

My Army Career as a Medical Officer In R.A.M.C.

December 1939 — April 1941

Saturday, 2nd December, 1939.

I left Birmingham by the afternoon train to Euston. It was cold and wet and miserable when I reached London town — even the taxi driver could not raise a smile as we dashed across to Waterloo. There seemed to be millions of soldiers in that very wonderful station — a seething mass of khaki. All roads led to Aldershot and district. I entrained for a small station called Fleet and arrived there in darkness. A taxi brought me to Crookham Camp, the Depot of the Royal Army Medical Corps. I signed numerous forms and papers in the office and proceeded to the Officers' Mess. The Mess was a cheery spot but oh the wretched quarters — tin wooden huts. Three blankets and a rug did not keep me warm that night and for many nights to come! It seems I went to bed as an officer in His Majesty's Forces!

Sunday, 3rd December, 1939 — Tuesday, 9th January, 1940.

These were bitterly cold days — barrack square drills and parades in mufti. We must have looked a queer lot — our bunch of lads — on parade. Strangely enough my companion in arms proved to be an Egyptian — Gattas by name. He had been in practice in Birmingham. I remarked that a very small percentage of doctors joining up were Englishmen! I met many Queensmen — Graves brothers, George Donaldson, Brian Creedy — and many Irishmen too! There was Major Tim Ahearn, Major Trimble, Col. O'Riordan etc. In those days I thought Majors were like gods and indeed they acted as such!

We had gas lectures, hygiene lectures, physical training — all these in cold, cold huts in mid winter. A great day came for me when my full uniform arrived and I turned out on parade fully dressed. We were billeted out with the local inhabitants — Gattas and I were sent to Mr & Mrs Dewesbury, Atbara Road¹. They treated us like Kings and I shall never forget them. They gave me a lovely Sam Browne belt.

I had an occasional weekend with Dr Lucy in Birmingham and I always visited Dr Macsherry². I shall never forget the first time I visited 72 Summer Hill Rd. all dressed to kill in my uniform, cane and gloves. The patients in the waiting room gave me a great reception — as did Dr "Mac". I met Tom Gunn that evening too. I spent my embarkation leave in Birmingham and Belfast — a hurried visit to my father at Old Park Road. He could not understand why I had joined the Army. He gave me a lovely Irish ham and oh how good it tasted on Christmas Day!

I remember a very happy day spent in London shopping — and eating. We motored to London in Lieut. Young's car; Gattas, another officer, and Young's wife came too. I paired off with Gattas and we proceeded to paint the town red! We had the most marvellous lunch at a Turkish Restaurant — the "Istanbul" near Piccadilly. Menu :- Suiscebad & pilau; Turkish Delight; and real Turkish Cigarettes; wonderful coffee. We had afternoon tea at the Regent Palace in Piccadilly; and an evening meal at the Cafe Royal in Coventry Street. At the latter place we met Young and his wife. We set off for Crookham in a dense fog (+blackout); the road was icebound. We did not reach Crookham that night but had to put up for the night in a wayside inn. It was a grand adventure going off to sleep on a settee with the odour of strong ale all around!

¹ The 1939 Register shows that Richard and Janet Jewsbury lived at "Endwell" on Atbara Road, Fleet in Hampshire.

² See Journal Postscript for more information about Dr Macsherry.

Lt. Young was a very nice chap — an Oxford graduate with a new practice and a new wife. After our leave we were billeted in Fleet and I saw a lot of the Young family and Lady X with whom we were billeted. Lady X had a husband in the Indian Army and lived in a large mansion nearby. We had no work in those days — January 2nd-9th. We paraded each morning at Crookham (3 miles away). A very imposing Assistant Adjutant Capt. Low solemnly read out 10 names each morning — for “France”, “Gib.”, “Middle East”, “India”. New faces appeared to replace the old ones. And then Lt. Murray’s name came on that list and the word “India” was whispered in his ear! “Gatty” and I rushed off to London and bought heaps of tropical kit with our £10 allowance. We spent hours in Moss Bros — the cheapest military tailors — and we spent very much more than £10 on rubbish that we would never need in the tropics. I thought I was the “cats whiskers” in my topi, khaki drill, and shorts! I loved shopping in London town, I loved the tube and Waterloo; taxis and buses seemed to travel at incredible speeds; lunches at Lyons’ Brasserie were grand! The move to India was very secret! We were not allowed to breathe the word. I always wanted to go to India and so I was not very heartbroken at going away so far from home. Still I thought it would only be for a short time and I would “see my Irish hills” again within a year!

We left Fleet on the morning of 9th January 1940, arrived at Southampton at noon, and went aboard our ship in the early afternoon. It was one of the Heysham boats which had been dismantled inside for use a troop carrier. We crept quietly out of Southampton water about midnight en route for a French port.

Wednesday, 10th January — Wednesday, 31st January, 1940.

Voyage to India. As I sat in the lounge of that little cross-channel steamer I took stock of my R.A.M.C. fellow officers (it is a habit of mine). Capt. Coplands had a commission in the last war; he was a small round man; a bluish red face with a fat bulbous nose. He was a cheery soul and a very talented pianist — but oh how he drank! He was not sober for a moment during the whole voyage. I felt sorry for him being sent to a country like India, especially as he was blind in one eye (cataract) and partly blind in the other. Poor chap did fare badly during his first Indian summer at Meerut and I was glad to hear later that he was invalided out of the Army and sent back home in 1941. However, I shall mention him and others later in my story.

Then there was a wild Liverpool-Irishman called Dickey Doyle M.D.,F.R.C.S.; a fighting man with a heart of gold but with a very hot temper — and he with a few drinks taken. Believe me, Dickey could swill his liquor!

J.D. Stone was a Jewman who had wandered far and wide like his wandering tribesman Suss! I called him the “Rolling Stone” and I always enquired about his moss! He was a thin, underdeveloped, pale faced young man; very dapper but effeminate. The ladies were ever at his feet — on the voyage, in Quetta, in Secunderabad, and in Singapore too. He must have been horribly disappointed with the Prisoners of War Camp at Changi (Singapore) — no ladies admitted.

“Gatty” (A.A. Gattas) was a graduate of Birmingham University. He was a mixture of French and Egyptian, though he always proclaimed himself a Frenchman. He was very powerfully built though not very tall. He was a kind hearted chap, but he had a most awful temper! He was clever and “widely travelled in realms of gold and many goodly states and kingdoms seen”! He knew more about the world than I could ever hope to learn. Languages were his speciality — French, Italian, Arabic. He was my companion on the voyage to India.

The Oxford blond — Young — showed his real worth on the voyage. He was small, thin and freckled — he had a weakish chin. He was the only one of our party with whom I crossed swords — and it was not my fault that trouble began. He had a small dark man as a bosom pal during the trip — his name does not matter.

An extremely wild Irishman from Belfast, called McCallum, was the loudest man of the crowd. He had been with the BEF in France but had been promptly returned as “NOT WANTED”. He was crude in everything he said or did. He was forever wanting to fight and break things up, especially after a few drinks.

A typical English version of “Lord Haw Haw” was another of the party — Lieut. Thurston. He was fair and partly bald, had prominent teeth and a receding chin, and spoke with a drawling accent. He was a medical specialist of sorts. He had a pal too with a superior air and accent whose name does not come with things. And now you have met everyone!

As I was saying — we were sitting in the lounge of our cross-channel steamer and chatting amiably (without drinks) with R.A.F. and Navy men. We talked of everything but war — nobody was worried about war in those early days,

it was all so unreal and afar off. War did not worry me in the least — it was all an adventure and besides, I was only a doctor!

We rose at dawn and saw the French coast on the horizon. A French flying-boat escorted our tiny vessel on its last lap. Then the docks at Cherbourg became visible; they looked very peaceful basking in the sun. There seemed to be minefields everywhere. It is rather uncanny steaming through minefields for the first time, but then I thought it would be grand fun swimming to the shore! We wended our way to the railway station and dumped our luggage on the train which was not due to leave until midnight. Off we ran to see Cherbourg and fill empty stomachs! I loved Cherbourg and its quaint cobbled streets. "Gatty" was our guide because of his fluent French. We moved around all kinds of queer little shops and cafes. Night was soon upon us and so we went off to a large restaurant and had marvellous dinner with several French officers. The French are the only people in the world who know anything about food!

Cherbourg had no real blackout and so we had no trouble finding our way to the station. I had an awful shock when I saw my compartment — it was bare and bereft of all comfort. I formed a poor opinion of the French railways. We could not lie down so we sat awake the whole night through. We tried to wash and shave the following morning but without success; the water was frozen. And still we rumbled on through France. Eventually the Sun came out and we saw glimpses of the French countryside — pretty farmhouses and quaint chateaux set in lovely surroundings. At each halt our carriage was invaded by French lads selling cheap wines and champagne. Gatty, Young, his pal, and another officer played Bridge — that was my first introduction to the game! We spent another cold night awake on that rumbling, creaking, uncomfortable train and reached the docks at Marseilles at 9am on January 12th. We stretched our cramped limbs and inspected the various ships alongside — "Duchess of Atholl", "H.M.T. Ettrick" etc. We brought our luggage aboard the latter — a brand new 10,000 ton troopship (P&O), — were allotted our cabins, had a quick lunch aboard and dashed off to the city. I clung to Gatty and his French. We made a tour of the cafes and showplaces; a church or two I visited. Eventually it palled a bit and we went to a cinema and saw a Bulldog Drummond show — Reginald Denny actually made the French people laugh! We had a grand supper at a restaurant and became friends with a French couple - they claimed me, an Irishman, as their own because they were the proud possessors of an Irish setter! Gatty was anxious to visit a cabaret and so I trailed along with him to the would-be "show". The latter proved to be a brothel and I fled the place and dragged Gatty away in time. We got aboard at 11pm and prepared for bed.

