

THE WAR

(I DID IT MY WAY)

by

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When war broke out my Mum, who was a wise old bird, told me to go down to the Music Shop and buy copies of all the popular songs of the day. Then I had to learn to play them on the piano, off by heart. As Mum said, "When they find out you can play the piano, you'll have a better war of it." Ever the dutiful son, I did just that and never regretted it. I did have a better war of it!

I began to be very worried about my parents as, near where they live, there were the Canvey Island oil refineries – perfect targets for the German bombers. I persuaded them to evacuate into the countryside at Banstead. One of the girls in the office lived there. In the next door house was a lady who had a spare room to let, so my parents moved in. It was a mistake. The lady was most peculiar, into all sorts of weird beliefs and practices. Her garden was overrun with weeds. Mum, trying to be helpful, pulled up all the stinging nettles and burnt them. It was quite the wrong thing to do, as they were an important item in the lady's diet.

Mum and Dad moved out immediately and stayed with my Uncle Fred, a butcher who lived in Bromley. He had a huge house with plenty of spare rooms now his children had left home. At the weekends I stayed there as well. One Sunday I cycled from Bromley to Banstead to visit my friends. In the evening I returned but, owing to the blackout and the tiny light that my bike lamp was allowed, I completely lost my way. I was riding along a well made-up road when a group of Air Force Military Police rushed up, dragged me from my bike and took me into a building. There had been a scare that German spies were descending by parachute, complete with bicycles. Somehow I had cycled into the middle of Biggin Hill aerodrome. How I had passed the guards at the entrance I could not imagine. Perhaps the road sloped and I had silently free-wheeled in the dark past a guard who was not paying attention at the time. I was asked to identify myself. I used to keep my identity card and money in my gas mask case so I opened it and they were not there. The guards became more certain they had got a German spy and became more nasty. However, in the bag I found my Dad's income tax papers. I had picked up his gas mask by mistake. Gradually it began to sink in that I might not be a spy. No German spy would carry my Dad's income tax papers. Eventually they phoned Uncle Fred and the matter was cleared up. I was loaded up on my bike again and escorted, under armed guard, back to the aerodrome entrance. They instructed me how to find the road to Bromley and I went on my way. But for my Dad's income tax papers I could have been shot as a German spy.

Soon after, perhaps to distract me from my sorrows at the loss of Phyllis, a girl friend who had turned me down flat, I received my call-up papers from the Army. I was to be in the Royal Army Pay Corps. My friend De Havilland said to me, "You are the sort of man who falls off Westminster Bridge into the Thames and comes up with your pockets full of fish". Certainly the Pay Corps had its attractions. It was basically a non-combatant corps, although I suppose it would have to fight if the occasion demanded it. To my delight I was told that my firm, Lambert Brothers, intended to pay me full salary all the time that I was in the Army – half now and the other half when I returned to them after the war.

I was told to report to Winchester Barracks. There, all of us men in our intake were given blankets and three "biscuits". Army "biscuits" are bed mattresses – very hard and uncomfortable but better than the cold floor. We were marched to the great other ranks' mess hall for a meal. It is a tradition of the Army that the Orderly Officer of the day has to come into the mess and call out "Any complaints". On this occasion, to our surprise, the Orderly Officer was none other than David Niven, the famous film star. At the outbreak of the war he had come over from the States and joined the Kings' Royal Rifles Corps, reaching the rank of captain. He was probably the only Orderly Officer in the whole history of the British Army who, when he had called out "Any complaints", was greeted by all the men's stopping eating and staring at him.

Early the next day we were loaded onto a train which set off, roughly in the direction of north. In fact, it meandered in all sorts of directions, stopping at times in isolated stations, sometimes even changing the locomotive. At one time, it stopped in Bristol and stayed still for two hours before proceeding on towards our final destination of Nottingham. It had taken the whole day to reach Nottingham after zig-zagging to and fro

throughout England. That evening we were allocated billets in private houses near the Pay Office. Five other men and I were in a corner-terraced house on the Hucknall Road. The owner, a bossy, rather simple little lady, had adapted her home as a lodging house by cramming as many beds into it as possible. There were, in fact, even three beds end-on along the upstairs landing. Her meals were primitive to say the least. We were given dehydrated milk instead of fresh milk. When the men complained her only answer was, "If it's good enough for babies to drink, then it's good enough for you." The puddings were always stodgy packet chocolate or vanilla sponge with custard. They must have been the cheapest that she could have found and we hated them. Complaints made no impression on her.



We were issued with our complete kit. The uniform was made of rough khaki cloth that was most uncomfortable to wear. The underwear was woollen and included long johns instead of the pants I was used to. I folded them away in my kit bag and continued to wear my civvy underwear. I packed up my suit and shirt and sent it home to my parents.

Now costumed like soldiers, we were to be drilled like soldiers. Our drill NCO was a corporal. To our relief, he was a friendly, humorous, man. He told us that, in Civvy Street, he had been Lobby Ludd. This peculiar profession had kept him occupied throughout most of the summer seasons at the seaside. It was a competition sponsored by, I think, the *News Chronicle* paper. All he had to do was to walk up and down the promenades at seaside towns. The newspaper had printed daily articles giving vague descriptions of him and where he might be found.

