dangers of the journey were many: storms, sickness and some passengers were less than satisfactory, engaging in gambling, drunkenness and violence. Sailors were

often bribed by passengers in rough weather to make sure they would be first in the lifeboats.

Julia had a rough time on the trip as she had only just given birth to her fifth child, Julia Johanna, born 1863 before they left to go to Liverpool, named after her mother and probably a female servant who lived next door, Johanna Armstrong.

When the McRae's arrived in Melbourne in December 1863, it was a city of 125,000 people. Previously it had been a tent city, with dirt roads and hundreds of immigrants preparing to head for the goldfields. In heavy rain, Elizabeth Street was a flowing torrent of muddy water, now there was gas street lighting, regular piped water and solid buildings, which gave the city a more permanent appearance.

Their first residence in Australia was Scarsdale, approximately 20 miles south west of Ballarat, and Duncan tried his luck at the Linton diggings nearby, but soon realized he needed something more permanent with a family of five

children and another on the way. He went into a Blacksmith's business in Evansford and here he had 10 acres and later bought another 40 acres at Amherst, which was close to Talbot. They were doing OK, better than the first Australians.

Farquhar was born in Evansford in 1867 and Isabella in 1870. They had their own home now, a beautiful bluestone and brick establishment. There was a school in Evansford, not far from the McRae property. Margaret, Christine, Donald and Mary Nancy were at school with Johanna, Farquhar and Isabella still at home. In any case once they turned 12, very few children stayed at school, and Donald Senior turned 12 in 1869 and with the new baby on the way he would have had to earn his keep, either helping his father pump the bellows in the blacksmith's shop or panning for gold on the Amherst property.

With a proper school set up in the town there would have been a teacher, and in a one teacher school classes could be 40

or 50 and the older children were expected to teach the younger ones. School was nine to five on the diggings with a two hour lunch break to have with the family at home, usually the main meal of stew, but in the proper school they had lunch there, as some had a long way to travel. There were no uniforms and subjects were reading, writing and arithmetic, but also some special subjects like geography, natural science and music.

Roles were strictly enforced and girls were taught to sew and embroider and played with dolls and basically prepared for motherhood. Boys were taught drawing and bookkeeping and extra arithmetic to prepare them for work and were given wooden building blocks, toy soldiers and model coaches with toy horses to play with. There were lots of books to read and most told stories that encouraged children to be good.

Learning to write was a big thing and they progressed in stages:

1. Beginning the alphabet – sand trays with a stick to make the letters
2. Words – a slate and special pen to copy the teacher's words from the blackboard.
3. Writing – paper and pens with a metal nib to dip in ink, stored in special china bowls in a special inkwell hole in the desks, but only for those who were ready.

You were never allowed to talk in class unless answering the teacher and the cane was used to back this up for poor attention or naughtiness. Parents had to pay fees in proper schools: under 8 years - one shilling; 8 to 12 - one and six; and 12+ - two shillings. If parents didn't pay at the start of the week, you were sent home. At breaks boys would play marbles or imaginary games and girl's played jacks or skipping.

On Sundays all the family would dress up in their best clothes and go to Church. In the afternoon they were not allowed to play games, but sit quietly or read the Bible. They were Presbyterians, part of the reformed Church of Scotland that had split from Roman Catholicism in 1560, led by John Knox. This was very much a community based Church with elders responsible for the discipline, nurture and mission of the local congregation. Parishioners were expected to believe in certain things and express these as ‘confessions of faith’.

On 7/7/1874, Duncan selected land at Charlton West, 270 acres, and began to farm it. Duncan was leaving his blacksmith profession and going into farming, and this would have been a big move for him. His eldest children also married and were on the land. They could pay for half an allotment on selection at £1 per acre and pay rent on the other half, usually for 7 years; they could then gain title to the land

when the other half was paid for after making improvements to the land.

By 1880 Charlton was a thriving town, and a provincial capital for the district within a 20 mile radius. There were two steam flour mills to process grain and a cattle market held fortnightly. There were three Churches, five banks and several hotels.

In 1877, Ian's grandfather, Donald McRae married Mary Elizabeth Nesbit (nee Chapple), at Donald, a thriving farming town to the south-west of Charlton. Prior to his marriage, Donald, at age 19, had selected 110 acres, across the road from his father in Charlton West. Now at 20, he was married to Bess, as she liked to be called. She was 22, and had a two year old daughter, Alexandria. However, they didn't stay long, and after the birth of Elizabeth (1878) and Donald junior (1879) in Charlton, they moved to Broomfield, just north of Creswick. Here Donald worked at the Allendale Mines; he

had left his property for his father and younger brother and sisters to manage.

While they lived at Broomfield, two more daughters were born, Margaret (Annie) 1883, and Isabella 1885, and all four children born to Donald were baptized at St John's Church of England in Creswick. Yes, Donald's wife Bess was Church of England, her father was Charles Robert Chapple, from Exeter, England, and her mother Margaret Kavanagh, from Ireland.

Charles was the eldest of ten children born to John Chapple and Anne Oke. John was a successful auctioneer and jeweller in Exeter, and from a well off family. He and his wife (and 8 children then) had migrated in 1848 to Port Adelaide; in fact the Chapple's were in Adelaide at the same time as the Milnes.

In 1857 they trekked by wagon to the goldfields after residing in Adelaide for 8 years. This journey took over a month and eventually they arrived to meet Charles and his

family at the diggings near Avoca. Eventually they all settled in Bealiba in 1864. Charles and Margaret Chapple had 7 children and six of them were born in 7 years from 1853 to 1860. Their mother died when Bessie was only 13; she was the 3rd girl, of 6 girls and 1 boy.

Charles Chapple had some success with a find at Tunstall's State Forest, three miles north-west of Bealiba, but after the death of his wife in 1868, he wandered around in search of that illusive fortune on the goldfields. Perhaps this is why Bess may have convinced her husband to give mining a go, but it was short-lived, miner's wages were low and most of them lived a fairly hand-to mouth existence. Miners worked 10 to 12 hour shifts six days a week with no holiday or sick pay, for only £1/10s per week. Also miners were unlucky to live more than 35 years and died from silicosis, fine dust inhalation, as Charles had done.

Donald obviously was not in favour of this, but instead of going back to Charlton; in 1886 they moved all the way across Victoria to Cowwarr, then finally settling on a dairy farm in Strzelecki, East Gippsland. Did Donald not like farming in Charlton or did they just want to be on their own?

This was the same year that the young people of Coranderrk were forced to leave the mission because of the Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria (or 'Half-caste Act'). The Victorian Aborigines Protection Act had excluded 'half-castes' from their definition of an Aboriginal person, and as a result nearly half the residents of the missions and reserves had to leave their homes. The Act specified that no person of mixed descent under the age of 34 could live on an Aboriginal reserve. This meant that the running of the mission was left to an ageing community. Declining numbers gave the government an argument for moving the community off the mission. They

were prepared to run the mission themselves at Coranderrk but they were not allowed to do it. This behaviour towards Indigenous people was justified by the British colonial system that didn't understand, respect or value Indigenous Australians; it was such a shameful part of Australia's history to see Aboriginal people socially excluded in their own land.

In 1890 three tragedies struck the McRae's in Charlton. The eldest girl Margaret was 17 years of age when she had married Donald Charleson, who had a farm not far from Duncan. Their recent baby had died in August and the whole clan were upset over it.

Then before Christmas, Farquhar, in his early twenties, had been stripping a neighbour's crop (Mr Jones) at West Charlton with a young man, James Murray, who also worked on his father's farm. They had stayed the night at Mr Jones on Christmas Eve and in the morning at 7 am left to go duck shooting, with the purpose being to take a duck to his parents

for Christmas dinner. Mr Jones lent Murray his gun but told him to be particularly careful as the tumbler on the lock had worn away and the gun went off very easily with the slightest pressure. The inevitable happened and as they were preparing to get through a fence the gun went off and hit Farquhar in the right arm, just below the elbow. Murray got a shock and dropped the gun. He immediately applied a tourniquet to Farquhar's arm stemming the flow of blood. They walked to another neighbour, (Mr McGillivray) half a mile away and he got his buggy out and drove Farquhar into Charlton. The fracture was so serious that he had to go to Inglewood hospital by train to have his arm amputated; and a special train was put on at Korong Vale to take him there. Farquhar was of such quality that he told his mate James not to stress over the accident and 'not on any account to allow it to interfere with the stripping operations'.

It is often said that tragedy runs in three's and so while

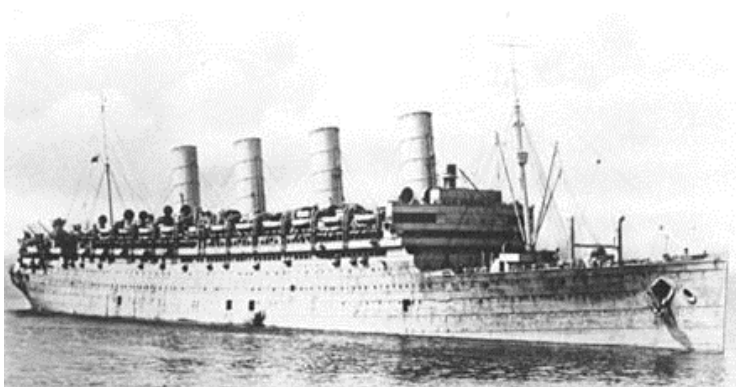


Farquhar was in hospital Farquhar's nephew, John Duncan Charleson (aged 5½) also died, after 12 hours of convulsions. It is possible he drank something he should not have, like whiskey, or perhaps had a fever.

This news was very unsettling for the McRae's. Rob, Ian and Elva had heard these stories and were well aware that accidents could happen, and that it was important to stay focused especially in times of difficulty; and there would be plenty of opportunities for them ahead.

Rob

On October 19th, 1940, Rob begins the wobbly climb up the gangway to the Aquitania, with his kit on his back. He is 24 years old and a corporal with C Company, in the 2/14th Battalion, part of the 21st Brigade, of the 7th Infantry Division of the Australian Army. ‘I wonder if I will return to this country’ he thinks to himself; ‘yes, this is getting serious!’ He had been taught to kill in his training, but he wondered if he would be able to go through with it in the heat of battle or hand to hand combat.



The Aquitania had been a troop ship during WW1, and although it was old, it was a big ship with four operating

steam funnels and eighty lifeboats, including two motorised launches with Marconi wireless equipment. On one occasion during WW1 she had transported over 8,000 men in one trip, however during this voyage the men were to have their own cabins, because there were less than 2000 men to board: the 2/14th, 900 men, mostly from Victoria, and the 2/27th to be picked up in South Australia, also about 900 men, and then on to Western Australia to pick up the 2/16th of roughly 1000 men.

As Rob checked in with his sergeant he decides to change his next of kin to his mother, as the last time he saw his father they argued about him joining up. His father had his own fears anchored in his subconscious from WW1 and in those days they didn't communicate too well. Rob was still a bit angry at his father for taking bets and hanging around pubs while he had to help his mother in the shop, but they needed to survive. They also add Mrs White's name from Red Cross House, 289

Swanston Street, Melbourne; a precaution if he was killed or wounded.

Back on deck, with his gear stored below, he finds a place next to his mates to watch the armada of yachts and motor boats all waving flags, wishing them well. This was the first time Rob had been overseas before and despite the seriousness of their mission, he was excited and about to meet a whole lot more friends that he could keep in contact with for many years to come.

After they picked up the 2/16th in Freemantle, it was more cramped in the mess deck, and with a lot of men going to war in a new adventure, nerves became frayed. Rob was a confident young man, with a responsible head on his shoulders. He had been a boy scout and had served with the 5th Victorian Scottish Regiment at Mount Martha; however he did have an angry streak in his character that could rear its head unexpectedly at unpredictable moments.

As a young boy at his grandfather's dairy farm he had an incident that occurred with his older cousins whilst at a gathering of celebration. The adults were inside and the teenage boys were left to clean up the shed after milking. Rob was 5 years old and the boys didn't notice Rob put his finger too close to a circular saw that had not quite been turned off. He lost half of his right index finger and this had shattered his confidence in himself and made him wary of unexpected happenings. His parents had been shocked and had immediately taken him to the Warrigal Hospital for treatment; as a result of this experience if he felt threatened or uncertain he could easily get angry.

On the Aquitania each company had a roster of jobs to complete to help the ship's crew with the running of the ship. One morning Rob was helping to carry the stores from the hold to the mess preparation area before lunch with several others, when one of the 2/16th thought he would play a practical joke for a laugh, and stuck out his foot so that Rob

hit the deck spilling the bag of potatoes he was carrying. There was a huge roar of laughter from the joker's mates but Rob instantly saw red and flung himself at the offender, knocking him to the deck floor.

After they were both restrained they were paraded before the appropriate officers of the battalions for a dressing down.

Morale on a ship heading for war is so vital and there is also a great need for entertainment to sooth the nerves of the troops.

It was decided that this was an opportunity to do just that, so these two would represent their battalions in a competitive boxing match to be held on deck the next afternoon. Bets were



placed, and although Rob lost the fight to a heavier, taller man, he did earn the respect of his own mates. However, if he was to survive this war he thought he had better try and curb this angry trait and be more focused.

They were now in a convoy of three ships crossing the Indian Ocean: The Aquitania; the Queen Mary (carrying 7th Division signals) and the Mauretania; being escorted by the HMAS Canberra. They reached Bombay by Nov 4th, 1940. The crossing had been uneventful and they disembarked at Bombay and travelled by train, 130 miles to the north-east to Deolali for training in a mountainous area. It was winter and the temperatures were pleasant and the men were soon to learn that war involves months of training, weeks of fighting with sometimes only hours of desperation and dying, if negotiation has failed to subdue the enemy. Again they took the train and it was back to Bombay, where they boarded smaller troopships, to navigate the Red Sea as part of a larger convoy. Only once did they have to scatter to avoid an Italian

reconnaissance plane flying overhead; the guns on the Canberra opened up, making it disappear. Italy was in the war and Mussolini's troops had invaded Greece. They still were not sure where they were heading – perhaps Crete or Greece?