We sailed on the morning of 13th January. Out into the Gulf of Lions we sped and soon we saw the blue Mediterranean. It proved to be a Mediterranean cruise for everyone and I enjoyed every moment of it. We were escorted by a French destroyer as far as Malta. The Sun came out each day and we basked in it on deck. I had no duties to perform and so I had time for games on deck. H.M.T. Ettrick³ was a beautiful boat and had every conceivable comfort. We had the usual boat-drill each morning and the Captain's inspection. After that we had the day to do as we pleased. The food was super and the drinks seemed good — judging by their effect on the officers! It was good to be alive — again the war was forgotten by all aboard. We did hear odd bits of news by radio but nobody appeared terribly interested in news. Gatty kindly gave me tips about Bridge and soon I found myself becoming engrossed in the game. However, it became too serious for me and I could not play serious card games!

I was in a three-berth cabin with Young and his pal. I got on well with them though one was English and the other Scottish. Young began to take objection to poor old Gatty's colour and was rude enough to mention the fact. Then he began discussions on religion and tried hard to make me angry, but he did not succeed. Many nights he had a few drinks too many and then he was particularly abusive. And then one night I decided to teach him a lesson. He had been very nasty and rude to me personally. I picked him up bodily under my arm and carried him, struggling, out into the passage way. There I pinned him firmly to the ground and pressed on his windpipe for a while! I bumped his head a few times on the ground and explained in a firm even voice that he really must learn some manners and be a good little boy in future! By this time Doyle, McCallum and Stone had gathered around to see the fun and they expressed loud approval. Well, Young did become a good little boy after that and never a naughty word escaped him. It was the first time in my life that I had ever used my strength against any man and maybe it will be the last. Before my tussle with Young I apologised to him because of my more powerful physique but I explained that it was very necessary to teach him a lesson!

³ See https://www.britisharmedforces.org/pages/nat_troopships.htm. The ship was later sunk by a German submarine U-155 150 miles west of Gibraltar on 15th November 1942.

We reached Malta in the late afternoon of the 17th. That was a glorious moment as we sailed into Valetta Harbour — large men-of-war, destroyers, and numerous small craft were littered all over the place. The town seemed to rise sheer out of the water in wonderful terraces; the houses of Italian style and a peculiar stonework, light brown in colour. The gun positions looked very formidable and gave the impression that Malta really was a fortress — unlike Singapore! My disappointment was great when I learned that no shore leave would be granted. We only halted for a couple of hours and then steamed off down the Mediterranean again. I was always impressed by the very smart morning parade of the naval ratings on board. I became fast friends with three young midshipmen — the Ipswich and Ceylon lads were my favourites. It seemed such a tragedy that such very young lads should be mixed up in a war like this. They were going out to join H.M.S. Kent which was then at Colombo and on its way home from China Station. The Ipswich lad insisted on giving me dancing lessons (on paper) and even gave me a short book on dancing! I was playing lots of deck tennis and quoits — and feeling very fit. We had quite a good boxing tournament on deck. The troops went wild with excitement and the referee's (an English Padre) decision was derisively at times! Needless to say Paddy Doyle was one of the organisers of the tournament. I also indulged in a very rough game called deck hockey — played with any old stick and a chunk of wood!

I was looking forward to seeing Port Said which we were due to reach on the 20th, but alas I did not see it by day. We arrived in darkness, were granted shore leave until midnight, the others trotted off but I was left in bed with tonsillitis. The lads came back with very grand stories of Hungarian dancers, night clubs and cabarets and Simon Artz's famous shop. Gatty was allowed ashore, to visit Alexandria (where his people live) and then join the ship at Suez.

We entered the Canal in the early hours of the morning. The following day I was better and had my first glimpse of the Frenchmen's famous masterpiece. It seemed just like any other big canal but wider than most; on either side stretched sandy desert as far as the eye could see. Telephone wires ran all the way down the left bank and off into the desert. Small outposts appeared at intervals all along. Suez made its appearance on the 22nd. We dropped the pilot and picked up Gatty in midstream without stopping a moment. We had collected some passengers at Port Said and also deposited some troops for the Middle East. Among these were some R.A.F. nursing sisters — who were immediately seized upon by adoring subalterns — and a Major Chowla. The latter was in the I.M.S. (an Indian with a Scotch wife and kiddies who wore kilts!) and became boozing pals with Paddy Doyle and McCallum! He gave us a blood curdling lecture on "Snakes of India" — I only saw one snake in India and that was a tame one!

The hottest moments of my life were spent in H.M.T. Ettrick sailing down the Red Sea (with closed portholes at night). It wasn't so bad during the day, but the nights were really hell. The Red Sea is really red. It would be incredibly dull if it were not for the fascination of the wild Arabic countries on either side, and even that is not often seen. We met an occasional boat northward bound but nothing exciting happened. We had our first concert in the Red Sea; there were some good tunes and the genial sisters roared at the vulgar jokes.

On the evening of the 24th we reached Aden. It was dark when we arrived and so we were lighted into the harbour with shore searchlights. We leaped with joy when we were allowed on shore for 6 hours. Off we went in a local motor boat to the pier. Our party consisted of Gatty, two midshipmen, and myself. I was fascinated by the bazaar and all its odours. It was the real East — Arabs chattering all over the place, all eager to sell their wares to us. Their cheap silk goods were great and immediately we began buying — pyjamas, undies etc. It was really funny doing business with the Arabs and their pidgin English; they have the invariable habit of asking treble the actual value of each article. My Ipswich friend bought a lovely silk dressing gown for his young sister — he borrowed 10/- from me which was faithfully repaid in India a month later. Having made our purchases I went in search of a telephone and after half an hour's search found me at the local police station (a small garnett up a back stairs!). I wanted to phone up Seamus Bowe who was in the R.A.F. hospital at the other end of the island. The policemen jabbered away in Arabic; I found a number at last but could only get more Arabic from the other end. I had to give up in despair in the end and content myself with a message to Bowe per another R.A.F. officer. We sped back to the boat at midnight and clambered into bed, happy and content with the world. The boat had moved off in the night and we slept on.

The sea trip from Aden to Bombay was not exciting. I was spell-bound when I gazed out across the waves and saw the rugged coast of Arabia. Its vast grey irregularity in outline has to be seen to be believed. I later saw something approaching its splendour in the North-West Frontier tribal area of India. I had many dreamy moments at night looking down at the phosphorescent glow in the spray of the waves. By day I watched the shoals of porpoise

gambolling in the ocean and followed the flight of the flying fish as they sped over the surface of the waves — I often wished I were a flying fish! Time passed pleasantly and quickly. Then came the eve of our arrival at Bombay — there was a terrific party and much breaking of glass and smashing of furniture by the lads (especially the Irishmen).

We anchored in the middle of Bombay harbour the following morning and awaited the tide. There was nothing spectacular to be seen, save the Taj Mahal Hotel which seemed to tower above the other buildings. We docked a few hours later. We were bombarded from above by Kite hawks (vultures) — they swooped down upon us from all angles snapping up scraps of food. We were bombarded from below by many dusky coolie lads asking for “backsheesh”! We were all dressed in our ready-made Khaki drill and topi, Sam Browne, and cane under the arm. We went ashore — the midshipman, Gatty and I were together. How horribly damp and clammy Bombay was on 31st January while all at home were freezing in the grip of an awful winter. Before leaving the boat I collected Rs 100 from the local Cashier. To decide what stations we would be posted to, the names were drawn out of a hat — my good fortune was Rawalpindi. I made lots of enquiries and all agreed that it was about the best station in India.

The dock area was swarming with coolies — very thin men carrying enormous loads on their heads, and running too! The city seemed to teem with people; in every street we saw deformed and crippled children; at every step one was attacked by a beggar or a salesman, pressing his wares; tongas whistled along the streets at breakneck speed — what thin, mean, scraggy beasts these tonga ponies were; oh what a motley mass of humanity surged along those streets — handsome, high caste ladies with delicate features, marvellously coloured saris, priceless pieces of jewellery on their wrists and long diamond earrings; men or women with red or green spots on their forehead or side of nose or cheek — indicating their caste; Indians dressed in Western fashion. Buses and tramcars dashed along the main streets; there were tonga and motor accidents but nobody seemed to worry if a poor woman was knocked down. The fashionable shops were there just like home but much dearer (the rupee is supposed to be equal to 1/6 but in reality it equals 1/-!). The professional letter writers were there at their little stalls at every street corner; their patient illiterate clients standing by.

A man approached us with two baskets and plopped down on the ground. He opened one basket and a cobra popped his head out; he opened the other basket and out dashed a mongoose and grabbed the cobra by the throat! The man separated the combatants and promised us a fight to the death if we paid him one rupee — we declined with thanks! I was eventually caught by a watch seller who dumped a dud watch on me for Rs 7. At first I found myself giving annas away to the beggars, but in the end I had to stop the practice!

I went into a jeweller's with Atcheson and there at the back of the counter was a large picture of the Sacred Heart. The owner, whom I thought Indian (now I know he was Anglo-Indian), said that there were many Catholics in Bombay — of course that amazed me! We had lunch at Green's Hotel, which overlooks the harbour. Just across the road is a huge monument — an archway; it is symbolic of Bombay as the gateway to India. Lunch was not finished until late in the afternoon and so we went to see Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas in “Ninotchka”. The Metropole was the most palatial cinema I have ever been in — air conditioning, a bar, ice cream etc.! We had tea there (late tea) and then dashed back to the ship for dinner. Later we went out again to see Bombay by night — we went to the Taj Mahal Hotel and to Green's again but there was no dancing that night. We found a dancing class near the Taj. Bombay by night as seen from a tonga was a fascinating sight — the colourful scene of brilliant turbans, saris lit up by arc lamps. The temples looked weird by lamplight, yet they were elegant too. The following day we went sight-seeing by tonga. Of course we went into the prohibited area of the city — the streets were narrow and choc-full of Indians blocking the road and footpath. The Congress flag was displayed everywhere (green, white and yellow!). This was really the bazaar district; the shops were open fronted and the wares were scattered all over the pavement. I felt the tempo of the crowd as they regarded us with scornful looks — I liked them because I had so much in common with them. We visited the famous Bombay Gymkhana Club (tennis, cricket etc all being played, Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay University, and most interesting, the Parsee temple. The dead are not buried here but left out in the open where the vultures come and pick the bones dry! The Parsees are of the wealthy merchant class; they are successful business men and very Europeanised — more than any other sect in India.