Readers were invited to try and spot him and, carrying a copy of the *News Chronicle*, to accost him with the statement, "You are Lobby Ludd, I hereby claim the *News Chronicle* prize." This had to be said precisely, without mistakes or hesitation. The prize for correct challenges was the enormous sum of £5. Many perfectly innocent men were accosted as Lobby Ludd on promenades throughout the country. The only positive identification the newspaper gave was that Lobby wore a trilby hat and showed a photo of him with the hat pulled down obscuring his face.

I never really latched on to his drill orders. My feet would not co-operate with Lobby's commands. One day he shouted out at me, "What the hell do you think you are? A bloody greyhound?" I suppose that on his command, I would stand and ponder about it; and then when I had finally made up my mind what to do, I set off at a spurt, well after the other men. Rather like Corporal Jones in the TV show, "Dad's Army".

I was soon enlisted as pianist (volunteer) in the Pay Corps band. The man in charge was an absolute moron, a staff sergeant, who told us that he had been trained as a bandmaster in the Army Music College, Kneller Hall. He wore a little badge to that effect on his sleeve. He was so stupid that he wore his bandmaster's sash even for rehearsals. It soon became apparent to me that his knowledge of music was minimal. Once when he was trying to get us all started on his beat with the tune, "South of the Border down Mexico Way", he failed to understand that the tune started on the third beat of the bar. As the first note was a quaver, he thought the tune started halfway through the third beat. I had the temerity to correct him. That was when I discovered that any senior officer, non-commissioned or otherwise, was always correct, even when he was wrong! He told me in no uncertain tones that he knew what he was talking about; that he was a trained Kneller Hall Bandmaster; and if I didn't shut up he'd have me on a charge. ("On the fizzer.") As I was a volunteer pianist, I just left the band and, in the end, he had to come to me and beg me to return.

I also joined the Concert Party, known as the RAPCATS – a combination of Royal Army Pay Corps men, and women soldiers known as the ATS. In the Concert Party I played duets with a fellow conscript and also joined in with some of the comedy routines. I quite enjoyed the latter and soon found that I had the ability to make people laugh.

Nottingham was a fine town to be stationed in. There was a lot to do. I went ice-skating; joined the choir in a

local church; learnt how to ride a horse and even went to a night school in the Attenborough Factory to learn how to make false teeth.

Horse-riding came easy to me. I found it to be very exciting. When I had mastered the basics of riding I was allowed to take my favourite horse, Western, out across the fields on my own. It was thoroughly exhilarating to gallop, field after field, alongside the River Trent. Our teacher was a friendly young lady who seemed to like me.



Our regiment was addressed by our colonel. He said that volunteers were required to go overseas. I had no desire to do that. I did not want to go that far from my parents. Nottingham was far enough. So I did not volunteer.

The next week I was put on a draft to go overseas!

In preparation for the medical hazards of overseas service we had to have injections. The worst one was to be typhoid injection. Our sergeant major advised us that this injection would make us feel very ill and ache all over, especially the arm in which the needle went. The only way to overcome this unpleasant side effect was to exercise the arm by, for example, vigorous window cleaning. After the injection we were given the day off. My idea of vigorous exercise was to go horse riding so I went to the stables and took out Western, for a gallop along the banks of the Trent. It did the trick and I did not feel so unwell.

Our riding teacher then invited me to have tea with her and her mother in their house. The mother took me aside and told me that, although her daughter was 29 years of age, she was young in her ways and most suitable for me as a wife. Apparently her daughter had decided that I was to be her fiancé and the two of them had made plans to enmesh me as a future husband. That was the last time I went horse riding in Nottingham.

Our draft was loaded onto a train that landed up in Paddington. We were all billeted in houses in that district. I was given an attic bedroom with a fanlight over the bed. As the German air raids were taking place, my fanlight had been broken by shrapnel. It was a very cold December. I shivered in that bed despite the blankets. Sleep was very difficult for other reasons. There were all sorts of noises in the house throughout the night. I soon found out that the house was a sort of brothel and the noises were the comings and goings of the men and the prostitutes.

We were paraded and told that we were to be given a week's embarkation leave prior to going overseas.

One of the soldiers was a man called Scarborough. He was a strange person. He told everybody that he was in the wrong regiment. He should have been in the Intelligence Corps as he was so clever, especially in inventing devices to help us win the war. We all thought he was daft. He announced that, unless he were transferred to the Intelligence Corps, he would desert. Our sergeant took me aside and told me that he was putting me in charge of Scarborough. It was my duty to keep my eye on him and prevent him from deserting. I had to take him with me wherever I went. This was an awful thing as Scarborough was so unpleasant in every way. Even when I went to Banstead to see my friends, I had to take Scarborough with me. My friends were not impressed.