Rob was on the 'Dilwara' and they had to sleep in hammocks as she was a lot smaller than the Aquitania, so as to navigate the Suez Canal. Going through the canal Rob saw many Arabs along the way going about their business and they all laughed as one man turned his back, and mooned them from the side of the canal. 'If that's all we have to worry about, we will be OK!' he thought.

They anchored at El Qantara on the Suez Canal and boarded a train to Palestine through the Sinai Desert and moved to Julius camp, one of many camps on the coast between Gaza and Tel Aviv, where they pitched their tents. It was only a bus ride from Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but it was November and the rains had begun, which made their life very difficult, and special care was needed with drinking water to avoid rabies,

dysentery and diarrhoea. There was little vegetation in the surrounding countryside, and it was here that they had to slush through of lots of mud on long route manoeuvres and again train in drill, weapons and field craft, as well as avoid getting sick. However they did have leave in Jerusalem and Rob and his mates toured the old city visiting the sites where Jesus had lived, taught and died, and saw the site of Christ's birth at Bethlehem. Christmas came and their officers served them with turkey and plum pudding. (See below)



Rob got a surprise when he opened up to one of his officers that his younger brother Ian had been captured in Norway and interred in Sweden. The officer knew someone who had been on the same ship as Ian; it was a surprise and Rob was soon looking for Keith, a man who was in Signals at Qastina Camp at the northern end of Julius camp.

Ian on the right and Keith in the middle



When he found him he got another surprise, Keith not only knew Ian but was a great friend and had a picture of three of them together on the ship. Rob was so excited to hear the stories Keith told him about Ian, however Keith was dismayed

Keith Rutherford is the one on the right.
Dear Mother,
This is a surprise.
Mr Bourke one of our officers gave
me this. He got it from Keith
Rutherford who belongs to Corps HQ.
I know nothing about it except
of course that they were once
together. I'm looking for Keith now
Rob

when he learned that Ian had been captured in Narvik on board the Riverton. He gave Rob the photo and Rob sent it home to his mother, who he knew was anxious for news of him, with a note on the back of the photo.

As fate would have it 1 Corps Signals were looking for a new recruit and someone who could ride a motor bike. As this was an opportunity for Rob to learn more about his brother he was keen, but all he had ridden was a bicycle, which he would ride from Prahran to Rosebud to visit his sweetheart before the war. However a wink from Keith reassured him and Rob told the officer he was the man for the job – ‘Keith will teach me to ride’ he thought. He had a new friend and a new career in the army.

On 6th January, 1941 he attended 1st Australian Corps School of Signals training and was transferred from the 2/14th a month later and promoted to acting Sergeant. Little did he know that his brother Ian was at that very time involved in a scheme to

escape Sweden and bring Norwegian ships back to England with a load of ball bearings and iron ore?



Once again on leave Rob visited Tel Aviv, where he tried hard to stay clear of wine, women and venereal disease which many of the soldiers fell prey to. ‘Boy this is just like St Kilda’ Rob thought. However with his promotion to acting sergeant and his engagement to Wilma, he managed to avoid this pitfall, but the temptations were huge for the men of the 7th.

On 24th January, 1941 No 1 Company Signals left Palestine and moved across the Sinai desert to Cairo and Mena on the western outskirts of the city, two hours by vehicle south of Alexandria port. This was 10 months before a raid was carried out on two Royal Navy battleships in the harbour of Alexandria, on 19 December 1941, by Italian Navy divers using manned chariots to attach limpet mines to the Queen Elizabeth and Valiant, disabling them for nine months and six months respectively. Rob did not know it yet, but he was to learn more about these chariots when the British decided to use them as well.

Mena was close to the historic Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx, just a short walk, and so Rob was getting the adventure he wanted as he climbed to the top of the pyramid. Six months later they realized the adventure was not worth the trouble, yet if no-one had confronted Hitler, what would have been the outcome? A case of ‘you are damned if you do, and

damned if you don't!' So what do you do? You do the right thing.

Signals was moved to Mersa Matrah along with the 2/14th, a camp that was only 300 km from Tobruk, on the front line. Soon sections of signals were at Tobruk to aid in setting up communications. Rob had plenty of time to practice riding a motorbike (Don R), however because he was now a sergeant it often fell to the younger men, but dust was a real problem to the dispatch and reconnaissance riders, and so they were not always favoured.

Most of the desert they were living in was arid and flat, with only a few drought resistant bushes, and fierce winds and dust storms that made their life unbearable. It got in your hair, your clothes and inside your tent. Although the days were hot, the nights were extremely cold and anything exposed would be covered with dew. Their job was to create reliable communications, and this meant laying out lines over extremely long distances, which could easily be destroyed by

the wheels of vehicles or tanks. While at Mersa Mutrah, air attacks plagued them on a daily basis as the Stuka's dropped 'screamers' on their camps. A lot of time was spent picking up the old cable for use later in Syria. On Feb 28th 1941, they were recalled and moved to Ikingi Maryut, an Allied staging camp outside Alexandria. It was here that Rob had word that his brother had escaped to England.

Ian

The prisoners had been confined for over two weeks now at the Iris café in Narvik and they were cold, hungry and dirty. The Germans in Narvik barely had enough food for themselves, so they decided to march them into neutral Sweden under escort. When Ian and the others found out they were to move to Sweden they felt better – he thought: ‘anything was better than starving to death in a cramped environment’. Little did he know at the time that this might eventually be his fate!

They set off in two groups early on the morning of 25th April following along one after the other through the snow along the cliffs of the fjord. Ian was now 22 years of age, his birthday on the 19th April having passed with only a fleeting recognition. He had been cramped and sore as he left the café, but gradually the blood had circulated throughout his body, and he felt good to be moving again. Three years on the Grain ships had given him a fit body and strong mind, and he was

soon helping others who were struggling with injuries. At least the freezing conditions helped to slow the loss of blood from those with wounds.

After trudging most of the day they finally arrived at a train station, wet, cold and very exhausted. Here they were told to board the carriages under guard and they were at least pleased to be out of the snow, even if they did not know their fate. They were given a small ration of hot soup each before the train got underway towards neutral Swedish territory. At a point near the border the train was stopped and the guards told them to get out and walk the rest of the way, but it was mostly uphill and took many hours before they came to the border post. There they were made to wait while Swedish soldiers contacted their superiors as to their duty. After hours of explaining their circumstance, the soldiers eventually took them to a ski resort hotel nearby. Some 125 miles north of the Arctic Circle, the world's northernmost ski resorts only open when the climate is more temperate and the days are longer,

and it was now that time of year in May. They were given food and drink, and medical attention and a hospital for those who needed it.

The Swedes were very kind to the sailors who had escaped from Narvik. They were not pleased to hear that the Germans had invaded their next door neighbour. The Swedish officers at the hotel, which had been occupied by the military ever since the outbreak of war into Poland, decided to send the ‘fortunate to survive’ seamen south to Gallivare, and so once again they boarded a train, but this time as guests of the Swedish military. Here they stayed a few days while it was decided again what to do with them.

They were sent to Jörn, a 320 km journey on the train to the south, in the north of Sweden. They were put into an old house, but complained after a few days that their treatment was less than satisfactory so the Swedes decided to billet the men in the community. Ian enjoys his time here, learning

Swedish, especially with the blond girl he strikes up a close friendship with.

On May 10th the German Army had invaded France and was pushing the Allies back to Dunkirk, where if it had not been for bad weather that hampered the Luftwaffe, and Churchill's Operation Dynamo, they would have been annihilated.

Towards the end of July they were entrained again to a special internment camp set up at Helsingmo in the Soderhamn municipality, 560 km south of Jor. It was now the middle of the Northern summer and the weather was much more agreeable, sunny days and no snow. There were 170 men in this camp who had survived the battles of Narvik. They were offered paid work to keep them occupied building a railroad till 2.45



pm each day with a break for lunch and the men were happy to do this to prevent boredom.

At present they had no way of returning to England and they were not sure if they were prisoners or not. As Hitler had consolidated the expansion into Europe with the expulsion of the Allied forces from Dunkirk by the end of May, the Swedish authority's neutrality wavered. They had always sold iron ore to Germany and they continued to do this because they were afraid of the German advancement into Russia, and to avoid being conquered found themselves making more and more concessions to the Nazis – they continued to ship iron ore to Germany despite Allied pressure.

So the seamen found their treatment was not so welcoming any more, and the Nazis were infiltrating Sweden and monitoring their activities with some Swedes acting as informers. In the summer of 1940, U-boats were wreaking havoc in the Atlantic on merchant ships. In June – 58 ships

sunk; in July – 38 sunk; in August – 58 sunk, all with the loss of just one U-boat. Churchill was alarmed.

Britain was running very short of ball-bearings and machine tools for their industry; Sweden was the centre of production, but the sea routes were blocked by the Germans. British planes needed bearings during the Battle of Britain, so the availability of Swedish bearings on the outcome of the war cannot be underestimated. Some material came by air, but that was limited in weight and volume. About this time a British businessman, George Binney, who was in the UK Ministry of Supply, and was the representative of his government in Sweden, realized that there were Norwegian merchant ships anchored in the Swedish ports, who were unable to get back home due to the German blockade.

So he took a flat in Gothenburg and began to interview the Norwegian captains to see if they would sail their cargos to Britain. However the captains had been unimpressed with the British warships abandoning Norway to the Germans when

they had the opportunity to press home their advantage. Why should they help the British now; they had no willingness to risk the German blockade in the Skagerrak. Only one, Captain Isachsen of the Tai Shan, was willing to help. So Binney needed a plan B. He travelled to the camp in Helsingmo and explained his mission to the merchant sailors there and asked for volunteers. Many of them were keen even though they had not sailed on diesel engines before, but the plus for Binney was that they were trustworthy – not informers like some of the Norwegians that had already leaked Binney's plans to the Germans. The only problem was that they would have to wait until winter so that they could sail unseen through the German blockade. The exiled Norwegian government gave approval for the captains to hand over their vessels to the British.

Ian volunteered to take part in Operation Rubble, as it was called and was to sail with the Captain of the Romanby, Andrew Henry on the Elizabeth Bakke, who had been offered 100 pounds extra for the voyage. The seamen had also been

promised an incentive of an extra 20% on their normal wages, plus a one off payment of 30 pounds for crew and 50 pounds for officers who took part. Compensation would be given to families of those who might be killed, injured or captured. It was risky!

Once winter set in the men were taken to Gothenberg, a seven hour train journey to the west coast of Sweden, where they began to get acquainted with their respective vessels. They painted the ships a grey colour and blacked out the windows, as well as loading concrete blocks around the bridge for protection in case of air attack. After they had secured their cargos, just under 25,000 tons of vital material for the British war effort, just before Christmas, 1940, they sailed the vessels one at a time to Bro fjord and hid them there till the conditions were right for an escape.

Ian once again was preparing for a voyage and checking the life boats and other equipment necessary in the case of an incident. Unfortunately the water around the ships had turned

to thick ice and the skies did not look promising – with a promise of more snow. They had another nervous wait on their hands. Ian was starting to wonder if this was a good idea. He had left a fairly secure camp at Halsingmo to stand on the deck of a freezing Norwegian cargo ship stuck in ice, with some Norwegian sailors who were close to breaking.

In case of capture, because they had no explosives, they had fitted 8 valves in the holds of the decks so the ships could easily be sunk if they were captured. They had also been given expensive Swedish life jackets that were specifically for sailors operating in Swedish waters. They were unsinkable and kept you warm; however they were very awkward to move in and hopeless below deck.

As the ice began to break up they got nearer to the best night to escape. They chose a moonless foggy night to leave and the Elizabeth Bakke was the last to leave and get clear of the ice. Captain Henry kept the ship in deeper waters to avoid mines; even then they did have a mine come very near to the hull.

Then after about 6 hours of sailing he spotted two destroyers and was worried they were Germans, however it turned out they were British destroyers sent to accompany the cargo ships across the Atlantic. Henry brought his ship to full speed and because his was the fastest they were the first to reach Kirkwall in the Orkneys. It took them a full nail biting day to reach Scotland.

One of the other ships, the Ranja, who was the slowest, was not so fortunate and had been strafed by German Luftwaffe, until the British destroyers arrived to prevent any major damage to the ship. Their mission had succeeded with over 24,000 tons of iron and steel being taken safely to Britain, but it was kept hush hush because the Swedes had asked that Operation Rubble be not made public.

It was the end of January 1941, and Ian was lucky to be safe. 80% of the Jews that were to die in the Holocaust were still alive; but on January 20th a conference at Wannsee Villa in

Berlin enunciated Hitler's 'final solution'; the genocide of the Jews.



On January 30 the Elizabeth Bakke (see picture above) sailed down the west coast of Scotland into the Clyde River to dock at Glasgow to unload their precious cargo. Ian was free again, cashed up and on leave. Don and Vi had known he was still alive and had been taken to Sweden, but had no idea he had escaped. He was desperate for letters from home as they had not been allowed to write from Sweden, so as not to give their mission away, so Ian went on down to Liverpool where he had

lived before the war near Merseyside, while in between voyages.

He wrote a letter home to his parents, telling how he left Sweden and luckily made it to the UK.

He writes:

200 Grove Street,

Liverpool 7.

February 10, 1941

'Dear Mother and Father,

Well it's decent to be writing from England again, especially as I thought I was stuck in Sweden for the duration. Now I am going for my ticket and then see where I go next.

I suppose you have been wondering how I got back to this country – it is rather a long story but I don't suppose you'll be satisfied until you hear it all.

I suppose you noticed you didn't get any letters from Sweden since about October. Well I'm sorry but we weren't allowed to write.

You see a chap came to the camp and asked for volunteers to get hold of some Norwegian ships in Gothenburg and run the German blockade through the Skagerrak. Naturally we volunteered. The chances were supposed to be about 1 in 100; but we made it, so the Jerry Navy must be feeling pretty sick about the whole affair.