Our sightseeing was over and we went back to the Ettrick for lunch. Then we were scattered to the four winds — the midshipman went south to Ceylon to join H.M.S. Kent; Gatty went by troop train to Peshawar; Stone went by sea to Karachi to reach Quetta; Doyle, Young, Coplands, Thurston and Shepherd were all due to leave for the north with me at 8p.m. that evening on the Frontier Maid from Bombay Central Station. My bags had caused a

lot of fuss at the Customs in my absence in the morning but they got through alright. Time passed quickly that afternoon as I had along chat with the S.M.O. and assistant M.O. of the ship. After an early dinner I went off to Bombay central station (G.I.P.) with Young and his pal! Coplands was awakened just in time to come with us — he was fast asleep in his cabin (and not too sober!). I shared a 1st class sleeper compartment with Doyle and Coplands. We had a disturbed night even though the carriage was comfortable and the fans in full blast. In the morning we were covered with sand and dust! However, after a shower we felt better. One by one the lads dropped off at the various stations until Doyle and I alone remained to spend another night on board train. The country was interesting — mud-walled villages, primitive ploughs being drawn by oxen, big cities like New Delhi, Delhi and Lahore came and went. The last stage of my journey began when the train pulled out of Lahore in the morning. I spent those six dreary hours looking out at weird, barren, hilly, red country which was riddled with deep erosions — this was the great Punjab one hears about! My last companion had left me at Lahore; I lunched with a young subaltern who was on his way to Murree for ski-ing! I ate my curry with a fork (horrible crime) and accepted bad rupee coins in my change! Oh what a raw recruit I was in this India — I was like an infant among the wolves! I was joined in my compartment by a very gallant Brigadier — bull necked, typical Indian Army. He was on his way to take over the Jhelum Brigade and he was accompanied by a terrific load of boxes and bags, golf bags, fishing tackle, and several guns! I found him very charming and we became like old friends soon.

I mentioned about ski-ing in Murree — well, to explain. I had left home in mid-winter shivering in my greatcoat and gloves; I was sweltering in the Red Sea in shorts and shirt; I was suffocated in Bombay in my Khaki Drill; and now as I was approaching Rawalpindi I was shivering again in my greatcoat! (Murree is the hill-station for Pindi in hot and cold seasons). As I stepped off the train in Rawalpindi I was besieged by numerous coolies, my bags were carried off to a taxi, and off I was whisked to the "Doctor Sahibs' Mess". I was not expected it seems when I was deposited on the front door of a palatial Mess. I was made welcome by numerous young men dressed in civilian clothes — they stared at my uniform! Capt. Richards, the secretary, showed me to my quarters (a Wana Hut); produced a bearer, Yassin, for me, and made me quite at home. Richards was a Welshman, small dark and dapper; a Catholic who never went to Mass; a harmless lady killer who played no games and who did not know his job. Soon I was introduced to all the members of the mess — Lt. Col. Harris, A.D.H. Northern Command, a hale, hearty man of 45, made me doubly welcome as he was Irish — a Cookstown man! We were fast friends immediately and remained so until I left India. He later went to Army H.Q. at Delhi and became A.D.H. of India. He was an M.C. and many other decorations from the last war. It seemed ridiculous that the most senior officer in the mess should be so friendly with the most junior. Next was Lt. Col. Lipscomb, Medical Specialist Northern Command. He was tall, thin, gaunt, grey, and tried to act the part of a regular army officer. However, he had the brains of a fish and Fred Harris inevitably took the wind out of his sails! He was an old man trying to be young again — played tennis poorly and golf badly and cricket awful! He did not know his medicine as he should. He got a good job in Iraq. Then I met Lt. Col. T.J. Dunn, the Women's Specialist of Northern Command. He was very small, thin and dapper, long faced, long Roman nosed, turned up chin to match! He was not clever and so jokes were forever being turned upon himself. He was vain and effeminate, a good golfer, liked ladies, was insecure to quite a degree, always talking of his wife and children — as did Lipscomb. The Surgical Specialist, Major David Fettes, was a really grand chap — a first class surgeon, a good golfer, a jovial companion in the mess, a florid middle sized man of 42. He later became a full Colonel and Surgical Consultant to the forces in the Middle East. Major Taylor was the skin and V.D. Specialist of Northern Command. He was a pleasant, good looking, pale faced, bald, senior major, who had no energy for anything save swilling beer and whiskey! He had a frightful temper — especially with mess servants — I have seen him fling knives and forks around at lunch!

The Junior officers of the mess were a queer lot. Marrable was a sports fiend, hockey, tennis cricket & golf. Always perfectly groomed and oh what a snob! Tom Fowler was a lanky Scotchman who didn't enjoy life very much at all — except for golf and whiskey! He was a dour type but decent enough. He was a camera fiend but neither a doctor nor a soldier! John McGlue was a loud spoken Scotchman playing at soldiers but not a doctor. He was no use at games. Bell was only a kid with not much sense, plenty of cheek, and a flair for microscopes. He later got a job as pathologist in Abbottabad Brigade Laboratory. McGlue soon pushed off to the Frontier. I was amazed to find everyone in mufti. Uniform was only worn till 1p.m. daily; mufti was compulsory on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays! I was severely reprimanded one Thursday for daring to appear at hospital in Uniform. I reported for duty at British Military Hospital, Rawalpindi on the following morning. Col. Lang received me. He was a kindly grey-haired man who made me very much at home. I was assigned my duties in the medical ward. Then off I went to district H.Q. to report to Cl. Cane (ADMS); he was fat, florid, useless, but amiable. He sent me to Northern Command H.Q. where I faced the famous "Hammy the Hun" — Major General Hamilton — a steely eyed, fierce looking, efficient man who tried to weigh me up but without success. At these H.Q. I met Col. Harris

and he introduced me to Major Bill Campbell M.C. & Bar, D.S.O. etc. — Belfastman of 45 or 50 years old. He was a dashing, carelessly dressed, devil-may-care man whom I admired very much. We became good friends later. He was D.A.D.M.S. (Mob.) Lt. Col. Percival D.A.D.M.S., M.C., D.S.O., was a small sandy haired man of exceptional intelligence but no sense of humour. He was later ADMS of 9th India Division in Malaya (mine) and did gallant work there. I also met the chief matron of Northern Command, a Cork woman! I didn't do much work that day but met the Staff Captain — Tom White I.M.S. He was a lazy man at District H.Q. but was a good friend to me on occasions.

I soon settled down to life in an India Continent as an Army Officer. A huge bearded Sikh came along and measured me for Khaki drill uniform, dinner jackets (summer and winter) — his name was Ram Singh and he was a rogue. Then I had visiting cards made "Lieutenant F.J. Murray, Royal Army Medical Corps" and popped them into these little black boxes outside each officer's bungalow "Mrs So-and-So" NOT AT HOME! Sometimes Mohd. Yassin did the job for me! That was "calling on people" — and I had to call on all the medical families in the district, on all the nurses and sign my name, on two generals and sign my name in the book at the gate! Oh what futility. Typically, the Campbells had no box at the gate and would be in for a chat. Mrs Campbell was very attractive — very dark hair (sleek), tall and graceful. I was asked to drop in any time for a cup of tea or a drink. I had many good games of tennis with them. Soon I had joined the Rawalpindi Club, but only indulged in games — cricket and tennis. The courts were very fast and made of baked mud. I became no.2 tennis player to Marrable and was chosen as his partner in the Rawalpindi Club Championships. My cricket improved vastly and I earned quite a reputation in R.A.M.C. circles.

Hospital "work" was ridiculous. I would reach hospital at 9am; have a chat with Capt. O'Reilly (Sub Charge) IMD; then do a round of the ward; sign a few papers, and work finished at 11am. Hot sweet tea killed time until noon; then all went off to the mess for a drink before lunch. The assistant surgeons did all the work at the hospital. The Q.A.I.M.N.S. sisters and the officers did literally nothing! The sisters were a queer lot — very mixed. Most of them were all out to get their man; a few were interested in nursing; and a very odd one interested in their work and in the troops who were patients. They all drank and danced and flirted. I held my own with the Tartars, was completely immune from the charming ones, ignored the fast ones, and showed only admiration (silent) for those who worked for the troops. I really got to know none of them in those first three weeks.

I made the awful mistake of saluting Capt. O'Reilly on my first day. He was not a King's Commissioned officer. I did not then know anything about Anglo-Indians (Eurasians) and so I began questioning him about his Irish ancestry, and suggested that they might come from Cavan! He passed it off quite well and said that his grandfather was probably Irish. Strangely enough he was not a Catholic! Nor was Assistant Surgeon McNamara! (who later joined me in Malaya). Pageira was a very good Catholic and he was also in my Field Ambulance in Malaya.

And then one fine day I twisted my knee playing cricket at the Club and the following day I was in hospital with Rheumatic Fever (my second bout). Col. Lipscomb was in charge of my case and he condemned me to bed for six weeks at least. Not knowing anyone in Rawalpindi, I never had any visitors. My servant, Mohd. Yassin was a treasure to me during those days of trial. Sister Iris Jones was a very severe young woman in charge of the officers ward but when not on duty (as I afterwards discovered) she was a very charming person indeed. Her young man was in the frontier and she was expecting to marry him in a year's time. I did not forget to send her a wedding present on the eve of my departure from India in April 1941.