One of our Regular Army soldiers, who was a typical barrack-room lawyer, told me that the sergeant had no right to put me in charge of Scarborough, unless I were armed with a gun, and I should tell him to bugger off. So I went to Scarborough and told him that, as far as I was concerned, he could bugger off. So he buggered off. I told the sergeant who was furious but the barrack room lawyer was right. He could do nothing about it and I

was then free to enjoy my embarkation leave.

I went to Westcliff to stay with my Mum and Dad. That was fortuitous as my twenty first birthday was due. My parents had a small bottle of Champagne with which we celebrated the occasion. They wanted to buy me a ring as a present but I felt that a ring would be uncomfortable when I played the piano, so I was bought a wristwatch instead.

The Rev. Woods presented me with a pocket-sized New Testament and adjured me to read a passage every day. --- I never did.

My parents came to London to see me just before I was due to sail and we had a tearful parting as they left me to go on the train back to Westcliff. I can still see my Mum leaning out of the window of the carriage, waving to me with tears streaming down her face.

The next day we were taken to Avonmouth and put on a ship. It seemed to be a very unsuitable boat for soldiers to travel on. It was in fact, a refrigerator boat called the "Highland Princess", used to carry meat from the River Plate to England. Instead of meat in the hold of the ship, it was full of men. Fortunately the refrigerator was not switched on as, being the 3rd of January, it was snowing outside. The refrigerator might just as well have been switched on as we were frozen. Our beds were hammocks, slung where previously beef corpses had hung.

As we waited at the quayside, suddenly a Military Police truck arrived and out stepped Scarborough, under armed escort. He had been caught, just in time to be returned to his draft. The escort thrust him into our midst. He made a beeline for me and attached himself to me for the rest of the voyage. I was none too pleased. Apparently, after deserting, he had made his way to George Bernard Shaw's flat near the Thames Embankment. There he introduced himself to the great man as a fellow genius, who should not be in the Army but should be engaged to employ his skill at inventing things for the War effort. G.B.S. promptly phoned the police and Scarborough was arrested, then quickly returned to the bosom of his military draft for overseas. In the close confines of our refrigerator, Scarborough quickly made himself unpopular by his continual moaning about the great mistake the War Office was making for not using his vast talents in the right direction.

We set sail, aiming for the Atlantic in the direction of the USA. We joined an enormous convoy of ships, all full of members of the Forces, protected all round by battle ships. The important thing was to avoid German U-boats. It was cold all the way. We went to bed in our hammocks, fully dressed, with our blankets wrapped round us and shivered all night. The food was not too bad, fortunately. We had to wash or shower in salt water (only the officers had fresh water) which was very unpleasant. They gave us special soap that was supposed to work in salt water but it barely lathered. Some fellows gave up washing entirely and many began to stink. One particular man stunk so badly that a group of us were ordered to take him bodily to the showers and wash him down. He yelled and struggled madly so that we had quite a strenuous job to get him clean. It was not helped by the fact that we were all nearly paralytic with laughter whilst doing it.



Within a few miles of the coast of America the ship turned and aimed back towards Africa. The air became milder and then warmer as we sailed for Sierra Leone. Life on shipboard became pleasanter and social life amongst the soldiers became quite interesting. We formed a concert party of sorts and did our best to entertain the troops. There were sing-songs using traditional bawdy barrack room songs. The officers were instructed to lecture us in small groups on a variety of subjects that the Army considered would enlighten us. The officer who came down into our hold as our lecturer was an agreeable fellow, rather a chinless

wonder, who had a dreadful stammer. As he was quite incapable of giving us a lecture on any subject, he decided to tell us a funny joke instead. He took the whole of the time allocated for his lecture to work his way through his joke. The stammer was so pronounced that we could hardly make out what he was saying. The joke was so funny that he himself kept thinking about the end of it before he came to it and bursting into laughter; and we had no idea what it was all about. But we had a hilarious time of it, almost in hysterics and falling about with laughter. That lovely man did more for our morale, in a time of considerable unhappiness, than all the other officers with their serious lectures as demanded by Ship's Orders. We heard, much later, that the majority of his regiment was wiped out in the Western Desert.

At Sierra Leone we paused for refuelling the ship. The natives all swarmed around us in their bum-boats to sell us fruit, mainly oranges. That was a great treat for us, as we had not tasted oranges under wartime rationing for ages. We all bought a stock each of oranges and kept them below deck, near where we slept. Then the order came out that there was a risk of disease in those oranges so we had to throw them overboard. With much grumbling we obeyed. The bum-boat men cheerfully gathered up the oranges from where they were floating in the water to sell them to the soldiers in the next ship. To our amazement and annoyance, soon after we set sail the same oranges appeared for sale in the NAAFI shop. We could not help feeling that there had been a fiddle somehow.

I had worked up a comic act on the piano. It consisted of my attempting to play a prelude by Rachmaninoff, interrupting it with silly gags, false notes and falling about on the keyboard. It went down well with the troops. The entertainments officer gathered a group of us performers to put on a show in the officers' mess. My piano act was well received, the laughs all came at the right place and I got a good round of applause.