The worst part of the whole show was the waiting. You see we had to have suitable weather and it was a long time coming. So long in fact, that the ships were frozen in the ice. We started out in a blinding snowstorm and didn't see anything except a mine which floated by about five feet from the side of the ship. I don't know how many minefields we went through; I think the whole lot is pretty well sown. We had extraordinary luck and in the North Sea were spotted by a Jerry plane. He didn't have any bombs but used his machine gun cannon quite a lot before he buzzed off.

The mate of one of the ships got two in the tummy but I think he'll pull through alright.

We finished up in Scotland and had quite a reception from newspaper men and newsreels but I don't think anything has been released yet. From there I came on to Liverpool and I think I'll be here about 6 weeks while I go to the school.

How is Rob getting on? Could you send me his address? What do you think of the news from Libya? Great isn't it? The boys are certainly showing what they can do.

I don't know what to do now. I thought of getting a job as sub-lieutenant R.N.R when I get my ticket; that is if I can shift over from the Merchant Navy. What do you think about it? Write soon and let me know all the news. The last letter I had from you was written in 1939, so it was a bit ancient.

Anyway it is great to be back here again. There are not many chaps get two chances at the war and get away with it.

How is Elva? Does she still skate or is she too busy knitting sox? I suppose everything is topsy turvy at home as well now. Liverpool is not so badly damaged. We have had had three warnings since I came back but no planes or bombs. The

people here are marvellous. They just carry on as if everything was as usual so Jerry isn't getting any good out of his dirty work.

Well I suppose I'll have to close down until next time. Don't forget to write soon and write heaps of letters. I haven't had any for so long I've nearly forgotten what they look like. Cheerio for now and best of luck.

Your loving son

Ian

A following similar and more daring Operation called 'Performance' ended in disaster with six of the ten ships being sunk, two being chased back to Sweden and only two getting to Britain. Two hundred men, mainly Norwegian sailors were taken prisoner and put in concentration camps with only fifty surviving to the end of the war. A radio warning to the ships during Operation Performance had been sabotaged by a Danish inspector, according to George Binney.

Ian decides to contact the 'Blue Funnell' shipping line and he gets a few relief jobs while deciding what to do, but remains in Liverpool. All merchant shipping is now handled by the Admiralty, and from May 1941, the Ministry of Shipping was renamed the Ministry of War Transport. Headquarters for Alfred Holt's Blue Funnel Line was at India House in Liverpool. Supplies and troops were moved by the Merchant Navy and protected by the Royal Navy.

Liverpool shipping and city was bombed relentlessly by the Germans, they had first started in August 1940; but the peak of the bombing occurred from 1 – 7 May 1941, overall 2,716 people were killed. The raids continued until January 1942 and over 6,500 homes in Liverpool were completely demolished by aerial bombing and a further 190,000 damaged. Ian's residence at 200 Grove Street was not damaged. Was he lucky or unlucky?

At the moment he was indeed having a run of luck, because he gets his ticket of competence, and he can do this because of

his sea time in the merchant navy. When he gets his answer, he moves down to London and visits Australia House and gets to speak to Mrs Ethel Bruce, the wife of the Commissioner, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, who was the Prime Minister of Australia before the war. He has been accepted to do a course at the Royal Navy College at Greenwich, but while in London, Ian also visits his father's sister's relatives, in Bow Road, north east of the Thames, near Bethnal Green. He says in a letter:

'They have been "blitzed" out but are still very much alive and kicking. They invited me to spend some of my leaves there when I get them.' The blitz of London did not destroy the British will to resist an evil dictator.

Isabelle McRae was Don's younger sister. She married Charles Sitch in 1923, his second marriage. His parents Joseph and Margaret Sitch came from Bow in London in 1876 on the 'Lady Jocelyn' to Adelaide, with two small children and a baby born during the voyage. They had 10 children eventually

and settled in Coburg, Melbourne; it was Charles's relatives that Ian visited after letters from Aunt Belle told him where to go.

When Ian starts his course at Greenwich, he writes that he has heard Rob was in Bethlehem, but due to the slowness of mail, Rob has been all over the place by now, Mersa Mutrah, Alexandria and back to Nazareth by this time, preparing to fight the Vichy French in early June, 1941. Ian himself is keen to get involved in the war, and writes:

'I shall be here doing a course for about six weeks and from then on I can't say just where I'll be going. Somewhere with plenty of kick in it I hope. It was good to hear that Rob is in Bethlehem but I wish he could come over here for a while. It would be great fun to see him for a while. Still maybe I may meet up with him yet, I hope so anyway.'

Rob

For members of the armed forces the importance of mail during World War II was second only to food. The emotional power of letters was heightened by the fear of loss and the need for communication during times of separation. Military personnel felt the most connected to home through reading about it in letters. Civilians were encouraged to write their service men and women about even the most basic activities. Daily routines, family news, and local gossip kept the armed forces linked to their communities.

The problem with mail during WW2 was that it was slow and mail is often opened and offending parts blanked or cut out, and civilian mail may be subject to much the same treatment. Sensitive information such as military unit location and troop strength were censored, and so Ian did not know that Rob was no longer in Bethlehem.

At the end of May, 1941, there was a shift back to Palestine to make preparations for the war against the Vichy French in

Syria. The 7th Division had set up headquarters 65 miles north of Jerusalem, near the Sea of Galilee at Nazareth, the town Jesus lived and preached in, close to the Syrian border. Signals were camped in an Olive grove, but there was to be no olive branch offered by the Vichy French.

At first it was thought that they would surrender quickly and perhaps join the Free French, so the Aussie soldiers were told to wear slouch hats to show they were Australians, who had fought alongside the French in WW1. Once the fierce fighting broke out and a few Aussies were shot in the head, they reverted to helmets. The campaign against the Vichy French lasted 5 weeks from June 7 to July 11, so while Rob was involved in setting up communications to aid the push to Jezzine and Beirut, Ian was studying to be a sub Lieutenant in Greenwich, which he achieved on July 14. He was thinking of becoming a submariner, as the Royal Navy was constantly advertising for them and Churchill had put in a call for midget submarines to attack the Italians, like they were doing to the

British. Would Rob have told him he was ‘crazy’ to serve in a submarine, with a 50% chance of survival?

Any letters of the fighting were censored, and anyway the engaged soldiers would not have time to write. The objective was to occupy Beirut but to get there; they had to navigate rugged terrain, with mountains and valleys and rivers running out to the sea. It was difficult to say the least. Don R’s were used to run the ‘Mad Mile’ as it was called, near Jezzine, a winding road across a steep ravine, over which line laying was impossible and the riders were usually under constant shell fire whilst trying to carry their messages through. They developed a stop/start procedure to make it difficult for the Vichy gunners to hit their targets.

It was a ferocious campaign, where the Vichy French lost 521 dead and around 2,000 wounded. The British and Indian Colonial forces were the hardest hit, with 3,300 casualties in total, while the Australians lost 416 dead and over 1,000 wounded. The Free French, who had to fight their own

countrymen, had 1,300 casualties. The French nation had been split in two, after the retreat from Dunkirk.

The invasion by the Allied troops exposed strong bitterness between Free and Vichy French, while a bungled armistice didn't take the Free French into account at all, instead allowing the Vichy troops to be repatriated if they wished so. That, in turn, also created a deep rift between the Free French and the British. At the end of the first day's fighting the Australian General Blamey had cabled a summary to the British commander: *"Troops participating: British, Free French, Australian and Indian, request minimum publicity of details'.*

STOP

After the Vichy French surrender, the 7th Division, now nicknamed the 'Silent Seventh', moved to Tripoli and the 1st Australian Corps Headquarters were in the mountains near Beirut, on the Mediterranean coast. Men who fought this campaign were instructed NOT to share details with family. Signals role now was to maintain a network of

communications that extended from Palestine to the Turkish border. They now had a 60 line switchboard at Tripoli with tele printers and a wireless link, and of course the Don R's letter service, that handled thousands of despatches per day. This was much better than the 5 weeks of hostilities, where they had to use donkeys and even carrier pigeons, plus letter drops.

In February 1942, as Singapore fell and the Japanese military prepared to invade Papua New Guinea, Curtin instructed the 7th division to be brought home to defend Australia. Churchill wasn't happy; he wanted the Australian troops to be used in Burma, but Curtin had his way and Australia realigned its foreign policy towards America, and sent troops to New Guinea to help fight the Japanese.

Rob stayed on in Syria longer than the 2/14th, who left in January in the SS Île de France from Port Tewfik at the end of the Suez Canal on the Red Sea. Sailing from Egypt on 30 January 1942, the 2/14th disembarked at Adelaide on 24th

March 1942; however five months later, on 13th August it arrived at Port Moresby in Papua, and by 16th August was advancing along the Kokoda Trail to confront the rapidly advancing Japanese. The 2/14th was destined to fight on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea where their casualties in jungle warfare were high. Was Rob lucky or unlucky?



Rob was at the signals office in Aley and here they settled down to a passive role for the winter, with bitter cold winds and deep snow drifts. Rob had time now to think about his

brother Ian, wondering how he was, and of course to write home to his fiancée, parents and sister. Rob took security seriously and didn't talk about the war. Rob wrote many letters home to Wilma while at Aley, in Lebanon, but one reply in particular made him uneasy.

Ian

Ian was now a sub Lieutenant in the Royal Navy Reserve on leave in the latter part of July, 1941. Where could he go before he got a posting? He wanted to visit Rob in Syria but he also wanted to go up north to Scotland to see his ancestors home and maybe catch up with a few relatives.

Ian had been to visit his relatives in Piangil West north of Swan Hill, and stayed with Uncle Farquhar, the huge man with only one arm. Farquhar was well versed in all the Scottish



tradition even though he was born in Victoria; he even had a glengarry bonnet like they wore at Culloden.

When he hears no word of Rob, Ian takes a long trip up to the Highlands and visits John MacKenzie, Ann MacRae's (nee

MacKenzie) brother at Sallachy, on Loch Long. Ann was married to Duncan's brother, Donald, who was a fisherman. This is the area where his ancestors came from and he hears a lot more about the significance of the relationship between the MacRae's and the MacKenzies.

In the early 1300's Kintail in the Scottish Highlands was controlled by the MacKenzie clan who were fast gaining lands and power at that time. Over the next two hundred years the MacRaes were joined by other families of their clan who moved to the Kintail area. The clan thrived in the area and fought alongside the MacKenzies. They earned their place and lands by giving armed support to the MacKenzies; specialising in archery they were a welcome addition to the larger clan's arsenal.

Eilean Donan castle was the Mackenzie stronghold but over the centuries the MacRaes in view of their constant service to the Mackenzies, became known as the Mackenzies' "shirt of mail". As a result and in lieu of service they were eventually

given the position of Constable of Eilean Donan to ensure the safety of the stronghold and protect and defend the surrounding areas. (*They still hold that position today.*)

John also tells Ian that at the head of the loch is a place called Killebran which means St Fillans Church. St Fillan was one of St Columba's missionaries and was held in such reverence that his arm bone was one of the holy relics paraded in front of the Scots Army at Bannockburn. He was reputedly a healer who lived in the seventh century. Many MacRae's can trace their ancestry back to 1400 when surnames began and the name McRa means Sons of Grace, indicating a close connection to the Church of St Fillan.

John MacKenzie tells Ian of the battle of Sherrifmuir, which took place on Nov 13, 1715, the MacRae's and MacKenzies fighting alongside each other in the Jacobite army. It was, for the MacRaes, one of their blackest days. It is said that by nightfall on the day of the battle, there were fifty-eight new MacRae widows in Kintail. MacRae's don't give up easily,

and this lesson is not lost on Ian, who was a sickly child, but now he has a strong constitution and body, as well as a courageous attitude; perhaps too courageous.

In September he gets word that he has been accepted to train at HMS Elfin at Blyth in Northumberland, a submarine training facility in the harbour, the first base in the UK to have the ability for the submarines to submerge in pens and leave the harbour undetected. He heads to Blyth in North Eastern England, which is 15 miles north of Newcastle upon Tyne and spends the next two months doing a crash course on submarines.

Following sea training and all the necessary class work, such as steering course, depth keeping, loading torpedoes etc., they learn the ins and outs of the engine room in a training submarine. They also learn about the Anti-Submarine Detection or echo sounder. It gives a pinging noise which goes out into the ocean; if it strikes something there is an echo, so you get a 'pingg-gah' noise. Operators must gain experience

to learn the difference between a school of fish, a shipwreck or just an eddy of water because the sound of a ship or submarine is what they are interested in.

While Ian is training, Germany is moving into Russia and murdering Jews at close range in villages that they capture: thousands of men women and children. This was the ‘shooting by bullets’ holocaust carried out by the Einsatzgruppen, the SS death squad that accompanied the German Army with this special objective, genocide.

On October 23rd, 1941 the Blueprint for the Auschwitz Death Camp was approved. It had 44 parallel railway tracks 50 metres apart from each other; 277 barracks with 36 bunks each, housing 5 inmates per bunk making a total of 500 per barracks. 26 ovens were built to burn the bodies, each oven with 76 chambers that could take 800 bodies each.

In ‘Sophie’s Choice’ the author William Styron asks the question: ‘Where was God at Auschwitz’ and answers with another question: ‘Where was man?’ One million Jews,

70,000 Poles, 21,000 Gypsies and 15,000 Russian POW's were killed there. Yet despite the fact that most German people knew what was going on, there were those who were not complicit in the death of the Jews and some even risked their own lives to save them. These were the real men and women of Germany with a conscience and a heart. Like Oskar Schindler the war forced Germans to re-evaluate their relationship with the Nazi's during the genocide of the Jews. Oskar risked everything, his wealth and security, to look after his Jewish workers, who were adamant after the war that he saved them from the death camps.