I had a boring time in bed during those six weary weeks in bed, but after the first week I became used to it. I can only recall two patients who became good friends of mine — Clive Walker who broke his femur in a horse accident and Capt. Bistock R.E. who had a badly smashed elbow joint. Walker was a 2/Lt., a Gunner, and a mere lad. It was in hospital that I first met Pte. Dunhill when he was visiting Clive. Poor chap was a 1st in Law at London University, son of the famous Dunhill of pipe fame, and yet a mere private in the Royal Ulster Rifles, who were then stationed in Rawalpindi (I was their M.O. for a couple of weeks and oh their Belfast accents were a treat to hear)! 2/Lt. Mervyn Dennison (late Queens) was also in the Ulsters and he came to visit me too and brought me books to read. Capt. Walken of the Army Dental Corps brought me Auto-Bridge to play with. He was a little Wigan man who had a practice in Blackpool. I remember St. Patrick's Day arriving without shamrock, but it was a great day among the Ulsters. I had a special invitation to an Irish Ceilidh organised by the Reel Club. I had also an invitation to dinner at their mess, but alas I missed all these treats. The Ulsters had just come down from the N.W. Frontier where they did remarkably well. Many of their best officers and men had gone home and were replaced by new recruits and conscripts.

While in hospital I experienced my first Indian dust storm. It raged for about an hour and was followed by a thunderstorm and heavy rain. The dust penetrates every hole and corner of a building — everything is saturated with dust; trying to eat food for the rest of that day is futile, because you just have mouthfuls of dust! An amazing feature of the first few minutes of the rain is that drops of mud come down instead of rain-drops!

After much trouble I managed to contact a priest and he came along to me for Confession and Communion. This brought me great joy on Easter Sunday morning. Capt. Bostock was a very good Catholic — and old boy of Downside. Poor lad fell very much in love with one of the sisters but she married another chap. He was a marvellous sportsman — polo and boxing and rugby were his speciality. He had a massive figure about 6ft 2ins and very broad. He was killed later in an accident.

The O.C. hospital's weekly inspection was comical, with his long train of followers passing up the ward from bed to bed asking inane questions of the patients. The Matron, Miss Clarke came round daily; she was a good sort and very popular with staff and patients. Then one fine day early in April, Lt. Col. Lang came to see me with a suggestion. The moves to the hill station would be taking place very soon and would I consider a post as Medical Officer in charge of some Gunners in a small station called Kyhra Gali. I would soon be allowed up from bed and be ready for the journey by the 19th of the month. He explained that it was a quiet little place and would be a holiday for me as the work would be negligible. It was about 8,000 feet up and 8 miles beyond Murree in the hills. I jumped at the offer and accepted right away.

I spent the night of 18th April in the Mess and early next morning I was speeding to my new station. It was becoming hot in 'Pindi (100° F) and I was glad to escape to the hills. Yassin sat in the back with his luggage and mine; while sat in front with the driver. I shall never forget that journey of 45 miles of tortuous road that ascended in a series of hairpin bends to 10,000 feet. The driver was the usual reckless Indian mechanic: The fact that the outer wheels only just cleared the edge of a precipice did not worry him in the least. The beauty of it all was not lost on me, however, because the country was lovely in the springtime. We passed through Gora Gali, Sunnybaash, and Kuldada on the outskirts of Murree; then through quaint dirty bazaars, through Barian and then up the hill to Khyra Gali. It was the deserted village in earnest — a few Indians greeted us but all the buildings were shut and not a sign of white men anywhere. There were still traces of snow upon the ground as I plodded along a path to my bungalow. It was really the Assistant Surgeon's bungalow but I liked it so much that I was determined to have it and not the Medical Officer's. It was a low building with two bedrooms and a sitting room; a very pretty verandah; a small front garden neatly railed in and overhanging a steep incline covered with pines and firs which stretched for thousands of feet below the terraced valley. Murree could be seen among the pines on the opposite hill; the Ghelum River flowed behind another hill to the north; and then the most glorious sight of all — the Himalayas, snow-capped and grand in their awful grandeur. Nanga Parbat 26,600 feet was a feast in the setting sun clearly visible 170 miles away!

The M.E.S. man soon had the bungalow opened; Yassin unpacked and produced a meal somehow. I spent the afternoon and evening exploring my mountain home. I discovered that Kyhra Gali was n-shaped and was isolated from the surrounding hills by the road and a huge valley all around it. It was rather barren except for the military buildings perched on its summit. I found the tiny hospital above my bungalow, the barrack rooms, the school house, the canteen, the married quarters — upper and lower — and the pretty little cemetery where several Catholics had been buried in 1860! I came across an apothecary's grave under a gnarled old oak that seemed to be hundreds of years old. Infants were buried there too. That tiny graveyard could always bring me peace no matter when I visited it. I was fascinated by my little dispensary a few yards away from my bungalow.

Next day Khyra Gali came to life. The troops arrived accompanied by their families and an officer — Lt. Garnier R.A. By evening things were all settled. Garnier came round to see me and I found him very "matey" — red hair, tall, broad, freckled, blue eyes, but not an ounce of sense in his head! He was mad about photography, women, and beer. He had the most remarkable little bearer I have ever seen — a little old wizened man who seemed to be forever padding around barefoot, had a red dyed beard and looked for all the world like a gnome! Garnier was the son of a Brigadier and was in the regular army. He produced some strange visiting cards which he often popped on people as a joke, such as "Garbage" and "Garbo". He was the S.S.O.; his battery was 23/24 Medium R.A. His C.O. came up a few days later with his wife — Major and Mary Bradshaw R.A. We all settled down to spend a delightful summer. A tennis court was fixed up and we blazed away at tennis every day. Dick B. and his wife, Mary, were quite expert tennis players. Garbo was hopeless and so were the other ladies in the station. I was a

match for Dick and Mary, but with Garbo as my partner they always won! We had dances about twice a week but I rarely went to them except when driven — and then I resisted dancing with the beautiful Mary. The latter was an English blonde, average height, slim and blue eyes. When Dick was busy he would urge me to take his wife for a walk — I did once but only under protest. I am still old fashioned about walking in the wilds with another man's wife! Mary was too broad-minded and I did not like her sex conversation when in mixed company.

Kyhra Gali was no exception to the usual hill station in India. There were the usual scandals among the men and the wives (whose husbands were on the plains!). The R.U.R. had a company and all the families down at Barian — so they came up to our place quite often. Algie Dunhill came to see me a lot and I was glad of his company. I had some marvellous tennis at Barian with Capt. Ledingham, his wife, Mrs. Christie Miller, and Major Morrison R.U.R. Ledingham was Scottish, 6ft 2ins, red hair, very thin; he was Medical Officer at Barian commanding the hospital there. He was an excellent tennis player, but I managed to beat him when I was in form. I always went down to Barian on a pony (a tat) all dressed up in my Gaelic (Queen's) blazer and white slacks. I loved those tennis parties — especially the ride back home up the hill. The sun would be setting behind those terrific mountains and the lone pine of Changla Gali looked so stately and grand perched away up on top of the hill. I always felt like singing cowboy songs on those delightful occasions!

My morning shopping was amusing. The butcher, the baker and the fruiterer came with their baskets and I sat on my verandah and bought sufficient for the day! At times I went to Murree with Garbo and Bradshaw and bought a few things. We had some anxious evenings at Bradshaws place listening to the war news, the fall of France and Dunkirk! On one such occasion my bungalow was broken into and I returned to find the rooms in chaos, a suitcase missing, my Queen's blazer gone, not to mention blankets and equipment. Of course the thieves were never traced nor was my stuff! I always looked forward to the arrival of water each morning on mules. The latter were wonderful animals for that hilly country, though they occasionally bolted down the hill!

I had some wonderful walks in those days, along the "pipe line". This was a narrow path along the face of the mountains which connected Kyhra Gali to Ghora Daka, and Khanspur (two small hill stations). It was at the former that I discovered Fr. Murphy and his lovely little church which was built by an Irish Regiment in India! He was a little grey-haired man of pleasant countenance and charming manner. We had mass once while I was in Kyhra Gali, in the schoolhouse.

There was quite a sensation in my front lawn one afternoon when a cheery fat little man arrived panting and limping, sat down on the grass, pulled off his shoes and socks, tossed the latter over the railings down into the Khudd! "I am Lewis from Khanspur — can you lend me a pair of decent socks? I have blistered feet!" He was followed by a charming little wife, dark, slim, and neat. They were both so full of life and yet they had their sorrows in a little boy who was constantly throwing fits. We had a beano in the canteen and off they tramped back home again. Poor Cliff Lewis later became D.A.D.M.S. to Col. Perceval in my division (9th Indian) and was shot by a Japanese on the night the British capitulated in Singapore (February 15th, 1942).

I had some lonely nights on my verandah but I had company always in my swallows who were nesting there. They built marvellous mud caked affairs. Soon they produced young ones and I had a very busy time feeding them with scraps. I also loved watching the ants at work — I often wished that I could work so hard. I experienced the worst thunderstorms of my life perched upon Kyhra Gali hill. I have never known anything so violent. In one storm one of my outhouses was struck by lightning and burned to the ground; hailstones came down as big as small marbles and wind whistled around the house at terrific speed.