There were rumblings and complaints from other regiments on the ship that they were having to do armed guard duty all the time and we Pay Corps men being, in a way, non-combatants, were getting off that duty. Our Senior Officer was ordered to make us do our turn at guard duty. This meant having rifles and performing rifle drill at the appropriate times during our duty; a sort of minor Buckingham Palace march up and down from time to time. None of us had ever held a rifle, let alone fired one. One of our sergeant majors, a regular, took on the task of showing us how to do rifle drill and guard duty. He had only a short time to put us through our paces. We clumsily waved our guns about to his commands, much to the delight and amusement of the real soldiers in the other regiments. He did his best and so did we. Then we were placed at vital points all round the ship to do our guard duty. I found myself outside the Commanding Officer's cabin on evening guard duty. Towards the end of my duty, the Commanding Officer, a colonel, returned from his habitual evening of boozing in the Officers' mess. He was very drunk. I threw up my rifle in a travesty of what should have been "presenting arms". The colonel recognised me through his alcoholic fug and remembered me from my piano performance the evening before. "I can see I am in good hands", he pronounced and I breathed a sigh of relief that my hapless attempt at presenting arms had convinced him. Later, thank goodness not in one of my guard duties, that colonel, in a drunken state, fell down a flight of steps and broke several ribs.

We enjoyed a splendid "Crossing the Line" ceremony put on for us by the ship's company. There was a lot of fooling about and mickey-taking. On another occasion a boxing match was put on. It was to be between one of the ship's cooks and a soldier. The cook was a hermaphrodite - born with the physical attributes of male and female. He/she stripped to the waist and showed that he/she had rather saggy breasts that hang down and wobbled. This brought roars of derision from the audience. But when he/she started to box we all saw that the "he" in him/her was decidedly masculine and he/she won the boxing match decisively. He/she was cheered to the echo.

We sailed past the Cape of Good Hope in the most frightening storm. The waves were gigantic. At times the ship seemed to stand on end. We slid down into the troughs between the waves so that all we could see was water rising up on either side of us. I was terrified and convinced that our end had come. As the ship rose up

gallantly, we could just see through the spray the famous Table Mountain of Capetown. The storm gradually abated and we sailed into calmer waters up the other side of Africa and eventually docked in Durban.

To our delight we were told that we would have a week's leave in Durban. We could go ashore daily and return to the ship to sleep. We all lined up for some pay to enable us to have a good time in the city.

Amongst our Pay Corps draft was a black man. He had been born in England, in the East End of London and was a proper Cockney as were his parents before him. We never gave it a thought that he was black - he was just one of the gang and joined in with all our activities. When we were in the Nottingham Pay Office, he came with us in our jaunts into the town and joined in our fun. As we all walked down the gangplank onto the side of the dock, a group of South African policemen stopped us. They sent our black comrade to the right, towards the black shantytown and we were told to go to the left to the more affluent white quarters. We remonstrated but the policemen got quite nasty so we had to obey them. When we returned to the ship in the evening, after a day on the town, our black friend was not to be seen. He had deserted. That was the last we saw of him. Years later, one of our field cashiers ran up against him in Ethiopia, I think it was. They had a friendly reunion and the black man said, "They treated me like a bloody native, so I decided to become a bloody native." He had made his way up through Africa to Ethiopia, where he had married the daughter of a tribal chieftain and was living a happy and satisfying life, away from racial prejudice.

The inhabitants of Durban were kindness itself to the rest of us. We were taken over, individually or in small groups, by friendly white South Africans, who gave us a really good time. We were shown all the sights of the town and treated to wonderful meals and drinks. After the privations of the ship this was heaven indeed.

On the last night we were told that, on the morrow, we would have to transfer to another ship. We were instructed to pack all our equipment and to present ourselves on deck first thing in the morning. We were marched off up the dock to a huge liner called the Orbita. It looked a bit shabby but we all felt that a passenger liner would be more comfortable than a meat refrigerator boat. How wrong we were!

The Orbita set sail and we soon became aware that all was not well on this ship. There was a stink, a permanent miasma about the place. The food was barely eatable. About the only thing that was at all edible was the daily baked bread. We soon found that we were only able to survive on bread and items that we could afford to buy in the NAAFI.



Members of the crew told us, that the Orbita had been sold to a knacker's yard for breaking up six years previously. How it had survived, no one knew. Somehow it had been resurrected and put into service as a troop ship.

A few days into the journey up the West Coast of Africa, a new horror hit us. The water tanks of the ship were infected with a bug that laid us all low with enteritis. There were inadequate toilet facilities and many of those did not work well. The only thing we could do to relieve ourselves of the diarrhoea was to sit straddled on the deck railings, with our bums hanging over the side, and let it all out into the sea. It must have been an extraordinary sight for viewers on any nearby ship to see rows of bare bums, crapping into the sea. The only creatures that gained any benefit from this were the denizens of the deep. We were always surrounded by fish of all types, surfacing and feeding with delight. I never knew, of course, if the fish then caught enteritis as well.

The doctors on the ship somehow disinfected the water tanks and dished out anti-enteritis drugs and, gradually, things settled down. To add to our discomfort, however, the water now tasted horrible.