On 29/11/1941, Ian is appointed to HMS Talbot, the Submarine flotilla on Malta, as a spare submarine officer. He was now in the Royal Navy Reserve and his rank was Sub Lieutenant. Malta was a small island, only 17 miles long, only 50 minutes flying time from the island of Sicily at the bottom of the Italian mainland. It had been a British base since 1814 and home to the Mediterranean fleet. From there the British

were able to attack AXIS convoys supplying their forces in Libya and Egypt, however because of their proximity to Italy they were in an extremely dangerous position and were constantly attacked by air and sea from 1940 to 1943; the ‘Siege of Malta’. Churchill feared that if Malta fell, then so would North Africa, the Suez Canal and the oil fields of the Middle East.

At first it was just the Italian planes that came and they were not really keen on this war after losing so many soldiers in WW1 and were often content to drop bombs into the sea; but when the German Stukas began their raids, it was a nightmare. After they dropped their bombs that screamed they would then dive low over the bomb site to use their machine guns also.

Be careful what you wish for; in Ian’s last letter he hoped to go somewhere: ‘with plenty of kick in it’ and that is what he got. It is war of course and no-where is safe, yet it was well known that the survival rate in submarines was poor.

During the summer of 1941 the bombing had lessened but in December, there began weeks and weeks of AXIS air raids, with 120 night alerts where they had to seek shelter; in fact there was only 2 nights free from attack; Christmas day being one of them. The Italian and German planes would also come in waves at breakfast, lunch and dinner; Hitler had called those on Malta 'sons of dogs' and wanted the base destroyed. The British Hurricanes were obsolete in comparison to the Stukas and Messerschmitt's, and once most of the British planes were destroyed they could only use their pilots as spotters. It was a most depressing time for all; especially since Pearl Harbour had been bombed by the Japanese and Russia invaded by the Germans.

Although there was some anti British sentiments among the Maltese people, feeling that the British saw them as inferior there were still friendly everyday contacts between the two peoples. They resented the Italians much more than the British and were upset they had turned on them as they were so close

to Italy. Luckily their air raid shelters were built of limestone, which crumbled and shook from the bombs but did not yield.

The Maltese people were very religious, there was a priest in every air raid shelter with a candle burning; yet the suffering was huge, there was steady rain, continual hunger with low supplies, and Christmas was not looking bright. Despite this the Royal Artillery and Maltese gunners made a total of 2,000 toys out of whatever they could find for the children of Malta, but they only had Christmas day to relax, if they could.

In 1941 3.6 million tons of British shipping had been lost, with 60% due to submarine U boat attacks and Churchill was deeply alarmed by these losses. The suffering of allied merchant seamen was terrible and the only way to fight back was to hit back at the AXIS merchant ships, destroyers and cruisers, yet in 1942 things were to get far worse for merchant seamen.

After Christmas, Ian was appointed to HMS Unique, a U class submarine commanded by Lt. Anthony Foster Collett,

DSC, RN, an experienced submarine commander, who had captained 17 war patrols so far, 15 in the Mediterranean. On 29th Dec 1941 Unique departed Malta for her 18th war patrol. She was ordered to patrol in the Gulf of Taranto. This was Ian's first time on a war patrol and no doubt he would have been quite excited, but with some trepidation as well.

On Sunday, 4th January, 1942 he joined those who had a religious background in the control room for Sunday Prayers, and was attentive to the last paragraph of the Submariner's Prayer:

'Fill them with thy Spirit that they may be sure in their reckonings, unwavering in duty, high in purpose and upholding the honour of their nation'

An 'HE' signal from ASDIC (Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee or Sonar) was received just as the service finished and as the worshippers left the control room to go back to their posts, the captain quickly calls the submarine to periscope depth, but before a look could be

obtained, HMS Unique loses 'trim' as a result of the churchgoers departing both for'ard and aft. 'Trim' is a balancing of the forces by varying, or adjusting, the amount of water in the variable ballast tanks, as the movement of crew back to their posts shifts the weight, adjustments must be made.

When a look can be made, the Commanding Officer (CO) spots a battleship, escorted by a cruiser and five destroyers, but they are forced to dive deeper as a destroyer comes really close to them. They could all hear the propellers of the destroyer, but they soon return to periscope depth and despite not being in a very good attack position fire all four internal forward torpedoes, however do not get a hit. After five more uneventful days patrolling they return to base. Ian has survived his first war patrol.

On her next mission in the Mediterranean, on 21st January, 1942, HMS Unique is 143 miles from the Manoel Island base between Sicily and the mainland when another pingg-gah on

the ASDIC brings them to periscope depth. The CO slows the speed by saying “Starboard motor slow ahead” to avoid making too much of a ripple with the periscope. The periscope rises with a hiss and he is ready with hands outstretched to grip the handles, at a depth of 25 feet, but sees nothing after a 360 degree visual. He looks at his ASDIC officer, they have been together a while now and can almost read each other’s minds:

‘I am still getting HE bearing 160 degrees, Sir’. ‘Must be a U boat, Bobbie’ the CO replies. A small dark object was seen on this bearing and all tubes were brought to the ready. As he waits for the periscope to rise it malfunctions and so they only have the low power periscope to fire all torpedoes at the sub, however they all miss. It is almost impossible for one submarine to sink another while submerged.

At the end of January, Ian is transferred to the HMS P36, a relatively new submarine with only five patrols and only two in the Mediterranean. He does have two weeks before he

needs to be on duty and has been in touch with his brother, and finally Rob gets leave and travels to Alexandria via Port Tewfik where he meets his brother after not seeing him for four years. The war and family circumstances have changed them both and it is like starting all over again; the love between them is deep, yet unspoken. Rob acknowledges his brother's courage but it worries him a little; yet he goes back to his unit without expressing his fear. What could he say, its war! The Nazi's are ruthless; they must be stopped.

Ian has to be back for duty by February 10th to join HMS P36, also a 'U' class submarine, for her 6th war patrol, commanded by Lt Harry Noel Edmonds. They are ordered to patrol south of the Straits of Messina and on 15th February, they stop their generators to listen to HE readings. At periscope depth her CO sights two AXIS cruisers and one destroyer bearing 265 degrees. Four torpedoes were fired but no hits were obtained, and they dived to avoid detection.

The following day however they did successfully damage the Italian destroyer, Carabiniere, south of the Straits of Messina and part of her bow was blown off. The destroyer had been protecting the heavy cruisers Trento and Gorizia. Twenty men were killed or missing and forty injured three seriously according to reports. A torpedo boat, Pallade came after them.

Ian had not been in a submarine attacked by depth charges before, and he waited nervously and patiently with the rest of the crew while they counted 45 depth charges, but luckily none came too close. The CO had successfully zig-zagged and crept away. Hours later they surfaced to periscope depth and observed the two cruisers again escorted by 8 destroyers and two aircraft. The CO took the range based on the masthead height of the Gorizia and his No. 1 fed the enemy course, speed and range into the Fruit Machine linked to the gyro compass.

‘Stand by all tubes; pre-set firing interval at 6 seconds’ he called into the microphone. ‘Fire one!’ ‘One fired, Sir’ he

heard his torpedo officer say over the speaker. They fired all four torpedos from the bow tubes, and thought they got two hits, but they missed. Torpedoes were in short supply and they only came out with ten this time, so now they had none and destroyers were coming after them.

‘Crash dive, Flood Q, dive to 70 feet’ the CO orders. Both fore and aft planes are set to dive and water is pumped out because as the sub goes deeper, it gets heavier. He knows he must dive quickly and prepare to escape the oncoming attack. When he feels he is far enough away he calls:

‘Shut off for depth charges; Silent running!’ the crew must now not make a sound and all unnecessary machinery must be shut down. His ASDIC operator relays what he hears: ‘Picking up Splashes; depth charges coming, Sir’. This time they count 105 depth charges, but none find their mark, although they do feel some shocks and the lights go out! ‘Emergency lights on!’ relays the CO.

Depth Charges were a crude weapon, a can filled with explosives and a fuse that detonated at a pre-set depth based on hydrostatic pressure. If they come close enough the shock can do damage. The CO is the main strategist and has to be a strong leader who generates the trust of his team; he also needs to be sure of his own ability and be confident in making decisions. Depth charges can be set differently and a commander chooses his depth and position somewhat intuitively based on his ASDIC readings. What a relief for the crew and CO when it is over; they had stiff necks from looking upwards and waiting for the next depth charge. It can drive a man crazy!

‘Screws are diminishing Sir’, relayed by the ASDIC operator; indicating that the propeller noises are moving away. They return from their war patrol unscathed on March 1st, 1942. Ian is almost beginning to think he is untouchable after what he has been through. The crew of the HMS P36 had two more patrols in March, the last one covering a convoy to

Malta. Only destroyers and an E-boat were seen and they were not attacked; perhaps it was safer on patrol because back on Malta the AXIS planes kept coming, flying from airfields in Sicily, with waves of them attacking continually, such that the gunners could not see or hear anything above the dust, stones and shrapnel.

The same month four ships left Alexandria to bring supplies to Malta escorted by cruisers, but only three got through. Malta was unprepared to unload them and the next day the three ships were sunk in an air raid, with only 5,000 tons of cargo being salvaged, which meant 21,000 tons of supplies were now on the bottom of the harbour.

Some submarines that came in from duty had to now submerge in the harbour to try and avoid damage and the airfields on Malta were so badly damaged that not a single plane could get into the air. On March 29, 1942, HMS P36 enters Marsamxet harbour and is moored alongside H.M.S. Talbot, as Lazzaretto was then called. The crew is given a

break at the rest camp at Ghajn Tuffieha in North Western Malta and again lucky for them because three days later, heavy air attacks by the Luftwaffe were a feature all day.

These were directed against the submarine, and between 2.30 – 3 p.m. a heavy raid of twin-engine Ju88s (Schnellbombers – rugged and accurate dive bombers) followed by Ju87s (or Stukas – also very accurate) hit the harbour area and resulted in the sinking of HMS Pandora. At the same time HMS P36, alongside the oil barge, was near-missed by a medium sized bomb which fell three feet from the port forward end of the engine room between the submarine and Lazzaretto building.

The torpedo officer and three crew who were left to do maintenance abandoned her successfully, because the control room after bulkhead was fractured, all lights extinguished and chlorine gas was escaping from the compartment as she began to sink. Luckily there was no loss of life. The gunners on the island were now the only defence that the island had for nearly

two months. The minesweepers could not keep the approaches clear either, yet somehow the defences held on.

By April 1942, Malta had been so relentlessly blitzed by the Germans and the Italians that the island was on its knees ready to surrender. On April 9th the faith of the Maltese people was renewed with what seemed like a miracle; there were 300 people inside the Mosta Rotunda Temple praying for salvation, when a bomb penetrated the dome and bounced on the floor below without exploding, plus other smaller calibre bombs fell at the front and at the side of the church, also without exploding; a miracle perhaps?

On 15th April King George of Britain awarded Malta the George Cross, the highest honour, and this rallied the brave people of Malta. The Governor of Malta replied to the King: 'by God's help Malta will not weaken but will endure until victory is won'. Yet the British had no planes to fight back with; whereas Hitler's General Kesselring, in charge of the Luftwaffe, had hundreds of planes on Sicily.

In March 1942, Britain sent 46 spitfires to land on Malta to boost their defences, but because of the damage to the airfields there was nowhere safe for them to be refuelled and aircrews were not experienced with Spitfires; within an hour of landing Kesselring's planes had rendered them all useless. The British pilots were now at breaking point!

The AXIS convoys were now getting through to North Africa and they were building up their reserves of fuel and armour. They were planning to invade Malta, something Mussolini was very keen to do; and a British reconnaissance plane had observed two airbases on Sicily preparing gliders. Kesselring however informed Hitler that Malta was now 'destroyed and would never be a British base again'; it was a waste of resources to invade Malta. The matter was settled with Hitler stating that an attack in Libya was to be carried out at the end of May and the attack on Malta in mid-July.

Ian had been through difficult times before in Norway and Sweden, but this was much worse; starvation rations, lack of

sleep, permanent tension and deafness from bomb blasts and gun fire. All the wood on the island had been burned and coal was in short supply, water was a scarce resource and it was so bad that it was prohibited to flush toilets or wash your hands with running water. By the end of April, the 10th Flotilla had to move to Alexandria.

Perhaps, Ian thought, I may get to see Rob again, but little did he realize that Rob had finally shipped out on the Melbourne Star on the 28th March, headed back to Australia, as the threat of the Japanese invasion of Australia became a reality after the bombing of Darwin on February 19th, 1942.

Wilma

In 1940 Wilma Youren worked on the ground floor of Foy and Gibson's in Swanston Street, Melbourne, as a cashier enjoying the 9 to 5 routine, and the tram ride home to 122 Toorak Road, Hawthorn. However her fiancé, Robert McRae, who used to work in the Manchester Department, has gone to war and she wants to do something to help the war effort also, so she joins the WAAAF's, living in the barracks at Point Cook with leave to go home at times.

She was the eldest of three girls, brought up in a well to do family in the north-east suburbs of Melbourne. Her father, Leslie Ormond Youren, was born at Clifton Hill and her mother, Edith (Edie) Brown, at Northcote. The Yourens and the Browns are both from the UK, Leslie's father, Samuel George Youren from Truro, a mining district in Cornwall and Edie's grandfather, also Thomas Brown from Shipley in Yorkshire, north-east of Liverpool and Manchester.

Rosebud
23-5-40

Dear Wilma

Just a line or two to wish you
the happiest of Birthdays in the 25th
and the sincere prayers of your Grandmother
and I is that you may be spared to see
very many happy returns of August-25-
our prayer is that the coming year may be
a pleasant ^{one} for you and that you may be
blessed with the best of health

This verse opposite your name in the birthday book
would be very appropriate to send you

Lead me heavenly Father lead me
O'er the world's tempestuous sea
Guard me guide me keep me feed me
For I have no help but Thee

Yet possessing every blessing
If my God my Father be Praise Psalms ^{chap} 32 and 5 verse

Enclosed, please find a small gift-

Findest love and every good wish for your happiness
from your Grandmother and I.
Give our love to all your dear ones

XXXXX

Letter from Wilma's grandparents
(Browns) before Rob went overseas.