I got on rather well with the men of 23/24 and 19th Indian Batteries and the families. There were many Irish among them. Bombadier Wright hailed from Ballymacarrat, but we became good friends. He was an expert cook and made me wonderful iced cakes regularly. I had grand fun on my monthly sanitary inspection of the area. The bazaar tea shops were always very dirty and so I had a hectic time chasing the owners up to keep them clean. Many of the local Indians came to my dispensary for treatment and they always had the best I could give them. I remember one bad eye case — a young girl brought along by her father. It is most unusual among the Mohamadens as the woman are in purdah always. I managed to cure her trouble and save her eyesight — and they were grateful. A sorry sight among the married troops was that of the Anglo-Indian wives and very dark coloured children. How these men could bring misery on themselves and children by such marriages is beyond my comprehension. It is a big problem among the troops in India. The men have absolutely no social contacts with young white girls and so they turn to the next best thing.

I had eight retainers attached to my "hospital" — dandy-coolies who hailed from Poonah, a native state which was ruled by a Rajah. Their duty was to transport urgent cases in the dandy down the hill to Barian. Their pay was 10 Rupees per month (15/-)! Of course they had nothing to do all day long. They made an imposing picture squatting there on the Khudd-side gazing down into the valley and to the Himalayas beyond. They would sit in little groups like that for hours in complete silence. I often wondered what they were dreaming of and what wonderful philosophy lay behind those rugged, weather beaten faces. I had often yearned for a small cottage away on a hilltop far from the world and here at last I have found it and loved it as much as I knew I would.

I had one grand inspection by the A.D.M.S. (Col. Carr) and the D.A.D.H. (Major Kurana I.M.S.) and it went off in grand style. My rest cure was complete and I was ordered to report to Rawalpindi on July 10th. "Garbo" arranged a truck for me all the way and so I had no troubles 'en route'. It was a marvellous ride down the hill to the plains; but not so pleasant when the hot air reached my nostrils. The temperature was only 110° F and oh it was like a hot oven. (The average hill temperature 30 miles away was 80° F). I found many changes at the mess and the hospital when I arrived there. Marrable had gone home; Col. Dunn had gone to Quetta; and many others had gone to the Frontier. A newcomer in Lt. John Frank F.R.C.S.Ed. had arrived from England with a batch of E.C.O.s including Lt. Fletcher from Queen's (Belfast)! I was appointed M.O. to the 1st Devonshire Regiment at Victoria Barracks; the East Yorks were at West Ridge (Connaught Barracks). I had also a job at the hospital in the medical ward. I got in some tennis and cricket during my brief stay of 12 days — and a few visits to the club. I did not see much of the Devon's officers until I was detailed to accompany them to Abbottabad on July 22nd.



"Capt. John R. Frank, M.B, CH.B., F.R.C.S.Ed."

I entrained with the regiment late in the evening and amid dreadful confusion we were off at midnight. We had little sleep of course en route. Abbottabad could not be reached by train, so we got off at a small station 15 miles from it at 5am. We had tea and a biscuit at the station. About 50 men were transported by trucks in relays while the rest marched. An ambulance car was waiting for me and I had a seat all the way at the rear of the column. We picked up a few men who collapsed on the way, but otherwise nothing eventful occurred until we reached Abbottabad (about 4,000 feet above sea level). The monsoon had arrived and so we were greeted by torrential rain as we passed through the bazaar of the town and halted at the foot of a hill. We were met by hundreds of mules and Gurkhas who transported all our sodden baggage up the hill to the plateau on top where our camp was supposed to exist. The site was waterlogged and we just milled around in mud and water all that day trying to sort things out. We had a miserable supper and went to bed in wet blankets. My wooden charpoy was useful at last because sleeping on the ground was unthinkable. Yet the troops had to do it! It took about four days for the camp to settle down! Then I began to be busy and take stock. I soon realised that the Devons were in a bad way. The C.O. (col. Cope) was tall, thin, prominent teeth, no chin, no character, had a dreadful stammer — not an ideal leader of men. Major Boville was old, drunken, and decrepit; an old Harrovian! Capt. Chumondly Coleridge (the G.O.C.'s nephew) was an old Etonian with nothing in his young head. Capt. Paul Gleadell⁴ was an old boy of Downside, a company commander of no mean ability, very popular, and a strong character. We became good friends immediately. He was born in Virginia and married to a retired Colonel's daughter (Mary); their only child was named Virginia! Another drunken Major was in charge of a company. The younger officers were mostly Emergency Commissioned Officers; they were good chaps on the whole — Ian Lockton, a famous Oxford athlete (hurdler); Sandy — the T.P.O.; Lewis my best friend. There was perpetual war between the regulars and the

⁴ See Journal Postscript for more information about Paul Gleadell.

E.C.O.s — and a very unhappy mess. Of course I sided with the latter. I soon discovered that the M.O. is a very independent person in a regiment — he can even tell the C.O. where he gets off! Percy Moran (the Q'master) was a gun in the crowd.

The regiment went into training for 6 weeks in mountain warfare prior to their departure for the N.W. Frontier. I naturally concluded that I was elected to accompany the unit to their final destination when training would be completed. My daily routine became heavier each day. The men were in poor shape and so there was much illness during the early days — also much malingering! The sanitation had to be carefully watched especially men under canvas. Added to my many duties was one more — M.O. in charge of the new British wing at the local Indian Military Hospital. We were the first British troops ever stationed at Abbottabad; the place was over-run with 4,000 Gurkhas, many Sikh Gunners etc. The local I.M.H. was four miles away and I spent the whole of the forenoon there. Col. Cope placed a regimental charger at my disposal daily for the trip up and down the hill. I was given a wonderful chestnut charger which I had great difficulty holding in check. I had many a wild gallop up that hill. I always had a supply of brown sugar handy from the syces (Indian groom) and my gallant beast was ever grateful.

The C.O. of the hospital was Col. van Reenan, a South African. He was quite a good type of Indian Army man, with wonderful stories of shikar and duels with tigers and numerous wild beasts. He was in the I.M.S. of course as were all the M.O.s at the hospital. The 2nd in command was a major I.M.S. — an Irishman with a fund of good humour, too fond of a drink, and not much medical knowledge in his head. Capt. Henderson was in charge of the Brigade Laboratory — a club man with fair hair and bright blue eyes, a real lady killer. The thousands of huge brown ants that swarmed all over his lab did not seem to worry him in the least. Capt. Taylor was a quiet lad, newly wed, a Scot, and a saver! He was quite decent to me, and gave me many lifts from the hospital to the bazaar in his car. He went away early on leave for a month and I was left with the Indian surgical ward + the British officers' families wing. Things ran well in the men's ward thanks to a few capable R.A.M.C. orderlies. The local officers (British) with the Indian troops were a nuisance. There was one nice lad, an Irishman called Monaghan — he was in the 6th Gurkhas. The Indian ward was in the most shocking mess I have ever seen — chaos everywhere; no decent orderlies; no decent attention; everything dirty. I saw some interesting cases in the ward, such as guinea worm in the leg. It burrows its way under the skin right up the leg for 18 inches. At its point of eruption it can be twined around a match stick. Oh! what a hospital and what awful medical treatment is meted out to Indian troops. Taylor left me with a case of typhoid — an officer's wife; and a couple of maternity cases.

Col. van Reenan was not really commanding the hospital — his wife was the C.O.! Oh how that woman could talk and lay down the law and interfere in things that did not concern her around the hospital. I only paid two visits to their bungalow and both were informal. I was given a cordial invite to come often but did not avail myself of the freedom of that home.

That long winding path up the hillside to the camp fascinated me. The lower half of the hill was covered with wild vines and bunches of green grapes hung everywhere. The upper half was wild and barren, with hairpin bends galore, but the mountain scenery in the distance was very pretty. There was a quaint native village about half-way up the incline, but oh! it was dirty. The streets must have been the narrowest in all the world — the casements above almost made an archway over the thin ribbon of a path below. The shy children would scamper off at our approach and hide in the folds of their mothers' voluminous pyjamas. It was in Abbottabad that I saw the smartest soldiers in all the world — the Gurkhas. They were small, muscular, well-set, mongolian looking, and ever cheerful. They were good footballers, good pipers, and were very prolific — there seemed to be dozens of children in each family. They were officered by Britishers. I was intrigued with their luxurious officers' mess (6th Gurkhas) — there seemed to be silver trophies everywhere and the walls were studded with fantastic antennae of various wild beasts of the Himalayas. They had a wonderful record on the N.W. Frontier against the Pathans of the border — those tall, sinewy Musselmans from the hills.

I paid about two visits to the local club with the younger officers. We had a swim on one occasion but it was a dirty pond, and so we found it rather flat. I managed one game of tennis. There was the usual mob of young females trying to look brazen and masculine; and many old females trying to look young! And all the while young beardless males kept buzzing around the ladies like bees around honey! The more sedate colonels sat around the swimming pond sipping beer and chatting scandal among themselves. What a life the Anglo-Indian leads in India. Sunday morning is the highlight of the week in the local club — the swimming pond is crammed full. Scores of people are sitting around drinking and admiring. Give me dear old Ireland any day of the week! Abbottabad itself was dull and thank heavens I hadn't any spare time to devote to it. The mess was quite jolly in the evenings with

the younger officers. Percy Moran became a Major one fine day and invited us all down to his tent for a party and a sing-song. We had a wonderful night of it; no regular officers had an invitation so we cut loose. Percy was very fat, very fair moustache, very red faced, stumpy and wheezy — and boy! could he drink. But he was one of the jolliest men I ever met.

Time passed very quickly and the end came on August 28th when an order came from the A.D.M.S., Rawalpindi District, appointing "Lieut. F.J. Murray R.A.M.C. as officer commanding B.M.H. Barian". Col van Reenan arranged a truck for me and I was rushed off to the nearest station en route for Rawalpindi. On arrival at Pindi I stayed a night at the mess and next morning the faithful Yassin and I were off to the Murree Hills again. Ledingham and his wife greeted me at Barian in the bungalow which I was to take over from them. They were very decent to me, showed me around, gave me many tips about the place, and also presented me with a cushion. There was much furniture in the bungalow which they had hired from 'Pindi, so I just kept it on.