Sleeping below in the men's quarters became impossible. The stink and the heat were unbearable so, every night, we took our bedding up onto the deck and did our best to sleep on the hard planking. Then came trouble. The part of the deck that the Pay Corps men chose to sleep on turned out to be the best area for comfort. There was some shade when the sun rose and continual protection from the wind. Soldiers in other regiments envied us our patch to the extent that it came to blows. They soon found out that the Pay Corps, although mainly a non-combatant unit, was not incapable of fighting. We defended our patch with determination and kept hold of it.

Gradually the Orbita crept up the coast of Africa. In all that filth many of us acquired other infections so that the Medical Corps people were kept very busy. I developed a penis infection and reported sick with it. The M.O. who examined me was a Scotsman with a version of dialect English that I found almost impossible to understand. Somehow he had got it into his head that I must have slept with a prostitute in Durban and I couldn't understand what he was saying about it. There were immediate actions taken - specimens were taken and examined in the lab. Finally, I was declared free of venereal infection but suffering from a simple bacterial infection. This was quickly cured with medication. The M.O. told me that as soon as the infection had abated, he was going to circumcise me. To be operated on in this hell-ship did not appeal to me, so I spent the rest of the voyage avoiding the M.O. and all the Medical Corps there.

All would have been well had I not gone down with a high fever and an awful headache as we sailed up the Red Sea. I was not the only one. There were twelve of the Pay Corps draft who had similar fevers. The British doctors, inexperienced in tropical diseases, did not know what to do, so we were put in quarantine in the ship's hospital. Fortunately the Scottish doctor must have forgotten all about my earlier treatment as he said nothing about the circumcision operation.

The Orbita docked in Port Tewfik and all the soldiers disembarked. The twelve of us suffering from the fever and headache, feeling dreadful and hopelessly weak, were taken ashore and laid down on stretchers in a row alongside a railway line in the full sunshine. All the other men in the draft were visiting the nearby Egyptian town and, presumably, enjoying themselves. Eventually a train appeared and we were loaded onto it. Egyptian trains have two long uncomfortable wooden seats on each side of the apartment. We invalids were given a seat each to use as a bed of sickness. The train set off, we knew not where.

Somehow, we found that we were feeling a little better. The fever was abating, the headache going and the journey began to be interesting. We sat up, watched the scenery and generally took an interest in the journey. We could see that we were progressing along the Suez Canal. The train arrived at a crossing point of the Canal and everyone got out. There was a very big tent in which we were given food and drink and then were allowed to wander around sightseeing. I saw my first camels, filthy beasts standing in a row, cursing and spitting and generally being unfriendly. A little boy came up to use offering to introduce us to his sister - "very clean, very hygienic". Pimps come very young in that country.

Still not knowing where we were going, we all got on another train and set off on the other side of the Canal. One knowing soldier told us that we were crossing the Sinai Desert. Gradually the train crawled along till, the soldier told us, we were entering Palestine. As night fell we could feel the train going uphill. We passed through little Arab villages and once stopped for a time at a station. Arabs came up to the train to sell us "eggsybread" and to offer to change our English money into Palestinian money. I changed some but, being hopelessly ignorant of the rate of exchange, I am sure I was swindled. It was soon very dark. The train stopped in a large station and we invalids were unloaded into ambulances that sped off through the wartime blackout and began to climb up a steep hill. At the top we could vaguely see that we were passing through pine trees. We stopped, got out and were led to a hospital ward, a long hut, at the end of what appeared to be a garden. Inside the hut, a friendly British medical orderly, welcomed us and gave us each a bed,. Soon we were

luxuriating in real beds with real sheets. Already feeling much better we had a wonderful night's sleep and woke, the next morning, to glorious sunshine.

We piled out of the ward to see where we were. The scene was spectacular. The hospital was on top of a mountain, we were told it was Mount Scopus. We were in Jerusalem and before us, in the valley below, lay the old City of Jerusalem. Everywhere was covered in early morning dew; the domes, minarets, spires, churches and houses of the Old City sparkled gloriously in front of my eyes. I was totally entranced.

A little Arab boy came up to us offering fried sandwiches. They were only double slices of bread with jam in between and then fried but, to our jaded tastes from our horrible diet on the Orbita, they appeared to be the nectar of the gods.

A rather blasé British doctor came into the ward and examined each of us. Specimens of our blood were taken and soon the diagnosis was found. We were suffering from sand fly fever - pappadaccio, so called. The nursing sister told us that the disease was quite harmless, lasted four days and would leave us debilitated for a week.