Before the war Leslie was building houses in Melbourne as
was Thomas Brown Junior, both carpenters and builders.
When the depression hit hard, Leslie bought a 100 acre block

of farming land at Claremont with one of his brothers, George Youren, and they and their three daughters moved to Gippsland. Wilma went to Warragul High school, but times were tough and she had to leave to work on the farm. However when George got into financial and marital difficulty in 1935, they had to move back to Melbourne, plus Leslie's mother Grace had died soon after George's troubles.

Edie's mother Elizabeth Triggs, a masseuse and midwife, had a grandfather who was a naval captain, in Yarmouth, Norfolk and came from a really large family, as was common in those days. Leslie's mother, Grace Mackie Trevena's ancestry was from Scotland. Her father was a businessman in Collingwood.

So they are all from the UK, and when the Youren's moved to Australia, also looking for gold, they were co-incidentally in the same area as the McRae's in Talbot. The main difference in the families was that the McRae's were Presbyterian, whereas the Youren's were Methodists.

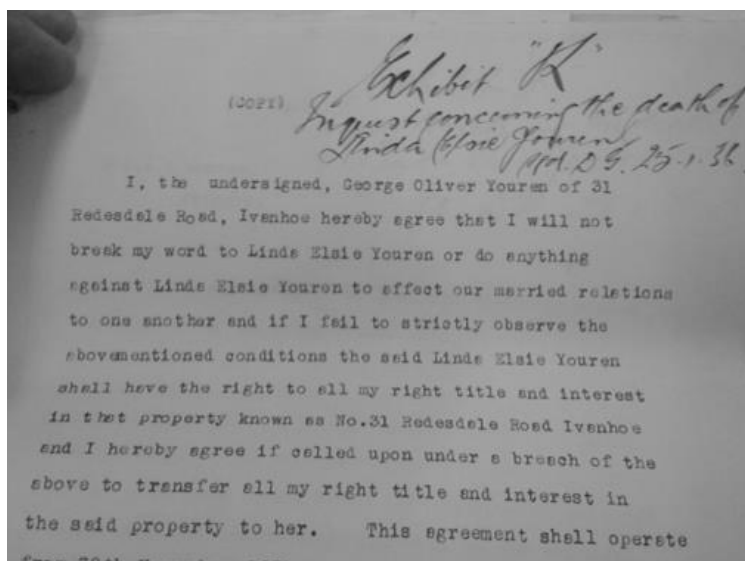
Presbyterians, with a more controlled religious belief run by the Elders or Deacons, have a list of things they should believe, whereas Methodists believe that you choose what you believe by your own free will, so long as you don't bring alcohol into Church. So when the Presbyterian Minister falls down the stairs, he says 'that was inevitable, glad it's over!' while the Methodist minister says 'that was an experience, what can I learn from it!' There was bound to be conflict.

Edie had been head smocker at Ball and Welsh in Flinders Street, and a Sunday school teacher, but when her two daughters were born, she never worked again; Les was so busy in the building trade and as a Masonic Lodge member. She did suffer depression as a lot of people did during those years, but was a lovely, gentle woman.

Leslie Youren's father was a real estate agent, the youngest of three brothers from Cornwall, and Leslie also was one of three brothers. George worked with his father in real estate and played football in the VFA (Victorian Football League)

for Northcote, while Charlie, the youngest was an electrician until he enlisted in WW1, and was wounded in Egypt.

George did play a few games for Collingwood in the AFL (Australian Football League). He was tall and handsome but ran into trouble, and after three affairs with women was accused of poisoning his wife, Linda. He was acquitted due to lack of evidence and claimed he had been set up.



(Copy) Exhibit "K"
Inquest concerning the death of
Linda Elsie Youren
194. D. G. 25-1-36.

I, the undersigned, George Oliver Youren of 31 Redesdale Road, Ivanhoe hereby agree that I will not break my word to Linda Elsie Youren or do anything against Linda Elsie Youren to effect our married relations to one another and if I fail to strictly observe the abovementioned conditions the said Linda Elsie Youren shall have the right to all my right title and interest in that property known as No.31 Redesdale Road Ivanhoe and I hereby agree if called upon under a breach of the above to transfer all my right title and interest in the said property to her. This agreement shall operate from 30th November 1933

Linda had a signed note from him that he would stop having affairs and if he didn't she could have title to their property in

Ivanhoe. There were traces of arsenic in Linda's system, but the coroner was not sure how it got there. She was being treated for nervous complaints and indigestion. George claimed he told Linda he would have to sell the house and he attributed the shock of this to her death.

Inevitably there was conflict with the McRaes and Yourens. When Rob was in the middle-east Wilma was invited to tea by Don's youngest sisters, Belle and Ellen, but Don told Wilma she wasn't to take tea with his sisters. What was going on?



Something was! Had they heard about George Youren?

Perhaps they didn't want them to marry in war time, or it could have been something else. It was a very unsettled time. Wilma was so upset she wrote to Rob telling all. This was all Rob needed! He wrote back and said, he was sorry, and if she wanted to call the whole marriage off, he would be ok with it.

Rob and Wilma

Rob finally ships out from the Middle East on 28th March 1942 on the Melbourne Star, arriving in April. As he leaves the ship looking expectantly for his fiancé, he notices many women in uniform. He gets a shock as he sees two of these women waving excitedly to him and realizes Wilma has signed up, and Elva, his sister is also standing next to her, also in uniform, yet their uniforms are different:



Wilma in navy blue;



Elva in khaki.

After a big hug and kiss, Wilma explains that she has joined the WAAAF and Elva has joined the AWAS; a lot of things have changed in 18 months. Wilma is at the RAAF Point Cook base on Port Phillip Bay near Werribee, working as a clerk and Elva is a corporal, working as a driver in the women's army. Wilma is no heroine, but she does have great attention to detail.

The Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) was formed in March 1941 after considerable lobbying by women keen to serve and by the Chief of the Air Staff who wanted to release male personnel serving in Australia for service overseas. The WAAAF was the largest of the Second World War women's services and women became wireless telegraphists, armament workers, flight mechanics, instrument makers as well as clerical, medical, transport, catering, signals and radar operators.

The Australian Women's Army Service became operational later in October 1941, and Elva is enjoying driving around

Melbourne, especially when she has American soldiers in her vehicle. Not only did they have good manners and slick uniforms but they were cashed up as well; the Aussie soldiers were not impressed, and sometimes these tensions erupted into open fighting in the streets.

Preference was given to women with signals and administrative skills. Even though they had all volunteered, they were paid wages equal to two-thirds that of their male equivalent. Grandma Bess McRae would not be happy, but a lot of these women didn't care and all they wanted was to keep busy at the time, and help the war effort that their men were involved in.

When Rob goes home to Brighton to see the family all is rosy for a while, until finally Rob learns they have exhausted his savings. He confronts his mother and father about 'the tea with the Aunts issue' and things become strained, and are never the same again. He and Wilma decide to get married quickly while they have the time and marry at South

Camberwell Methodist Church in Toorak Road, on May 9th, 1942. Vi and Don do not attend the wedding, what can they be thinking?



On 25th May Rob is promoted to acting Lieutenant and told he would be training AWAS, because by mid-1942 AWAS were being trained by Corps of Signals. Rob now had a less dangerous occupation, or did he? He was based at Ivanhoe.



Rob in middle of picture

After a while, he decides he can't continue, so he applies to join the commando's. He was sick of training AWA's and wanted to be in the thick of it. Half way through 1942 he was moved to Foster, to the Guerrilla Warfare School, with camps at Darby and Tidal River, joining the 2/3 Cavalry Commandos, part of the 2/7th.

There were three platoons of 60 men led by a captain, consisting of three sections led by a lieutenant; plus all the other services to enable the force to operate on its own – medical, engineers, sappers, transport. The 2/3rd was at Darby No 1 camp, which was in the valley floor surrounded by timbered hills. Officer and NCOs had six weeks of intensive training, and then they trained other ranks for a further six weeks.

The commando training they were given in isolated rugged conditions was very hard, deliberately on low rations. They would take them out and march them to the other end of Wilson's Promontory and back, without food and water, and without talking. They had to get from A to B and back by day or night in any sort of country and arrive fit enough to carry out the task. When they came back there would be trucks waiting and to sort them out, they would offer those who were exhausted a lift in the truck, but if you got in, you would be re-posted when you got back to camp; it was to test you

temperamentally, to see if you could put up with it. If you growled and grizzled, you were on your way back.

Every man learnt to be a signaller, and learnt to use explosives; how to blow anything up. There were a few casualties of course during training – deaths even and injuries; and fellows lost fingers and hands and things like that. Crazy!

In September, 1942 Rob contracted eczema on his leg and spent eight days at Kurneh in South Yarra, a convalescent hospital for officers. It had for 40 years been the home of Sir Norman and Dame Mabel Brookes. Kurneh was down the road from where Wilma's parents lived and when Rob was discharged on October, 6th 1942, he had leave with his wife, and proceeded to make a baby with Wilma, a son who would be born in July, 1943.

Rob went back to Foster, before Christmas 1942, but the camps were closed down in favour of ones being set up in Queensland, to give more realistic training conditions for jungle warfare in the humidity, so they were moved to

Canungra on the Lamington Plateau on 14th December, 1942.

There would be no Christmas leave for Rob McRae, but he wrote to his brother Ian, hoping he would get it in the New Year, yet Rob's letter would go unanswered, however news of his brother was received midway through January, 1943.

Ian

General Erwin Rommel not only took Tobruk, but was also allowed by Mussolini and Hitler to march against a weakened British Eighth Army, to take Suez and the Middle East oilfields. Things were not looking good in the Mediterranean, yet the lack of pressure now on Malta allowed the British to regroup, repairs were made to airstrips, rebuilding aircraft pens and those with special Spitfire technical knowledge were moved to Malta; the tide was turning despite the long summer of starvation ahead.

On May 9th 61 spitfires arrived on Malta and were refuelled in 6 minutes, and took off to deal with the six air raids on that day; shooting down 60 AXIS aircraft. HMS Welshman docked bringing extra air crews and more ammunition for the Spitfires plus the desperately needed oil for the island. They also brought a chemical smoke making compound to create a white haze, so thick that the AXIS pilots thought it was fog, and were forced to bomb blind. Eventually a convoy arrived

during Operation Substance, after many losses at sea to bring more oil, food and ammunition. The invasion of Malta never took place, a big mistake for the AXIS forces.

The quarters for the 10th flotilla in the Lazaretto building were rebuilt; with tunnelled out sleeping quarters, sick bay and operations room, a staff office, new bathrooms and mess decks. On the first floor above these, cabins were built for the Commanding Officers under the flat stone roof. Most of the attacks were by the Italians now and not the crazy Luftwaffe; and the Italians tended to stay high because of the Spitfires and would leave in a hurry if they were attacked.

Malta had endured the onslaught so far despite enormous costs; Churchill had been the only voice in the War Cabinet to not give up on Malta and he said the defence of Malta was the key to success in Egypt and the Middle East. Back in 1941 Robert Menzies had called him a ‘holy terror’ and quoted Churchill as saying: ‘in war—fury; in defeat—defiance; in victory—magnanimity; in peace —goodwill’.

Ian takes Foreign Service Leave to go to London on June 3rd, for a well-earned break, as he has been assigned to HMS P311, a new T class submarine which has just been built. Ian now contacts a girl he met at the Overseas Club in Greenwich and they have a day out together at Windsor, before he leaves London and travels by train to join HMS P311 at Barrow north of Liverpool, on June 17th, to be captained by Cmdr. R.D. Cayley, who has been a highly successful submarine commander. He had recently commanded HMS Utmost, and had sunk many Italian merchants. He had received a Distinguished Service Order for a mission, which is believed to have been the landing of agents behind enemy lines. His crew from the Utmost went with him.

HMS P 311 departs her builder's yard at Barrow for Holy Loch; near Glasgow on 5th Aug 1942, escorted by HMS La Capricieuse, and arrived the next day to begin a period of trials and training.

On August 7th US troops had landed on Guadalcanal and were pushing the Japanese out; as many as 400,000 Jews were being murdered in Europe in this one month alone, Hitler's 'final solution'. Operation Pedestal was taking place to again restock Malta in August and a huge battle took place. The Pedestal convoy, 14 merchantmen and the tanker Ohio (escorted by fifty-nine warships), departed from Gibraltar for Malta. Lying in wait were twenty-one Axis submarines and some 800 aircraft. It was vital to oppose the AXIS and risks had to be taken; only five of the fourteen merchant ships reached the Grand harbour at Malta. The SS Ohio was hit 9 times and had to be nursed to Malta by three destroyers to keep it afloat, it was carrying oil, a most precious commodity; the people of Malta were ecstatic and had tears in their eyes upon its arrival.

On 13th Sep 1942,
HMS P 311 departs



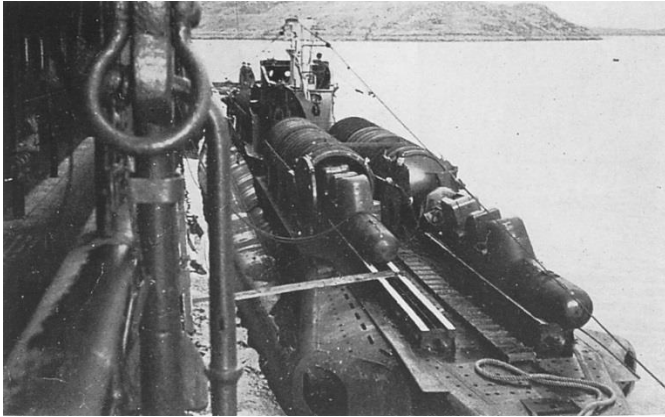
from Holy Loch for Plymouth. She had been chosen for a secret service mission – human torpedoes.