Barian has been rated by many as the prettiest hill station in India. Certainly I have never seen anything to equal its quiet beauty. Pine trees, green verdant grass, and flowers everywhere. My bungalow had 11 rooms; a beautiful garden in full bloom in front. This gradually sloped down into a valley between the hills. Rawalpindi could be seen as a blurred image down in the hot plains; at night it looked like fairyland with its lights dancing in the distance. There was a marvellous old tree right in the middle of the lawn whose branches gave wonderful shade in the heat of the day — it seemed to cover the entire lawn. There were two very annoying cicadas in that same tree and for hours on end they would scream forth their awful din. It was heavenly in that garden. About 20 yards away to the right was my tennis court. To reach it I had to walk through a tiny copse sloping away from the lawn.

The hospital was situated in terrace form away above the bungalow on the side of the hill. Besides catering for the troops at Barian, Kyhra Gali, Changla Gali, it was also the Rawalpindi (Murree) V.D. hospital. There were few patients in hospital ever. My routine was — sick parade for troops in Upper and Lower Barian; hospital rounds; families sick parade at Families Hospital followed by rounds there. Then one hours office work — signing letters and routine orders. Then followed a pleasant morning on my front lawn under the tree, which began with tea and cakes provided by Yassin. Oh the dreams I have had as I lay on my back looking up into that leafy wilderness; everything was so beautiful and peaceful and quiet.

My assistant at the hospital was Mr. Worrall, an Anglo-Indian. He had a very dark wife and many dark children. He was fat and jolly and had a frightful stammer. He was efficient and kindly to the natives. One of his boys was a very good tennis player and I had many good games with him. There were about 10 R.A.M.C. orderlies working in the hospital and a regiment of Indians — ward servants, bhistics, dhobies, sweepers etc. There was a nice old woman as matron in the Families hospital and she had two native Ayahs to assist her. We had a Mohamaden mosque in the hospital grounds and morning and evening I loved to hear the call to prayer. It is a very thrilling thing to hear — very impressive indeed. There were several Chowkidans (night watchmen) attached to the hospital and one always slept on a charfoy on my front verandah. One dark night he raised the alarm that a thief was breaking into the house. Yassin was out in a flash and captured the would be thief. Of course he pleaded innocent and was let off when he had bribed the local policeman. I had a wonderful scene with the latter gentleman who called me an Englishman and the boss.

My bungalow overlooked the road which connected Upper with Lower Barian, though the hospital and my abode were in Upper Barian. A small detachment of the Royal Ulster Rifles still remained in Upper Barian with the families — to protect them. However many of them got very special attention! Major Morrison was in charge of the detachment. He was a hearty, red nosed, beery looking man with spectacles; he had tireless energy and was forever marching his men up hill and down dale. He was not married. Mrs. Christie-Miller and baby lived with Mrs. Ledingham and baby in a bungalow nearby. The former was wife of the adjutant of the regiment. Mrs. McCallum, who was Catholic, lived with her very eligible daughter in another bungalow. Her husband was the Quartermaster of the regiment. Both she and her daughter were good Catholics; Mrs. Christie-Miller had been a Catholic at one time but had fallen away. She was a daughter of the MacDermotts of Sligo and was brought up in a convent. The "Ulsters" had gone off home early in the hot season, leaving the families to follow later. There were sports grounds, a Cinema, a canteen, and a dance hall in Upper Barian — so that were was lots of amusements.

Lower Barian had the families of the 5th Field Regiment and one Battery housed them. I later met the 5th Field in Malaya at Kuantan and later I was their Medical Officer in Changi where we were P.O.W.s. Capt. Dick Pearson was the S.S.O. He had a very charming wife and a lovely child. Mrs. Miller and I had some grand games of tennis

with them, both on my court and in Lower Barian. They were an ideal couple and very much in love. Poor Dick tried hard but never succeeded in gaining his majority. He was surprised to find me a major in Malaya. I had many tennis games with Major Morrison, who was poor, and Garbo, with Mrs. Ledingham and Mrs. Miller.

I went on several route marches with Major Morrison and his lads. I revelled in them. I remember one march in which we ran all the way up Jacob's Ladder. This was a narrow path which seemed to ascend up to the heavens from the road to the top of a hill. It was about 1 mile long! At the top we found an old Sangar (a fort surrounded by boulders). Here we had a shot-putting contest, which I won very easily, much to the surprise of Morrison who thought I was soft. We had another grand march over the hills beyond Changla Gali. There we had tea and macaroons in the bazaar — the best macaroons in the world, all have declared. It was pleasant to come back to my bungalow, a nice fire, and the ever ready Yassin with tea and cakes. We had a canteen in the hospital grounds run by Kartar Singh of Rawalpindi. He had a long flowing grey beard and was very decent to me. He could produce anything for me at a moment's notice, from Terry's Chocolate to Walls Sausages! I continued to patronise him on my return to Pindi.

My faithful friend at this time was "Algy" Dunhill. I flaunted all regulations and entertained him daily at my bungalow. He was very grateful because his barrack room pals were rather tough. We often went to the Cinema together, and had many pleasant walks in the vicinity of Barian. I got on well with all the men and their families. Mrs. C. Miller had several cocktail parties at which I solemnly ate the dainty snacks, speared tiny sausages, and sipped orange juice or lime juice! After one very hectic party at which Garbo took flashlight snaps, we all went off to a dance in the local hall. The troops and their families were there en masse from all the Galis. As is the custom with R.U.R. dances, several Irish dances are included in the programme. I danced an 8-hand reel with Miss McCallum, her mother having refused to take the floor! The troops could not understand how I came to know anything about Irish dancing.

One day I paid a visit to Murree and called in to see Mr. O'Donohue at the Chapel. I found him in wonderful form. I went up to the B.M.H. and saw Lieut. Frank in there as a patient with jaundice. He asked if he could come up to Barian and spend his convalescence there and I assented joyfully. A few days after this Fr. Murphy arrived in Barian from Gora Daka. I always served his Mass. He stayed a few days as my guest in my bungalow. There was a christening one morning of John Thomas Coyle and I was selected as godfather. His mother was a pleasant little woman who hailed from Hamill St. (Falls Road). I rushed off to Murree and bought a silver drinking cup for my godchild and had it inscribed suitably. They were very pleased with the gift. I was invited to the celebrations after the christening and sat with Fr. Murphy in a small kitchen eating cake and sipping lemonade!!

The next pleasant change at Barian was the arrival of John Frank at my bungalow. At first he was rather weak and had difficulty in walking, but when he had found his legs we had some marvellous walks together. It was then that I really explored the surrounding country. John was a very keen photographer and it was he who made me interested in this hobby and later persuaded me to buy a good camera. One day we were out in the wilds below lower Barian when we came across an old farmer cutting his Indian Corn (7ft high). He presented us each with a corn cob. It was my first time to see the like and Yassin soon found that we liked it as a savoury on toast in the evenings at dinner! We spent hours gazing down into those fathomless valleys and looking at the snow capped Himalayas on the horizon.

Then came the sad news that the "Ulsters" were bound for home. They all packed up in a hurry; piled into buses and off they went one fine morning down the hill to Rawalpindi. Garbo, Frank, and I went by car as far as Murree. Then John Frank went back to duty in the plains after 2 weeks stay with me. Oh it was lonely without Dunhill, John, and everyone. Barian was silent and deserted like Goldsmith's village. Dick Pearson and his wife went away too as did Mrs Ledingham. My last fortnight was very dull and I was not sorry to get the word to move everything to Pindi on October 19th, 1940. And so it happened. Garbo provided a truck for my convenience. A man arrived from Rawalpindi by bullock cart a few days earlier and carted away his furniture down the hill again. It takes about 3 days to do the journey of 32 miles by bullock cart!

I found 'Pindi much as I had left it, except that some young blood had been added to the Mess. Col. Down had gone and I was given his palatial suite of rooms in the Mess. Everything in the rooms was green with a fine edge of gold. I went out and bought some Chinese prints with which to cover the walls. I bought a Golden Buddha, wood carvings, Chinese horse in series, white ivory elephants etc. I procured a Kashmir Silk tea set and bed spread and many things which would make the place presentable. I had the lighting altered and a nice standard lamp

installed. I found myself still attached to the medical ward at the hospital and medical officer to the Royal Signals (District, Brigade, Divisional, Command Signals) and also to the Indian Army Ordnance Corps and families. As well as this I found myself the Quartermaster of the hospital! I was responsible for supplying food; all stores were on my charge; all the drugs and clothing! So I had a busy morning with all my various duties. There was never a dull moment during the next few months.

I had only been a few days in Pindi when I had a cable from my father telling me about my mother's death. (I have never found out the cause of her death). It just broke my heart to think that my beloved mother had died and I so far away from home. The greatest regret of my life was that I had not become reconciled to her before her death. We had become estranged while I was working in Birmingham and it was a slip of a girl and her mother who really caused it + my stupid infatuation and blindness. Thank God she thought more kindly of me just before she died — more kindly than I ever deserved. Her dying wish was that I should marry Eileen O'Kane (this was unknown to me at the time). Thank God I was sensible enough to send Eileen my love in a Christmas card from Pindi, which changed my entire life.

To relieve my mind I kept going all day long. All afternoon I spent playing tennis, cricket, or cycling. I found a new tennis opponent in Robertson, a dour Scotchman from Edinburgh. He was tall, dark, expressionless, mean, but quite good at heart. I always managed to beat him. I became no.1 tennis and cricket player among the R.A.M.C. officers and men. I was selected to play for Rawalpindi Cricket Club against Perhawa. I bought a new cricket bat (Cannon) and I still treasure it. I had my Slazenger racquet restrung and went great guns.