We were issued with hospital uniform – “Hospital Blues” - a shapeless suit of bright blue, a white shirt and red tie and told that we were free to wander throughout the grounds of the hospital but not to go outside into the town. The hospital had been a palace built for himself by Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany before the First World War. It was in massive stone, covered with carved emblems of Germany, mostly the double eagle. There was a giant chapel with an organ halfway up the end wall on a small balcony that was like an eagle's eerie. The grounds were beautiful. I saw for the first time olive trees, fig trees and pomegranate bushes. There was also a wild profusion of spring flowers, grape hyacinth, cyclamen, giant squill and all the so-called Biblical Lilies of the Field

One day the "walking wounded" soldiers were invited to go for afternoon tea with the wife of the High Commissioner of Palestine. Sir Harold MacMichael and his family lived in a magnificent palace some way from the hospital. We were taken there in a coach and allowed to roam through the beautiful grounds of the palace. There was a scruffy old Arab there pruning the roses. We went up to him and, in our coarse soldierly way, spoke to him, teasing him and addressing him as "George". We had learnt that we call all Arabs, "George" as a generic name. Arabs, in turn, for some reason, called each of us "Captain Macpherson". The gardener smiled gently at us and continued with his pruning. Later we found out, to our embarrassment that "George" was, in fact, the High Commissioner himself, indulging in his favourite hobby of gardening.

Sir and Lady Harold MacMichael had two daughters, Araminta and Priscilla. Priscilla was a rather cheeky young lady who cockily rode round the grounds on a pony. She got off her mount and chose me to make fun of. "Would you like to ride my pony?" she asked. I said that I would and mounted it. Then she slapped the pony's rump. Off it shot, bucking wildly. It was fortunate that I had learnt to ride in Nottingham. I soon had the pony under control and had a nice ride round the grounds. Then I trotted it back to Priscilla who, ungraciously, took it back from me, showing how annoyed she was that she could not make fun of me.

Afternoon tea consisted of cups of tea and triangular cucumber sandwiches, together with small cakes. Lady MacMichael was very pleasant, always smiling and chatting with the soldiers.

After tea, the other daughter, Araminta, asked if any one of us could play the piano. Of course, I volunteered immediately. I then had to accompany her singing. She was into Noël Coward's music and, correctly, pronounced his name as "Card". I had to play "*I'll follow my secret Heart*" and "*I'll see you again*", amongst others. There was a Palestine policeman there, an Englishman named Stuchbery Baines. He had a fine baritone voice. I accompanied him too. Incidentally, I found that Araminta was known to the troops as, "Aromatic

MacMintoe".

One of the bodily effects of the privations I endured on the Orbita was a very sore behind. I told the doctor about it during his round of our ward. I was sent over to the main hospital building for examination by a specialist officer. He used the dreaded shuftiscope on me. This was really an instrument called a sigmoidoscope but, in Arabic countries, the service men quickly used the corrupted Arabic word "shufti" instead of the "sigmoid" to describe it. "Shufti" became the most widely used "Arabic" word in the service men's vocabulary. It means, "take a look". And the doctor took a shufti inside the final exit of my alimentary canal. Quite painfully! Every inch of the shuftiscope entered into my being. I have a theory that doctors really enjoy doing things like this. He declared that there was nothing wrong with me, only that I was sore down there from continually sitting on hard wooden decks in the Orbita. A bit of ointment soon put it right.

I was announced to be fit to return to my regiment and was taken to a place called the Schneller Syrian Orphanage, the Pay Corps office. Ludwig Schneller was a German philanthropist who built orphanages in Palestine and Lebanon. Being a German building, it had been taken over after the last war started and converted into a British Army camp. It was really a very beautiful building, or series of buildings. The main building boasted a fine tower with a peal of bells, an inner courtyard with a balcony running on two sides and a giant eucalyptus tree growing on one side near the entrance archway. My sleeping quarters were the middle room on the left-hand balcony. I was given a bed that consisted of three planks supported by two blocks of wood. On it were three biscuits – those hard mattresses that, together, were the length of the planks. There were also a couple of rough blankets. Not the most comfortable of beds! I shared the room with one other man. Soon after I was put in another room at the end of the balcony with nine other men.



I explored my surroundings. First I found the toilets, then the washrooms. Lastly the NAAFI. On the way I saw more splendid buildings. There was the GHQ, or General

Headquarters, wherein the Colonel, his Aide de Camp worked, together with a sergeant major and a lance corporal. Past the sergeants' mess and the Quartermaster's stores was the NAAFI and that led on to another large buildings that had been a dormitory for the orphans. My friend Gerald Buckley was assigned to this building. Another splendid building still held its original name, "The Blind Home", where, as its name implied, blind orphans had been housed. Throughout the whole camp there were beautiful plants, trees and shrubs - olives, pomegranates, pines, passion flowers, and the gorgeous bougainvillea in full blossom.

I was put to work in a long hut. There I sat at a table with three locally enlisted men, two Jews and one Arab. One of the Jews was a gentle, quiet old man called Mr. Moses. He was a German Jew, a refugee from the Nazi persecution. The other Jew, whose name escapes me, was a fully qualified doctor from Berlin, also a refugee. The Arab was Mr. Haddad, a young man full of fun. Our job was to convert foreign currencies on acquittance rolls. Soldiers were paid and signed for their money on an acquittance roll. This was a sheet of paper on which the first two

columns were for the names and numbers of the soldiers. The next column was for the amount of money received in the currency of the country where the soldiers were serving. Then came an empty column for the amounts to be converted into British money. The last column was for each soldier's signature. Conversion was a very boring job. We each had a card with a conversion table on it. We looked at the foreign currency amount on the roll, found it on the card and copied its conversion into the appropriate column on the roll. Doing this all

day was mind blowing.