Early in January, Churchill had asked his Chiefs of Staff to copy what the Italians had done in Alexandria, when they used midget submarines to attach limpet mines to the hulls of HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Valiant, thereby damaging both ships. Italian cruisers were a serious menace to British activities in the Mediterranean, and Churchill wanted to use the same sort of aggression.

The Royal Navy was working on a midget submarine called X-craft, but these were a complete submarine and would take some time to develop, so a stop gap idea was to use human torpedoes, a torpedo that could be driven submerged by two drivers using electric batteries and a joy-stick, rudder and hydroplanes, with a pump mechanism for emptying and filling its tanks. Both men were in very cumbersome diving suits that enabled them to stay under water, but took a lot of getting

used to; some divers had passed out in practice runs. The

Chariots as they were called were to be housed on the deck of the T class submarines, aft of the Conning Tower.



HMS P311 has to be modified at the Devonport Dockyard to carry these containers that hold the Chariot human torpedoes. During the passage south through the Irish Sea she was escorted by HMS Jan Van and arrived at Plymouth on 15th Sep 1942 and after disembarking ammunition and torpedoes she enters Devonport Dockyard on the 17th.

The battle for Stalingrad, which had begun on Sunday 23rd August with an air raid by 600 German planes, now

deteriorated into house to house fighting between the Germans and the Russians, and in New Guinea the Australians and Americans are standing up to the Japanese. The Allies are holding their own!

On the 5th Oct 1942 Captain Dick Cayley took the submarine out for a trim dive to check the extra weight and get used to the modifications, and arrived back after five days. HMS P311 is a T class submarine, so much longer than the U class ones at Malta. It has two diesel engines and two batteries to power electric motors for submerged running. Its estimated crush depth is 191 metres, and it can go faster on the surface than submerged; 15 knots on the surface, 2 to 5 knots submerged. It has to surface to recharge its batteries and it is usually done at night to avoid detection. Its ballast tanks enable it to change its weight to sink or surface, and for quick dives there is a Bow Q tank enabling it to dive in 30 seconds. If it was sitting on the bottom or going slowly it could stay submerged for 17 hours.

On 5th November, HMS P311 departs Plymouth for a secret base in North-West Scotland, Port HHZ at Loch Cairnbawn, arriving three days later. The chariot divers have been training here and the submarines need to pick up the chariots they have been using to complete the mission, after some rehearsing of their operation.

Ian writes home on 11th Nov, 1942 and sends a photo of himself in uniform. It is the same day that the Allies forge a decisive victory in the battle of El Alamein. The British people were ecstatic about the campaign in North Africa after so many losses and defeats since the start of the war and Ian had now been in that part of the world for nearly two years. There are only 44 days to Christmas and Ian is quite homesick and is feeling the effects of being in a submarine.

'Dear Mother and Father,

No more letters from you have arrived lately but I expect that some will be along soon now. I can't complain very much because I have had quite a sheaf of your letters and one of

Elva's was posted as recently as August. She certainly seems to be enjoying herself. I'm darned glad she can get around a bit otherwise it would be rather boring for her there now.

The news is the best I've heard since the beginning of the war. It does put the end in sight much more doesn't it? Perhaps I'll get home much sooner than I expected.

There are ever so many things I want to do when I get there. You know after all this time I am going to feel like a stranger in Melbourne. I expect it has changed beyond recognition. Anyway I expect Elva should be rather a good guide now so she can drag me about when I get there, that is if the boyfriends will sanction it. You had better warn her that I still haven't learnt to dance. All I can manage is the same old shuffle walk. Then I can't skate with any degree of confidence so altogether she will have quite a lot to cope with. If she can charm the Americans as she does I'm sure she won't have any difficulty with me.

I am sending you a photograph with the letter. It isn't the large one I have been trying to get taken for so long and it doesn't flatter me very much but I hope it will be something. It is taken at rather a funny angle and seems to be shortened somehow but I hope you will like it.



My second stripe is almost due now; in fact I am expecting it any time. It will be rather grand to get it as it should be backdated a bit. I don't know Rob's new address so I will post the letter to him to you and you can send it on.

This letter is written in a devil of a hurry as I must catch the post as otherwise I won't get a chance to post it. By the way the photo I am sending you was taken while I was on leave. I had a day at Windsor and as you can see it is rather lovely there. The girl who took it is rather lovely too and we had a very good time strolling around the place and seeing the sights.

I was introduced to her at the Overseas Club when I was at Greenwich but haven't had the chance to see very much of her as I only managed to get a couple of days leave in London. She is blonde too – like the girl in Sweden who I still think is the best of the lot. The only trouble is she is rather a long way away.

That was about two days after I came back from the last place and I was feeling on top of the world. The war seemed a long way away and I made the most of it and enjoyed myself. It was darned good to see trees again after where I had been.

Well now this will have to be all for now or I will miss the post.

Cheerio for now and Best of Luck

Ian

The very next day on 12th November, HMS P 311 and HMS Trooper, escorted by HMS La Capricieuse depart from Port HHZ bound for Malta. They are not to stop at Gibraltar base, so as not to alert the German and Italian spies stationed in 'neutral' Spain that there are Chariot containers on her deck. The charioteers on the other hand left Port HHZ on November 26th and sailed to Gibraltar, where they disembarked and later flew all the way to Malta to prepare for their mission.

After two weeks at sea HMS P311 arrives at Manoel Island on Malta for briefings and more training on the mission. Due to the movement of the large Italian ships there are several changes of plans. The most risky task is to attack the two cruisers in Maddalena Harbour on Sardinia, and the other three missions are at Palermo Harbour, on Sicily.

Ian has time to write home again on December 11th. Egypt and Libya have been taken by the Allies after the second battle of El Alamein, and the Malta base has been restored again, so it is like he remembered it and he is pleased with the progress of the war:

Dear Mother and Father,

This is to wish you all at home a Very Merry Xmas and All the Best for the New Year. I do hope that it reaches you in time. As you can see from the front of the card here I am again, it didn't take me very long to get back did it?

At last I received two of your parcels. They had kept them here for me and I got a great kick out of getting them. All the things they contained are absolute luxuries here so they have been very much appreciated. The sweater was grand.

Things look very cheerful now so perhaps it won't be long before I can get home to see you again. Then maybe we can have a real Xmas party. I don't know yet what sort of Xmas we will have this year, I'll leave that to look after itself.

The latest letter I had from you was written in August. I'm glad Rob likes his new job. It must be interesting.

I sent you a snapshot in my last letter; I hope you get it alright. As soon as I get the chance I'll get a larger one taken, just at present we are kept rather busy so that it will have to wait a little longer.

The island is still much the same as when I left it last, and I have run into a lot of old friend's. Everybody here still has their tails well up and of course we just soldier along in our quiet way.

There isn't very much more that I can say except to wish you a Very Happy New Year and to hope that this one will see me home again.

Your loving son, Ian

Of course he cannot mention the mission he is on, but he seems optimistic, and is pleased to get parcels from home. Is he lucky or unlucky? The Americans have been in the war for one year now and before the anniversary of Pearl harbour they

conduct the first bombing of mainland Italy at Naples. The Germans under Rommel have now been pushed back into a corner in Tunisia, and the Allies have pushed the Japanese along the Kokoda Track and are forcing them out of Buna in New Guinea, and the Japs are abandoning Guadalcanal. The Germans are trapped in Stalingrad.

Christmas again on Malta was wet and on Boxing Day there was a Force 9 gale blowing. Most of the details of the mission have been worked out and Dick Cayley has volunteered HMS P 311 for the longest and most difficult journey, attacking the two cruisers at anchorage in Maddelena Harbour and he takes the best two Chariot crews plus dressers and backups. Was this mission necessary, probably not as it turns out? What was not known at the time was that the Italians were desperately short of fuel and this hindered the usage of the larger ships; but they didn't have a crystal ball.

The men have been waiting now for a break in the weather. They amuse themselves watching movies and playing hockey

or visiting friends on the island. Ian writes home on 23rd Dec, 1942, again homesick and wishing he was home for Christmas:

'Dear Mother and Father,

I hope that by this time you have had my Christmas Greetings and are enjoying the event itself in the usual way.

It is so long since I had a Christmas at home that I almost forget what it is like. I hope that it won't be many more before I can spend one with you. It is rather strange to think back over these Christmases. I seem to have spent them in all sorts of remarkable places don't I? These last two are the only ones to be spent in the same place, but I haven't any idea what sort of time we will have this time. Fairly quiet as usual I suppose.

I haven't had any of your letters for quite a while now I suppose they will be some time catching us up.

Ian would not have heard that his great uncle Farquhar had died in an accident recently, on October 15th, 1942. He was taking a calf to Swan Hill when his horse was spooked and he

was thrown from his jinker and died from his injuries. He was 75 years old.

This time you will have a bit larger family at home than last year. Will Rob be able to manage leave for Xmas? You can spare a thought for me then. I will be thinking of you quite a lot. Just wait until the day I come home again, what a grand reunion we will all have. This war has been rather long now and one way and another I have seen quite a lot of it. It will be grand to have peace for a change. Yet I suppose when peace does come again we will all find it rather boring until we get used to it again.

I have become a regular film fan just lately and have been to a different film every night. I expect you have seen them all. "Moon over Miami", "The Man I married" and tonight "The Mark of Zorro".

The Mark of Zorro stars Tyrone Power who shows great courage and cunning in standing up for the oppressed people in his homeland. The Man I married was a 1940 Black and

White movie that tells the story of a successful 'New Yorker' woman who marries a German man, and has a son to him in the thirties before the war. They decide to take a trip to Germany and Carol (Joan Bennett) is horrified that Eric (Francis Lederer) is sympathetic to the Nazi values and tries to instil them into their son. As a result she tries to escape with her son back to America, but he forbids it until his father tells him his mother was a Jew.

Ian and others would have perhaps been moved emotionally watching these movies, and it would give them courage to prepare themselves mentally for the mission. Hitler has sold his people a 'goldbrick'; a con. He thinks they should rule the world because they are blond Aryans, the racial hierarchy. Ian continues:

'As for other amusements as you probably remember from my other letters of last year, there just aren't any. I played hockey the other day and am still a mass of aches and pains. I suppose Rob could take it without turning a hair but you see

we don't get very much exercise in the boat and when we do try some it takes rather violent effect for the first few times.'

Rob of course is now in the thick of Commando training in Queensland, having moved there from Foster in Victoria. Ian seems a little depressed and the bad weather and the upcoming dangerous mission may be playing on his mind.

'If I feel very energetic and manage to find the time, I may go for a walk tomorrow afternoon and see some friends I know here.

Don't forget to write soon. Letters are the grandest thing in the world to get. Please ask Elva to hurry up and write too. She has been sadly neglecting me lately. This looks like the end of my sheet of paper so I'll have to finish off for the time.

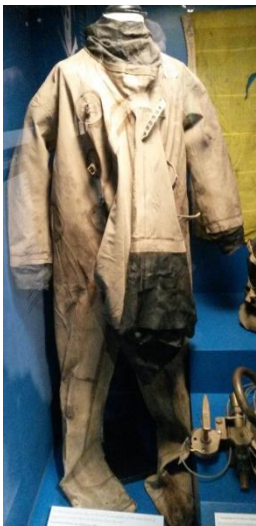
Cheerio and I hope you had a Happy Xmas.

Your loving son,

Ian.

He has gone from an incredibly fit young man to feeling the pain of exercise, because of his inactivity and perhaps melancholy emotions. This was his last letter to home.

On 28th Dec 1942, Commander Dick Cayley comes on board and goes below HMS P311 where he is greeted by his No. 1 Silver, who says: 'Ready for Sea, Sir; All hands on board'. He moves quickly to the bow of the ship passing lots of levers, valves and gauges and checks that the diving suits have been stowed securely.



To make room for the extra 10 men on the mission, the 6 bow torpedo reload racks have been used to house the heavy 'Sladen diving suits' and other supplies. Hopefully they won't be firing on anyone this trip. 'Everything OK, Gordo?' he says to his No. 3, 'All suits stowed sir, they won't move around!'

HMS P311 is a Group Three submarine with 6 bow internal forward facing torpedo tubes and 5 external tubes, 2 forward facing and 3 rear facing.

He heads aft and passes the chariot divers and dressers all sitting chatting on their bunks. They will get the first rest if at all possible due to the obvious excitement and the rough sea; crew members sleep in shifts of no more than four hours. He does not say 'Good Luck' as that is thought by seafarers to bring bad luck, all he says is 'Underway soon men!' They will however need all their wits to successfully complete their mission and perhaps a little luck as well. Hopefully this mission will be over within a week and the CO can get back to what he does best; hunting down and sinking AXIS merchant vessels.

He passes the galley and greets his cook, 'make sure those commandos get the first breakfast Skipps, if they are hungry?' Breakfast on a submarine is at midnight! 'Yes sir, we have eggs and bacon for them'. He moves on past the chart table

into the control room. The cover is still on the 'Fruit Machine', the calculating machine that organizes the aiming and firing of torpedoes; 'hope we won't need that' he thinks to himself. It is best not to give their position away on this secret service mission. He walks past the periscope and hydroplane controls and then pauses at the Wireless office near the Conning tower, to speak to his telegraphist: 'Ready to go, Jimmy?' 'Yes, Sir' His job was to send and receive signals.

Dick Cayley asks his No. 1 to double check the batteries in the control room while he is there and when satisfied that they are up, he looks aft to the engine room, and gets the thumbs up from his stokers. The batteries are vital to the T class submarine's power when submerged and when on the surface can be powered up by the diesel engines. He checks his watch and climbs the ladder to the Conning tower.

Sladen and a group of commandos are there to watch them go, as are some of the crews of the HMS Thunderbolt and Trooper. He is careful not to say 'Goodbye' but nods in their

direction and they nod back, they will leave tomorrow night. He calls to two of his able seamen to let go the birthing wires and they are wound up by men on the dock. It would be too dangerous to store them on deck in case they got loose and tangled around a propeller.