John Frank aroused my interest in photography and persuaded me to invest in a Voightlander camera for GORs. That little camera brought me more pleasure than words can tell. I just went around and snapped everything that came my way. I took a snap of my white elephants as they went trooping by on my desk.



"I had a dream and saw 5 white elephants marching in stately procession across my table"

I was present at some wonderful "guest nights" in the mess when high ranking military men were entertained. I had Paul Gleadell as my guest one night and he did enjoy himself. The dinner was always a spectacular affair. The massive trophies of silver down the centre of the long table; the brilliant colours of the mess kits; the rows of medals and decorations; the excellent food and wines — all made guest night a very delightful affair. One's guest always sat at his host's right hand. Paul looked very striking in his green and wine coloured mess kit. There was always a spirit of good fellowship on guest nights — maybe it was the atmosphere, maybe it was the wine. When the port stage was reached there was the usual toast of "Gentlemen — the King!" proposed by the most junior member of the mess (which was myself once) and seconded by the senior dining member. After dinner drinking proceeded till well after midnight. Many games were improvised for the evening — some of them quite rough! I managed to keep my head clear and watch the whole scene very impersonally.

I went a few times to the Cinema and saw "Gone with the Wind", "Down Argentine Way" etc. There was a good spot in the cantonment for having supper called "Sam's". Sam's weight was about 16 stone but oh what excellent steaks he could produce — his mixed grills were delicious. He also had all kinds of slot machines. I met Garbo down there a few times. I went to the club a few times for dinner, but never bothered about dancing even though there were Sisters present.

I was invited to many cocktail parties — Col. Caine, General Campbell-Moore, Campbells, Halls, Ledingham, Percevals etc. I met some very nice people among the Signals — Col. and Mrs. McSweeney, Tim Fegan and Dot

Fegan (Capt. & Mrs. Fegan), Paul Gambier of the fierce moustache and horses, Capt. & Mrs. Taylor, Col. & Mrs. Stevens (Ordnance). But my best friends were Major Paul Gleedell, and Mary not to mention Virginia, their daughter. I had never met many before but on first acquaintance I thought she was the most charming little wife I had ever seen; that was only confirmed by time. I spent many happy evenings with them. It was the happiest home I have ever been in — they were both good Catholics. Somehow they were always smiling — and it was not always pretence, there was something good about them that outshone anything I had ever encountered in a married couple before. The Fegans were a jolly couple too, but they were more elderly (both about 45); Tim had risen from the ranks to be a Capt. and later a Major at Army H.Q. in New Delhi. Dot was a bit neurotic and imagined she had got all kinds of diseases. Dot fed me very well when I visited them which was very often. They had an excellent cook who made marvellous fudge of which I absorbed great quantities.

I played much tennis with Major and Mrs Pevey, Major and Mrs Hall, the Crealeys, and many officers and wives of the 18th Indian Cavalry. I had tea very often at Hall's as their bungalow was quite near to the club. They had an adorable child called Jennifer — I had grand times playing with her! Jimmy Hall played quite good tennis in spite of his artificial leg. He was one of the best and kindest RAMC officers I ever met. He later went to A.H.Q. (India).



"View from my front door! Co. H.C. Benson RAMC. Free haircut at saloon."

Then came December with the rapid expansion of the Indian Army. Field Hospitals and Field Ambulances sprang up all over the country. Robertson was called into the 27th Field Ambulance with Major Benson RAMC in command. The former lasted four days when Benson had him discharged and I was selected in his place. I became 2nd in command. There were 6 other Indian Medical Officers (IMS) + 1 transport officer (RIASC). The officer in charge of training was Capt. Gamble I.M.S., a Canadian. "Benny" was a queer mixture — regular army officer, cerebration very slow, sandy moustache, reddish face, no chin to speak of; a good fellow — fond of gin and horses — hunted a lot with Pashawar Vale Hunt. He was a bit of a bore. I remained with him until January 19th, 1942 and at times he drove me mad with his indecision and muddle headedness.

We went into intensive training with our bunch of raw recruits — Indians just left their native villages. We had hours of drill on the "square", which was a brown dusty area above the golf course; we had long weary route marches through mud villages, over hill and dale (mullah), off the beaten track where there no roads. Our usual march was 20 miles. Of course the men could not keep in step. At first Benny accompanied me at the head of the column but soon he did not come on any more marches and until the end of the Ambulance's career I led all the troops! There was stretcher drill, first aid drill, field ambulance administration practice, tactical manoeuvres etc. We were all under canvas, but for the first two months we lived at the RAMC Mess. When I was orderly officer I had to sleep in camp and oh it was cold those nights with no fire. I had a wonderful sleeping bag which Mohd. Ismail

made for me — camel hair, soft, and warm. Still I enjoyed turning out the guard morning and evening; they presented arms with their "Kookries" (a thick short bladed, curved sabre — a Gurkha invention for cutting heads off). We had every known Indian caste with us - Mohomedans, Hindus, Sikhs, Dogras, Pathans, Gurkhas, Nepalese, Christians, English, Anglo-Indians, Moherattas, Tamils. We had to have several cookhouses — one for each caste! On my rounds as orderly officer I was not allowed to enter these cookhouses — I could only peer through the doorway and never could see much because of the smoke (never any chimneys or windows). Besides being 2nd in Command I was O.C. HQ Company and also Quartermaster and sports officer. I organised football and baseball matches and always took part in them. The Indians were very keen on volleyball and basketball. Sridharan (Lt) was a very good footballer from Madras University. He was O.C. "A" Company; a good lad; educated at a college run by Italian priests. He was quite Westernised. Lt. Getley was a fanatical Brahmin, who had slept in a bed until he was 24 years old! Palmar was a Sikh — not a bad fellow, though his long black beard was quite terrifying at first. Laher was educated by an Irishman — he was a dapper, fair complexioned Parsee from Bombay; Bawa was a Sikh of high caste who had shaved his beard off and smoked heavily. He was forever tittering and he spoke with a lisp. Then came the mighty Anora — great bulking brute of a man, with a small heart and a big appetite and a loud mouth! I took many snaps of the men in camp and out on the march. We had an exciting time at West Ridge with the East Yorks where we had a revolver course (.45) for 10 days — I qualified with honours!

On the social side I was playing much cricket and tennis. I was selected as no.1 tennis officer for the RAMC officers v sergeants tennis tournament. I won all my matches, singles and doubles. We were entertained to tea, and lots of dainties by the families — I enjoyed the feast very much and was reluctant to leave. I saw a lot of Paul and Mary in those days too and paid many visits to the Fegans and MacSweeney's who lived near our camp. I went to a few parties at Gambles where I met Gamble's wife — a very talkative American lady of 30 years. She had a caustic tongue but oh what awful taste — loud! The General (Campbell-Moore) made eyes at her but that helped Gamble a lot!

Christmas was coming and I made my preparations. I had sent Mess cards home — one to Eileen. Then I bought Jennifer a beautiful doll; for Virginia it was a nice fluffy, cuddly, white doggie. Those were my two best girls! Paul and Mary invited me to spend Christmas night with them and have dinner + a few games. I was so very pleased and accepted gladly. I began my day with midnight mass. It was bitterly cold as I set out on my bike for church. Oh what a lovely scene that was; I was sad unto tears and yet I was happy in a way. I felt so lonely sitting there thousands of miles from home and very little chance of going back soon. Mgr. O'Donohue said mass and preached a lovely sermon. Paul and Mary greeted me outside when all was over and that made my heart glow. I sped back to the mess on my bike, collected Virginia's present, and went off to Gleadell's house. I tiptoed along the edge of the gravel path and placed the dog on the front verandah and then slipped off into the night. It seemed that Virginia toddled outside next morning and discovered her doggie; she was overjoyed and hugged it. They didn't know whence came the present because I signed it "Uncle". Many days later I told them.

After the usual morning greetings to all in the mess I went off to the hospital with John Frank; we saw all the patients and sisters and the lovely decorations. Then we were dragged off to the families quarters and had to have a drink and cake at each house (and there were a dozen of them). Then we helped to carve the Christmas turkey for the patients. Back to the mess we went feeling the worse for wear and had lunch at 3p.m. Off I went to the hospital again and had tea there with the doctors and sisters. Then we visited the RAMC barrack room with Col. Crealey and the sisters who were brave enough. We helped carve the B.O.R.s turkey and serve their pudding. Speeches were made and toasts proposed. I sped back to the mess again and dressed hurriedly for dinner, dashed off to the party at Gleadells. It was a small affair. Paul, Mary, Paul Gambier, another young married woman whose husband was overseas, and myself. We each had a small gift on our plate as we sat down to a marvellous dinner. I enjoyed myself among my friends and went back to bed happy.

The Christmas spirit lasted for several days and then came the New Year. I was invited by Col. and Mrs. Perceval to spend New Year's Eve at their party. I went their with Col. Harris and found quite a crowd — Major & Mrs. Percy, Lucy Sheridan, and one more couple besides our hosts. We had a wonderful feast and some hectic games afterwards. Then as the old year was ringing out we rang in the new one with Auld Lang Syne. The party lasted an hour after that. Mrs Perceval was great fun — an Australian by birth; old Percy himself had not a shred of humour in his soul! Fred Harris spent the evening roaring with laughter, which became infectious.

About 10 new sisters had arrived from England in the Autumn and of course the officers of Pindi made a big fuss over them. I created an unpardonable crime by taking four of them + Carroll and Archard to a Corporals' dance

in the Signals' lines. I had always felt so very sorry for BORs in India — they were cut off completely from all social contact with females of their own age. The lads at this dance had a glorious time dancing with the nurses and the latter declared they had never enjoyed a dance so much! Of course my good intentions were frowned upon by the hospital people because Army Sisters rank as officers and so they must not dance with the lower ranks! All these young sisters either married or became engaged — forgetting why they were sent out to India! My best friends among the older sisters were Carroll (Irish) and Archard (Australian). The latter went to Peshawar; the former to Singapore where I met her doing gallant work in the theatre under shell fire. Alas she was killed escaping from Singapore when her ship was sunk and all the sisters machine-gunned in the water.