Occasionally there was a short hiatus while we waited for a new batch of rolls to arrive. Then we sat and chatted together. Mr. Haddad kept me amused. He spoke perfect English and also French. His favourite singer was Maurice Chevalier and he knew all his songs. He taught me to sing "Valentina" - the original rude version that Chevalier sung in the cabarets of Paris. I can still remember the words to this very day. Mr. Moses had been a university professor in Germany. He could talk learnedly about practically everything. I liked him immensely, he was so kind and forgiving and, despite his horrific experiences in the past, seemed to love all humankind. He spoke well of German friends in his previous life before the Nazis ruined things for the Jews. Sadly, poor Mr. Moses was one of the first to be killed by the Arabs in the troubles which blew up at the end of the war. He was shot whilst travelling up Mt. Scopus on an open truck. The Jewish doctor longed to live out the probationary period as a refugee in Palestine and to be allowed to practice once again. He had been trained in Berlin where medicine, apparently, was more theoretical than practical. His knowledge of medicine was encyclopaedic but he admitted that his practical experience was negligible.

The weather at that time was ghastly - heavy rain and cold winds. I went down with bronchitis and landed up in hospital again. This time it was in the Italian Hospital in the centre of Jerusalem. The British had taken over this place at the beginning of the war. I suppose that the combination of the awful conditions on the Orbita together with the sandfly fever had generally weakened me and laid me open to infections. I spent a long time in bed, mostly sleeping all the time. The doctors suspected tuberculosis and I was X-rayed. It was only a simple bronchial infection and I gradually got better. I was so weak that it was felt that I was not fit to go back to duty in the Pay Office.

As soon as the infection had cleared up, I was sent to the Natanya convalescent camp. This was a tented camp at the seaside with all facilities for encouraging quick recovery of the sick soldiers. The weather by then was gorgeous; we spent days on the beach sunbathing and swimming in the Mediterranean. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Sometimes I would wander across the dunes examining the local flora and fauna. I spent hours lying on my tummy watching the activities of a dung beetle as it dug a hole, rolled up a piece of camel dung, pushed it into the hole and laid its eggs in the dung. Then it covered up the hole with the sand. The chameleons were fascinating. I put one on different coloured plants of ground and watched it change colour to match its background as near as possible.

One day I lay on the sand, half in and half out of the shallow sea, enjoying the warmth. I dozed off and was later wakened by a grunting and growling sound all round me. I opened my eyes and found that I was surrounded by many camels, all pissing and defecating in the water. An Arab herdsman had led his camels into the sea for their occasional wash. The smell was appalling, the water had become filthy and I was covered in muck. I rushed out of the water and ran along the beach to a bit of sea that had not yet been invaded by camels. There I washed myself down as best I could. There was nothing else I could do but to run back to the camp, grab some soap and dash into the showers for a final clean-up. I dried myself, dressed and wandered back to the beach. The Arab herdsman was quite contrite. He went to a female camel and milked it into a wooden bowl. This warm, foamy milk he offered me as, I suppose, a sort of peace offering. We had been warned not to drink any milk that had not been pasteurized so I refused the milk. The herdsman was quite offended.

The news came through that an air raid had taken place on Tel Aviv. It was not a very successful raid. An Italian airman had lost his way and landed up over the coast of Palestine instead of North Africa where his base was. In his panic he had released his sole bomb which fell in a small park in Tel Aviv. Apart from making a hole, there was no serious damage. The park was then renamed London Park, to show that the Jews had something in common with our Londoners that had suffered so much from the bombing. The camp commandant at Natanya got the wind up however and ordered that all of us convalescents should be made to dig slit trenches and camouflage the buildings and tents. None of us were really fit enough to do such hard

manual labour. We were lined up on parade and harangued by the sergeant major. Many of the convalescents were Polish. The sergeant major read out the list of names, making heavy weather of the Polish ones. He directed the Poles to do slip trench digging. Suddenly the Poles, who actually had a good command of the English language when it suited them, failed entirely to understand the instructions from the sergeant major. He finally gave up and they sloped off to follow their own pursuits. Then the sergeant major read out the names of the British soldiers. When he came to my name, he read it out and said, "Here's another bloody Pole". I didn't disillusion him so I was sent to join the Poles. We felt we had managed to avoid digging trenches but the sergeant major had other ideas. He marched up to us, gave us brushes and camouflage paint and with a very effective mime display hinted that we should start painting. We all painted huts and tents quite happily - it was a pleasant way of spending a few hours and nothing like so strenuous as digging trenches.

The shower unit was a crude affair. It consisted of a slatted wooden platform some distance from the ground. We climbed up the steps to this platform and showered ourselves. The water just fell to the sandy ground and drained away. I was in the shower room one day when another soldier was showering. When I looked at him I was astonished to see that he had nothing between his legs. His entire wedding tackle was missing. He saw that I had noticed and told me that everything had been shot away in the Western Desert. I asked him how he felt about sex and the intercourse that was now denied him. He was quite philosophical about it. He had been a virgin and had never experienced sex with a woman. Consequently, what he did not know, he did not miss. He was a regular soldier, enlisted as a boy soldier well before the war started. At one time, he told me, he had been Winston Churchill's batman whenever that great man had to appear in Army uniform. I did not know whether to believe him or not.