‘Group up, half ahead, start engines’ he talks into the voice pipe to his No. 1. As it is night time they can stay on the surface as there is not as much chance of detection or an air raid now as things have settled down but as they move out of the Marmasett Harbour it is still raining and the sea will be choppy outside the heads. The weather has been bad since Xmas Eve, and especially on Boxing Day. Eventually the Commander of the 11th Flotilla said: ‘We must go ahead, the weather is not going to improve, and I won’t abort this mission unless it is anything but damn impossible!’

After an hour, Dick is ready for a trim dive and so calls ‘Clear the bridge’ and the lookouts move quickly down the ladder, his No.1 has already ensured that the crew are ready

for a trim dive to test the load balance, so they don't sound the klaxon. If they didn't check the trim, the submarine could be nosediving to the bottom. Right here it is shallow and a good place to test it, if something went wrong. Dick calls into the voice pipe: 'Open main vents' to let the air escape and pulls the hatch above his head down and secures the clips. He glances at his No. 1 and gets thumbs up, and HMS P311 sinks into the Mediterranean Sea.

They check their speed as Dick calls 'Group down, slow together.' The clutch between the motor and the engine would be disengaged when the submarine dived, so that the motor could drive the propeller, powered by electricity from the batteries. The 'after' hydroplanes operated by his petty officer stoker Verne, are the horizontal rudders that hold the submarine at the required depth, and like the 'fore' hydroplanes are operated by a brass wheel and dial showing their angle. His No. 1 checks the 'trimming' telegraph to see if

the submarine is level; he can ask either hydroplane operator to adjust the balance if necessary.

‘Trim is good, Sir, at 30 feet’ he calls to his Captain. When diving it was vital that the crew remained still and did not move about too much; all his men had been briefed on the mission and they were finally on their way. A submariner’s life can be harsh especially in summer, as the temperatures could rise significantly, especially when submerged.

There were more men than bunks and this meant that they slept in shifts and shared their bunks, so they would swap sweat on a regular basis. It was cold now as it was winter but



the sea was rolling, and this could cause sea sickness. There was little fresh water for washing sheets or washing yourself plus going to the toilet was tricky and they had to pump the waste into a tank with compressed air. If you didn't seal it properly it would come back at you. After 7 days at sea you were very much 'on the nose!' With 10 extra men on this mission it was more crowded than usual and because a lot of men smoked to calm their nerves, the atmosphere in a submarine could become quite toxic.

'Standby to surface' Dick called over the microphone after checking above with the periscope to make sure they were not in danger. 'Check main vents', this quick dive was over and they could now proceed at a faster speed of nine knots using the diesel engines. His No. 4 Mack had the first watch. 'Call me if you need to sub, dive if necessary' the CO instructed, 'Yes Sir!' During the siege commanders were banned from their Conning Towers when they were surfacing as they could not afford to lose them, they were too vital. If a plane saw a

periscope coming up they would often wait until the hatch came open and then dive down low and use their machine guns to take out the captain, who controlled the periscope and the submarines torpedos. Mack had his watch keeping certificate; he was joined by three other crew members on the watch, who would cover a full 360 degree visual with binoculars for the next hour, as they headed north towards the small islands of Comino and Gozo, and then past Cape Scalambri on Sicily, 40 miles to the north.

The watch was only for one hour to make sure that they were fully alert in case of dangers; patrolling AXIS aeroplanes, submarines or warships armed with depth charges. Normally a submarine would head straight into danger, their role being to attack the enemy, but in this case it was an undercover mission and they needed to avoid detection. After quite a few watches they had not run into any problems and by the time the CO came back to the bridge after four hours sleep it was time to dive again – to spend the day submerged as they headed north.

When the commandos woke from their nap some of them could not even think of breakfast, the submarine was rolling so much but as the HMS P311 dived to a deeper depth the effect of the waves was not so bad. Luckily there was an open drum on board for seasickness and it could host several at a time. The commando's grouped together in the mess to go over their plans again.

The two teams would each attack a ship, one the 'Trieste' and the other the 'Gorizia', both cruisers at anchor in La Maddalena Harbour. They realized they were going to have a rough time of it, especially mounting their chariots after they were freed from their containers. Once the chariots were out and the divers suited up and astride them the HMS P311 would submerge slightly so that they would float off the blocks they were on. However if the seas were choppy this was going to be tricky, but these men had been chosen because of their great courage, cool nerve and determination to succeed. They had been training for months now and finally

this was their chance to do what they had trained for. To get inside the harbour they would have to cut or go under mesh submarine nets, and there was always a chance they may pass out if they went too deep. There was a plan for their recovery, and there were plans B and C if things went wrong. The crews were to be picked up by HMS Unison.

The CO had to navigate his submarine under the minefields and his ASDIC, the sonar, worked pretty well with big objects, but was not good at detecting small floating mines. They either went around them or under them. If there were bottom moored mines attached to cables at different heights, then it was better to avoid this area altogether. The ASDIC operator must be ever vigilant and not relax for a second while he has the headphones on; he is the equivalent of the lookout when submerged. At the end of the month HMS P 311 sent a signal to base that she had successfully got through the first mine field.

Rob

When the McRae's received a telegram in January, 1943 from the British Admiralty, they were terrified. Don was reluctant to open it, and Vi was shaking as Elva read it out:

'We sincerely regret to inform YOU THAT your son, Ian Norman MacRae is missing. STOP HMS P 311 departed Malta for a Chariot attack in La Maddalena harbour on December 28th, 1942. STOP It is presumed HMS P311 was mined in their approach to the harbour. STOP The last known position of P311 is listed as 38degrees, 10 minutes North, 11 degrees, 30 Minutes East at 1830 on the 30th December, in a signal which was received at 0130 on the 31st. STOP This was the last signal received from her. STOP All on board PRESUMED killed. STOP'

'Missing', says Don, 'Well, there is a chance some of them got out, surely?' The girls wept in silence.

When Rob heard of his brother's loss, he was devastated. He could not feel any hope he would have escaped, because he

had heard of the high casualty rate among submariners. Unfortunately, the reality of submarine service during World War II was that most sailors who served either made it home intact, physically at least, or they died. Depth charges, torpedoes and mines were a big threat, and once a submarine was sunk the chances of escape were minimal. If the hull was breached there was little chance of escape.

The other five chariot attacks did not go exactly to plan. Six of the ten charioteers were captured after their attacks, two were drowned and two picked up after the chariot had engine problems. Only two of the chariot crews had any success.

One chariot pair from HMS Thunderbolt, Lieutenant Greenland and Leading Signaller Ferrier, did sink the Italian cruiser 'Ulpio Traiano' and damaged three submarine-chasers and a merchantman with limpet mines. Lieutenant Greenland had reported that the conditions on the submarine before leaving were so bad that they had been rolling noticeably at thirty feet, the wind was about force 4 and coming directly off

shore, and water was breaking over the casing, where the chariots were stored, with each wave; they had really struggled to get astride their chariots.



Another pair from HMS Trooper, Sub-Lieutenant Dove and Leading Seaman Freel, badly damaged the merchantman 'Viminale' in Palermo harbour on the night of January 3rd, 1943. All these four were captured after their successes, plus two others, who both lost their partners to the sea that night. Later that year in October, Italy switched sides and joined the Allies in the fight against Nazi Germany.

Rob was in Canungra when he heard; he didn't feel happy about going home, so he put his head down and immersed himself in the training. Soldiers learnt bushcraft and survival techniques at Canungra and that was just what he needed to deal with his loss. He had seen men die in Lebanon, and had felt the pain of losing mates, but this was different, his brother

who he had always loved dearly. When his son was born he took leave from Qld and headed home. He was born three days after his own birthday on 27th July, 1943.



Rob, Thomas Brown (who died in 1944)
and Ian Robert McRae

They named him Ian Robert McRae, honouring his brother.

Later in November, Ian Norman MacRae was also honoured by King Haakon of Norway who conferred a decoration and diploma of merit for his part in Operation Rubble on the Norwegian ship, the Elizabeth Bakke.



NAME	MACRAE, Ian Norman				
Award	WAR MEDAL	Reg.No.	-	Rank	- Service MERCHANT NAVY
Recommended by Governor-General on					} G. H. File
Promulgated in <i>London Gazette</i> on					
Promulgated in <i>Commonwealth of Australia Gazette</i> on					
Citation (G. H. File	M/N 22	) Gallantry in Norwegian M.S. "ELIZABETH BAKKE" in war			
Insignia received from London	6/10/44	PN LONDON	28/11/44	G. H. File	I/35
Insignia presented by	Registered Post				
At	-	On	22/11/44	G. H. File	I/35
Address of recipient on presentation date N-O-K. Mr. Donald McRAE, 10 Bright Street, EAST BRIGHTON, VICTORIA.					
Remarks	Awarded by the King of Norway. Joined R.N.R. as Lieutenant & reported missing in January, 1943.				
Other Awards					

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

RCDIG1068971

The training and living conditions at Canungra were tough and as close to jungle combat conditions as possible. Located in the Gold Coast hinterland near Tamborine Mountain, the

establishment was located amidst thick rainforest and steep ridges. Discipline was tough, and you needed to be physically fit to survive the exercises. Over a three week period, the men trained six days per week for 12 hours per day. This included six nights as well. On the fourth week they were sent on a six day exercise in the rugged MacPherson range. They carried their own rations. There were very few facilities at Canungra. They had a Canteen Day once a week and a movie night once a week.

Rob wrote many letters to Wilma, and drew cartoons for his son. Eventually in March 1944, the 2/7th Cav Commando regiment moved to the Atherton Tablelands at Kairi. There were many different squadrons belonging to the 7th Division training there. Rob was assigned to a section belonging to the 2/3rd squadron; a group of hardened fighters who had recently been in New Guinea fighting the Japs. They had been part of a platoon of 52 men who had in May 1943 captured a knoll that controlled Bobdubi Ridge, and cut off the Japanese supply

lines to Salamaua. As a consequence of their actions, the Japanese made fierce counter attacks to regain the ground over many nights, but the 2/3rd Independent company managed to hold on. They suffered heavy casualties and after the fall of Salamaua were brought back to Australia, where they were integrated into the 2/7th Cav Commando regiment. Despite being placed under a regimental structure the squadron continued to remain independent in terms of tactics and training. In terms of recent fighting experience Rob was somewhat of a greenhorn and he was to have his work cut out for him in trying to lead his section.

They remained at Kairi for the rest of 1944, north east of Atherton and 37 km from Cairns, on the banks of Lake Tinaroo. Groups went out each day to assist with the building of large camp sites. They constructed roads, culverts, unit headquarters and mess huts. Deep pits were dug for latrines, called 'thunderboxes'. However the men, who had recently seen action in New Guinea, became disgruntled. They were

not council workers, and they had news of the war's progress, especially the landings on D Day, 6th June. The drill procedure on the parade grounds was especially abhorrent to these men, who had proved themselves fighting the Japanese, yet despite this the 2/7th squadron won the Marching and Drill Competition of the 7th Division.

During the long months of training they also played football, both Aussie Rules and rugby, and other field Athletic events to take their minds off their inaction in the war. They continued weapon training and tactics in preparation for the campaigns ahead: the use of flame throwers, how to cut barb wire entanglements using the Bangalore long lengths of 2 inch pipes with explosives. As in Foster, Rob learned about first aid and skin problems and how to treat them, and he had already had first-hand experience with eczema. In fact if it hadn't been for his bout of eczema, perhaps his son would not have been born.

They were taken to Cairns to practice on barges from ships using scrambling nets. All of this practice would be useful, unless of course you got shot on the way down. Then in early 1945, the 7th Division got movement orders to embark at Townsville and Cairns. They had to load their own supplies because the Australian wharf labourers had their own various 'work to rules' practices; they would not work in the rain. These were long established and hard fought practices, which they did not compromise even during war time. However they did agree to train troops in the operation of winches and in handling cargo, so in the end the embarkation was successful.

There was a fleet of nearly 200 ships that sailed up past the south eastern tip of New Guinea and anchored in Milne Bay. There had been a severe storm in this section of the journey, but as they sailed up the north coast of New Guinea, the weather was fine and they passed beautiful tropical islands on the way to Morotai, where they disembarked and camped on the beaches.

It was there they were given details for Operation Oboe, timed to begin on July 1, 1945 at 7 am. Preparations and softening up of the Balikpapan peninsular had already begun. As they left Morotai, on an armada of various ships and craft; including the US LST's (Landing Ship Tanks), which were amphibious landing craft that could carry tanks, vehicles, cargo and troops directly onto the shore, the troops were tense, especially the new boys, whereas the veterans of the 2/3rd were keeping busy.

Lieutenant Bob McRae (as they called him) saw his section huddled amongst the tents on the deck of the LST debating some matter, and asked them what they were doing? They were reluctant to tell him, but when he insisted they told him their section had already lost 4 leaders, two killed and two wounded; they had decided that he was certain to get hit and were just having a raffle to decide who would get his watch, fountain pen, revolver and compass, etc.

Rob was not impressed, but what could he do? He couldn't discipline them in any way on the way to a landing, where some of them may die also; all he could do was to try and prove himself and gain their respect.

As they approached Balikpapan and their drop off points they could see the large oil refinery and storage tanks all burning, plus factories and other buildings; as a result of the huge Allied air and naval bombardment. It had been going on for two or three days, and the whole shoreline was covered with black smoke with flames shooting hundreds of feet into the air in some places. 'How could anyone live through that?' thought Rob, and he felt some hope that he would survive.

As they got closer to shore, the blood pressure of the men rose in anticipation, the sea was choppy, and as they went over the sides of the LST and climbed down the scrambling nets to the barges, they had to be careful they did not get pinned between the barge and the craft. Carrying about 100 lbs of gear each, they had to jump on to the barge. Each man was

wary not to fall into the sea with all this gear, but some did. They were anxious to prove themselves in the fight for their country's freedom. Wet and nervous they scrambled up onto Able Green beach into the mess of broken coconut palms and the noise of exploding shells; but their arrival was mostly unopposed. Where were the Japs?