I had an awful ordeal before Christmas when I was asked to lecture to V.A.D. nurses on first-aid. It was my first experience as lecturer and I was horribly self-conscious — whether the young ladies knew it or not I do not know — but it was a nightmare. Mrs. Barstow, a general's wife was the number 1 girl there.

There many dances and parties at this time and oh it was so very far removed from war. People behaved as if the war did not exist at all. Then I was suddenly uprooted from my pleasant surroundings and posted to the 27th Indian Field Ambulance. I spent many cold nights sleeping under canvas. I learned to love my work, the route marches, and the hard training. We had a revolver course at West Ridge with the East Yorks Regiment.

(Material added in 1980's)

The C.O. of the 27th was Lt. Col. Horace Claude Benson R.A.M.C.; not much personality or drive. I was made 2nd in Command and promoted A/Major. To celebrate I threw a party and we had a hectic night — all my friends were there. Fred Harris, then a Colonel; later became D.M.S. with the rank of Lt. General. Had friendly letters from him after the war.

And now came the most important period of my life — letter arrived on 26 February, 1941 (sent on 29 December, 1940) from Eileen O'Kane with love. After many years of silence and separation I had sent her a RAMC Christmas Card in 1940. The ice had been broken at last.

I wrote her eight long tightly packed pages, full of love and joy — and got a sadness that we were 7,000 miles apart at this moment of jubilation. We first met in Ranafest (Gaeltacht) at a Ceilidhe in Colaiste Brigid in 1929; when I saw her "across a crowded room" and knew then, even then that this was my girl. I connived in every possible way to get messages to her at her boarding school in St. Louise's Convent, Kilkeel. I met her at parties at McNabbs in Castlewellan. Even slept in a haystack one night there! Any dodge to be with my Goddess. This was a very simple idealistic love — no courtship, no kissing! It appeared that she was terrified of my earnestness. At Queens I found out her subjects, and the times she was leaving — and I managed to way lay her as often as possible, accidentally on purpose. And then we drifted apart. So while I remained at Queens I saw her at times — but only from afar. I walked many miles a week ostensibly to visit the Falls Park, but really it was so that I could pass her house at 195 Springfield Road.

I was in Dublin once playing football for Queens in the Sigerson Cup and bought her glass beads and a small broach — the beads were blue and clear but they were sapphires and diamonds in my reveries! Where did the money come from? By walking from Beechwood to Queens daily and skimping on lunches! I just idolised that girl of mine. Everyone knew that I loved Eileen (all, that is, except Eileen). I felt very bitter about our separation, even when I went to Birmingham to work. While there my father was informed by our local P.P. that I had married an English girl!

So you can imagine my joy when the letter arrived from the girl I idolised all through the years. It was a sort of miracle — and it was this miracle that was to give me hope and courage to survive for the next 4 and ½ years.

Meanwhile the "27th" was getting into shape — many Indian Doctors, Gatley, Sheridan, etc. not to mention Jennidah Partap Singh an astonishing tall man with a flowing grey beard. We tramped the countryside by day in the heat of the day, over dusty dirt roads and through sleepy little villages and there we saw the real poverty of India's people. They had little water, no education, and awful hygiene which led to much disease. The nights were cold under canvas; and the days hot (102° F).

However it wasn't all work. I hired a car and went to Peshawar with some friends. Nearing the Kyhber Pass, we turned off into Tribal Territory, which was controlled by Pathans, and arrived at the Kabul River. This divided India from Afghanistan; the scenery was awesome but had a rugged grandeur about it. Another remarkable trip was by car up to Murree and then through the snow in a sleigh pulled by coolies. Up we went to Kyhra Gali and had macaroons and tea at a rest house. A more romantic trip was to the banks of the Ghelum River where we had a midnight picnic. All the goodies were in a huge basket.

Addendum

After many months of training, exercises and route marches, the "27th" was ready to go to war. We entrained at 'Pindi on 5th April 1941 and we had no idea whither we were bound. All our luggage and equipment were loaded — the faithful Yassin came with me. It was a sad journey of 3 days down the sub-continent of India to Secunderabad a military town in Hyderabad (Deccan). A sad farewell to my faithful Yassin. We were under canvas and boy it was hot down there — especially on route marches. As a diversion we were entertained to lunch by the Nizam of Hyderabad — the richest man in the world, at the Royal Palace in Hyderabad city. He was an old wizened man and looked very unhappy to me. A notorious miser, he dressed badly and lived on 30 rupees/month. Gold and precious stones all over his person. His subjects were pitifully poor. What a family he had — 80 children, some were legitimate, others illegitimate; the former wore yellow turbans in a fez shape, and the latter pink ones. The old Nizam hates all pomp and seldom goes out in state. His Kingdom is well run and quite modern in ways — the approach to the city through a grand avenue lined by magnificent electric standards. The two eldest legitimate sons were locked up in the palace for the first 20 years of their lives; no education and poor food. The Viceroy intervened and they were given proper education, a weekly allowance and were allowed to travel. One married a Turkish Princess and they entertained a lot and performed state functions. However a careful watch was kept on expenditure. The Nizam collected money from relatives several times a year. We found the eldest son a very charming man. So back to camp after an amazing afternoon.

On the 16th April we entrained once more and next day came to Madras on the East Coast. And there on the dockside was a ancient troopship; then it dawned on us whither we were bound — Malaya of course! It was a short journey (3 days) to Penang where we docked and were ferried across to Port Swettenham. Then by train to Ipoh (April 21st). There I was ensconced in the Royal Hotel with the other officers while the men were under canvas. It was nice to be spoiled again when not on duty at the camp. But it was work all day until 7p.m. — no sport. Ipoh seemed very modern — racetrack, cricket club, tennis club, hockey club, swimming club etc. I went to one dance, but no partners available so no dance for me. Officers were not allowed to dance with the lovely Chinese hostesses! I was in love with Malaya — everything so verdant and green and clean. It was hot but not as bad as India, but very humid. I loved the people — especially the Chinese who make up a big percentage of the population.

Early in May we attended a reception given by visiting Chinese Generals. They were charming a the afternoon tea but really went to town at dinner that evening — 10 courses including bird's nest soup and roast pork crackling!

On 3rd May, the Sultan of Perak gave a garden party in our honour. He lives in a gorgeous palace overlooking the Perak River. The Royal Jugglers did all kinds of acrobatics & tricks; the Royal tennis Coaches gave a tennis exhibition on the Royal Court, and we went home in a Royal Car at a rapid speed of 70 mph.

It was in Ipoh I met Dr. Rupert Shelley and his wife "Shrimpy" not to mention their blonde daughter, Brigid (9yr). They were real odd balls. They threw a party one evening to celebrate the completion of their new loo. We all formed a semi-circle around the latter, Shrimpy sat on it, and Rupert pulled the chain, amid loud applause from the audience.

Then I met a Mayoman + his wife at mass one Sunday — Mr & Mrs Wimsey. They came to tea at the hotel and we became good friends. We met up with him on our honeymoon and went to the Leopardstown races with him! He was a superintendent in a local hospital.

I hadn't any news of Eileen since 7th April but on 7th May came a cable — and signed love Eileen. I was on Cloud 5! No letters as yet!

Journal Postscript

Frank met Major-General **Paul Gleadell** of the Devonshire Regiment while in India in July 1940. He got to know the family (Paul, his wife Mary and their daughter Virginia) well and he described them as his “best friends” in India; Frank attended a party at their house on Christmas Day, 1940. While on his way back to England from Ceylon with his family, their ship, the SS Llandaff Castle, was torpedoed and sank off the coast of Mozambique on 30th November 1942. Despite this setback the Gleadells reached England where Paul continued to serve in the Devonshires and had a distinguished career, eventually reaching the rank of General. He and members of the 12th (Airborne) Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment took part in the Normandy landings on D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge and the crossing of the Rhine in March 1945. When Frank finished an early version of his memoirs in 1988 he expressed a wish to meet up with Paul again. They were put in contact with the help of the Devon and Dorset Regiment and so in July 1988 Frank and Eileen (with two of their children, Josette and Carl) travelled to Dorchester to meet up with Paul and Mary. Paul was already very ill at the time and died on 3rd August 1988. Paul and Mary had four children and by an unusual coincidence, Frank’s son Paul, a teacher in Gloucester, ended up being the form teacher of Paul Gleadell’s great-grandson, Jordan Gleadell-Burt, for five years.

Dr Maurice Macsherry was in charge of the GP practice at 72 Summer Hill Road in Birmingham where Frank worked for two years before he joined the RAMC in 1939. Maurice was born in Cookstown and did his medical training in Edinburgh and Glasgow. He probably worked as a ship’s surgeon and he is listed as such on the crew list of a ship travelling between London and Sydney in 1901. He married a French woman, Valerie Marie Aubril, in 1907 and they had three children (Edith born in 1909, Philippe [also known as Maurice] born in 1915 and Dennis born in 1917). Frank frequently visited the family home in Francis Road, Edgbaston and he would probably have known the whole family. Soon after the outbreak of war Philippe (Maurice) gave up his job as an estate agent and joined the RAF to become a Sergeant Pilot based in Biggin Hill flying a Spitfire; he was killed in March 1941. Dennis, a medical student at the start of the war, followed his father and became a ship’s surgeon in the Merchant Marine. His ship, the MV Melbourne Star, carrying a heavy load of munitions, was torpedoed by U-boat 129 on 2nd April 1943 in the North Atlantic and swiftly sank. Maurice himself died in Edgbaston in 1944 but Valerie died in Poole in 1974. The couple’s oldest child, Edith, died in 2001 in Exeter.