The 2/3rd moved north-east, it seemed as if the Japanese were gone, killed or retreated perhaps. However, they had not retreated; but withdrawn to their well-prepared tunnels and hideaways, some miles inland. Troops and vehicles of all kinds were pouring from the LST's at Red, Yellow and Green beaches. Engineers had already destroyed land mines day's earlier and signal men had set up telephone lines. Rob was all too familiar with their processes and watched as a wireless set began transmitting to receive a final message for their platoon.

Their mission was to move along the Vasey highway, (named after the late Major General who had fought alongside troops in New Guinea) and capture the Sepinggang airstrip.

Scouts were sent forward to survey the danger, but the Japs were smart, they remained concealed in their hidden tunnels till dusk and ignored the scouts. In some cases overgrowth had completely covered the entrances.

At about 1715 hours, part of the 2/3rd platoon had reached an area they chose as a defensive layout for the night. As Rob went forward to his Bren gun to survey the 'field of fire', all hell broke loose, as a Jap LMG fired at the gun crew. Rob was hit by bullets in the left knee joint and right foot, and his Number 2 'Dagwood' on the Bren was also hit in the upper arm, as the rest of the men took cover. His number 1, 'Burnie' on the Bren opened fire long enough for the wounded to be dragged back to safety. Eventually the hidden LMG was put out of action and an entrance to a tunnel found. A flame thrower did the rest.

Rob was disappointed at being hit and could not contain his anger, as he yelled at his section: 'you bastards jinxed me with that raffle!' The men were solemn and silent as the two men

were put on makeshift stretchers and taken back to the beach, they had seen men get hit before and knew what it could do to a man's attitude; superstition was a big part of a soldier's thinking. Rob's own mother was superstitious, and was afraid of black cats, and stirring a hot drink with a knife, broken mirrors etc. Rob had blamed his section for his injury in a moment of despair, when in fact because he was giving field of fire to his gunners, it was highly likely he was targeted as an officer.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT. No. _____	
D.P.O. CASH REGISTER Sch. C.413-2/1913.	TELEGRAM This message is presented for transmission subject to the Post and Telegraph Act and Regulations. AFFIX STAMPS HERE. Charges for ORDINARY RATE Telegram For 14 Words or less: Within a 15-mile radius 1d. Beyond a 15-mile radius 1/2. Each additional word in both cases 1d.
Words _____ Charge _____ Time _____ By _____ Remarks _____	The address must contain all information necessary to ensure delivery. TO: MR. W. E. MCRAE 123 TROOPER RD RAWITHORN For Office Use Only T _____ B _____ C _____
LT. R.D. MCRAE WOUNDED IN ACTION I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT VX 15797 LT MCRAE R.D. HAS BEEN WOUNDED IN ACTION 14 JULY THE MINISTER FOR THE ARMY EXTENDS SINCERE SYMPATHY	
A REPLY PAID TELEGRAM is a courteous means of ensuring A PROMPT ANSWER	FROM: MINISTER FOR THE ARMY

The next morning he was identified as having a 'homer', slang for an injury that would take you home. He was transported to LST 1017, with an American crew, and taken

back to Morotai, and then on to a hospital ship to Sydney. He was later moved to Albury, where Wilma and young Ian visited him. He had time to reflect, along with others who had been wounded in that first day from a variety of different battalions. At least he was still alive, others were not; his own brother, for example.

The Aussies lost 229 men and 534 wounded in the 7th division in the Borneo campaign in July, 1945, whereas the Japanese lost 1,793 confirmed dead and only 63 captured. Some say this campaign was a waste of time in regards to the ending of the war against the Japanese, but who could have predicted America would drop two atomic bombs on Japan to end the war: The fighting was all over by the end of July and MacArthur had succeeded in retaking Borneo and the enormous oil reserves. It does not serve a purpose to blame in hindsight, that which could not be predicted. An average of 27,000 people per day perished each day during WW2, with a total figure of somewhere near 60 million lives lost.

Rob regretted his words to his section, but knew he had done his best. He decided he would devote his life to giving back to his community. He lay in bed in the Albury Hospital waiting for news on his injuries and was shocked when the doctors told him it would be better to amputate his left leg, and he could get a prosthetic limb. He told them straight away 'NO', he would keep his leg.



Wilma did not know the extent of Rob's wounds.

When Wilma and Ian visited, Ian was two years old and able to walk. He was so impressed with his daddy, that he decided after his first visit, he would go back on his own. Wilma

caught him outside their accommodation walking down the street in the direction of the hospital.

Rob faced his circumstances as best he could, he knew he was luckier than some, yet at times to follow, he would suffer post-traumatic stress from the war years, especially the loss of his younger brother with no recovery of a body or knowing



what really happened to him; also the estrangement from his own family due to the difficulties of the depression and war; and the pain he went through every night till his death. He could not talk again of his brother or his feelings. All he could think of was the future for his wife and child, and perhaps more children to come.

He would later say to his daughter, don't look back, you can't change the past. As he stood on his block of land at 2 Iris St, Burwood, crutch in hand, where Wilma's father had agreed to build their house for them, he thought: 'How lucky am I?'

David

In total the Allies lost 46 submarines in the Mediterranean while the Germans lost 68. Ian's chances of survival were never really good, but the Nazi's were stopped. To my uncle Ian who I never met, but who has recently revealed himself to me through his letters passed on by Heather Manton, I respect you Ian and feel like I am getting to know you even though I was born nine years after your death. I know now you loved your family and had a special relationship with your sister Elva, and your brother Robert. This war was not of your making, yet you found yourself in the middle of it.

I hope you didn't suffer much in the submarine, which two years ago was found in 100 metres of water, a few kilometres from the Gulf of Olbia in North East Sardinia, near Tavolara Island. The Italian explorer who found it, Massimo "Max" Domenico Bondone was quoted: 'it is said some fisherman had heard a loud roar, during a particularly stormy night', so

this may confirm in fact that it did hit a mine. Thankyou Max, it has brought me closure.

To my auntie Elva who I stayed with once, thank you for loving your brother Ian and your letter to the Ministry of Defence in the UK that helped me on my way. I am sorry you had an unhappy marriage; I would not wish that on anyone.

75% of war veterans from WW2 suffered anxiety, which we now call PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Wives and mothers also suffered anxiety the moment their men signed up, and if a letter didn't turn up for months they often feared the worst. If a loved one was missing this brought a continual grief for family, not knowing if they were alive or dead, sometimes children too suffered due to their parent's anxiety.

We must be mindful that our actions have consequences. If we get out of balance in seeking wealth or glory instead of caring for our children then they may grow up resentful and angry towards us. It takes a lot of fine tuning for parents to

deal with their own past conditioning in order to care adequately for their children.

After resurrecting my father and mother's families I came to the realization that it is easy to see faults and the negative aspects of character, and this tends to make you resentful and judgemental. I would have loved my father to share the triumphs and challenges of his family with me but he did not. It is much better to identify the positive aspects of their characters and focus on the good they did – they had weaknesses and strengths. Having read their stories I have decided to be resilient and try to be courageous; my father did have fortitude and my mother was supportive and thoughtful of his needs. I can be forgiving now of their neglect of me.

I regret asking my father 'what have you ever done with your life' but this is something I cannot now change; except to tell his story and that I found his brother. It does not do anyone any good to continually denigrate themselves for their mistakes, we need to forgive ourselves and learn from them.

I do have good memories of my Mum and Dad, who ran a men's wear business together in North Melbourne for 30 years after the war. My father always had a limp, and the Italian, Greek, Chinese and Australian customers sometimes referred to him as the man with the limp, but mostly asked 'Where is the boss?'.

He was such a kind man that he would go out of his way to get what a customer wanted, and so would drive out to the warehouses, some in Flinders Lane, Melbourne to purchase more stock. We would say he's running an errand, and Mum would 'hold the fort' while he was gone. She did all the alterations to the trousers or suits for customers and was a great support to him.

A couple of times he introduced me to very slim guys who came in looking for suits. He said these gentlemen are from Malta, and I could tell he had a lot of respect for them but I didn't know why at the time. Now I know why. He gave them the best treatment, and Mum had to alter their trousers so they

were not so baggy. I would have loved it if he had told me about his family, especially his brother but he did not, and neither did Mum. Perhaps it was the era they had come from or maybe I didn't instil them with the confidence that I would listen. I think a bit of both.

They would take us to Rosebud on Port Phillip Bay at Christmas time, and we would set up a huge tent to camp on the foreshore and enjoy the summer months there while my father ran the shop. I remember one Christmas when Mum decided Dad would have a break and she stayed in the shop. I was about 16 years old and he ended up making a table tennis table at the beach, so I could play with my mates.

Dad worked as a scout master in Burwood after the war and gave back to the community what he had learned. Mum loved her Church and was such a good cook, and she also loved to work in her garden and arrange flowers for people.

I can remember my father being in pain with his leg when the wet weather came on particularly, but he never complained.

He always said ‘I was lucky!’ After he had been sitting any length of time it would always take him a few minutes to get up and get the blood flowing into his left leg. I remember one time he asked me to help him get up inside the manhole in the roof to fix something, and another time he crawled under the house to do something, dragging his stiff leg after him, calling out to me to get him things when he needed them.

When I was about 18 years old he would work all week, plus Saturday morning and then go straight to the football ground to watch me play football, being the youngest I tended to expect him to be there. I now appreciate his input. Then on Sunday we would go to Church and have Sunday lunch together, sometimes with guests and sometimes I would go and pick up Grandma McRae and bring her up to eat with us. Thanks for the chewy Vi.

Although we will be tested time and time again it is better to stick to what you believe in; your values. You may fail and fail and fail, but if you keep making corrections you must

improve. We need to fully invest in our intentions, stand for truth and keep kindness a priority. Above all we need to take the necessary risks to live fearlessly realizing that not all situations will go our way; so we release our attachment to outcome but continue to do what we think is right.

Mary Nancy Bish's words about her father are appropriate for all our ancestors.

Their words, their actions are not dead,

But in our hearts are daily read;

Forget them? No, we never will,

In life we loved them; in death we love them still.



Jenny, David and Ian at our house 1952

Afterward

After writing this memoir I became aware that our journey here in Australia after coming from the UK has contributed to the dilemma we are in. Our mother country wanted to find a place for its convicts and so took over a country whose inhabitants were living sustainably, in total kinship with the natural environment. They decreed that the island nation hosting 750,000 Aborigine's was 'terra nullius' or simply uninhabited. This fiction was perpetuated by Lt James Cook on behalf of the British Nation and was not overruled until the High Court's Mabo judgment in 1992. He made no attempt to seek approval for their trespass, so the possession of this land was by conquest, not by treaty!

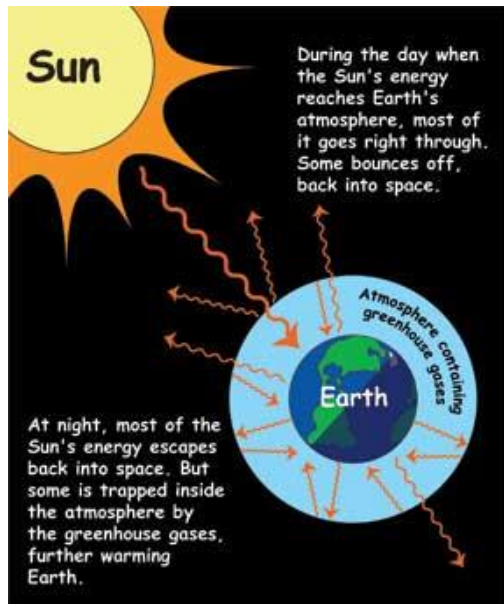
The forests have been decimated and cleared to make way for cattle and sheep, and great concrete cities have grown to house the now 25 million people living in Australia. After fighting two wars to overcome the German and Japanese invaders, the goals of our population morphed into 'the great

Australian dream' to own land and build a house and garage and perhaps a shed for the male of the household to escape to. The dream of the people to own their own plot is similar in all developed nations; yet is becoming unsustainable as our new technologies have developed since the Industrial Revolution, to bring air, sea and road transportation to within the grasp of nearly all the planet. Australians are now per capita one of the highest emitters of greenhouse gas, with 0.3% of the world's population it produces 1.8% of the world's greenhouse gasses; yet we are a huge coal and gas exporter; we have to take responsibility for this.

If the Galilee Basin in Queensland is opened up to thermal coal to allow the Adani mine to go ahead, this would set a very bad precedent as it is planned as a huge mine, and there are at least 5 other mines also planned in this basin. Our government at present complains that we have a very low percentage of emissions, yet the coal they export is not included in our total emissions. Even if we limit global

warming to 1.5 degrees, we still face the decline of our coral reefs throughout the world, and at 2 degrees devastation.

There are those who wish to do something about it by using the sun and wind to power our electricity needs, yet it is a constant battle with those who won't let go of the old ways. We need to change our goals and reduce our carbon footprint and it comes down to each family unit to do this, because the politicians are struggling to lead us. We must act now!



Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Heather Manton, my second cousin, Don's younger sister Annie's granddaughter, for sharing my Uncle's letters with me and the photos from his sailing days and war time experiences.

I would also like to thank another cousin Mark Arnold, Don's older sister Elizabeth's (Lilly) great grandson, for sharing his research with me into the McRae's and his interest in what I was finding out.

I would like to also thank my sister Jenny Welsh (nee McRae) for the photos she gave me and her words of support:

‘This memoir captures many events of my family. Our family history was affected greatly by the Second World War. As the daughter of Wilma and Rob McRae I learnt to cope with all situations. They taught me to be strong and resilient and this I will always love them for.’

Finally, thanks to my older brother Ian for reading my memoir and giving his blessing.