All too soon the time came for me to be returned to my regiment. I found myself back in the Schneller Orphanage, converting Egyptian pounds to English pounds and thoroughly bored to do so.

I began to take an interest in my surroundings. Jerusalem was wide open for me to explore. The Old City turned out to be a magical collection of winding alleys, beautiful buildings, bazaars, City walls with elegant gateways, churches and mosques of all denominations together with shady courtyards. Just by the Jaffa Gate I found a Church of England, Christchurch, the British

Parish Church. I went in and met the vicar. He let me play the organ and then asked me if I would like to play on Sunday evenings for Evensong. Apparently they did not have an organist. I jumped at the opportunity and thence began a happy relationship with the church that lasted for the whole of my service in Jerusalem. The organ was a Hammond electronic one. I had had experience of this type of organ,

as my cousin Roy had taken me to see and play the first Hammond to arrive in England, on display in the famous music shop, Boosey and Hawkes in Regent Street. The Hammond in Christchurch had been installed by Mr. Powitzer, the chief sound engineer in the Palestine Broadcasting Service. Mr. Powitzer had had an interesting career prior to coming to Palestine. We heard that he had been Adolf Hitler's personal sound engineer, responsible for the public address equipment for all of Hitler's mighty public appearances. Mr. Powitzer had, apparently, set up the P.A. equipment for the Olympic Games in Germany, where Hitler had stood and harangued the crowds on the opening occasion. Unfortunately for Mr. Powitzer, the Nazis discovered that he was a Jew and he only just managed to escape



from Germany, by the skin of his teeth, landing up in Palestine. Although a Jew by birth, he was, in fact, a Christian. He soon found a church to form an allegiance with, St. Paul's Church, a British Protestant church. He became the vicar's warden there. Such was his skill at sound engineering and acoustics, the Hammond organ and its two giant loudspeakers were placed at precisely the best position for the optimum sound. Many people who heard it being played couldn't believe it was not a pipe organ.

I practiced regularly to improve my technique. My parents sent me all my organ music and I added to it by purchasing more from the music shop in the centre of Jerusalem. I found an Organ Sonata by Elgar – I never knew that he had written one. I soon felt confident enough to give an organ recital and put one on after Evensong in Christchurch. I was gratified to see that most of the congregation stayed behind to listen.

I rapidly entered into the musical life of Jerusalem. I joined the camp Concert party, firstly as pianist but very soon as participant in comic items. I further developed my comedy act at the piano by playing Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody with silly interruptions, false notes and frequent gags. To dress for the part, I went to a lady in the Old City who kept a collection of costumes for hire. She had been a male impersonator in her younger days and had a lot of rather elegant male costumes. I hired a tail suit, much too small for me, with a top hat and a scruffy grey wig. I felt I



looked perfect for the part of a dotty pianist. I announced myself as Professor Dannattski. The act went down well with the troops. Also in the Concert Party was a corporal by the name of Ron Fountain. He and I formed a double act, called the Middle Eastern Brothers - a take-off of the famous Western Brothers who broadcast in England. Ron was smaller than me so the tail suit fitted him perfectly. I hired a dinner jacket suit from the lady that, more or less, fitted me. We looked perfect for the part of two sophisticated entertainers at the piano. Ron had the good sense to write original material instead of singing Western Brothers songs. I set his lyrics to music.



One of the members of the Concert Party was a little man, John Barlowe, who had a splendid untrained tenor voice and sang sentimental ballads very well. He was spotted by one of the Jewish civilian clerks who suggested to him that he should have his voice properly trained; and recommended a Jewish teacher for him. His singing really took off from then and he got engagements to sing for broadcasts in the Palestine Broadcasting Station. He took me along as accompanist. I had to learn to play most difficult music. The experience was magnificent. This gave me an introduction to the broadcasting studios and I got additional engagements to play there.

A broadcast was planned of a performance of "The Bells of St. Mary's". I was told that I would be playing the organ. The studio, the largest one there, was full of musicians. There was the Air Force Band; Stuchbery Baines, the baritone I had met before at the High Commissioner's palace; Sasha Parnes the distinguished Jewish violinist and Ariel Sharon, a Jewish pianist. One of the Air Force men stood in front of a set of tubular bells. The producer was a pompous man named Lance Fairfax. He had achieved fame before the war playing the part of the Red Shadow in the musical, "The Desert Song" - not in the London production but in a touring company that went round the theatres of England. He never ceased pointing this out when there was any doubt as to his abilities.



The organ I was given was a small American reed organ that I had to pump with foot pedals. Lance Fairfax made a dignified and self-important speech and then retired to the control room where he could look at us through the window. He signalled us to start the rehearsal. We played the music several times and, even then, he was not satisfied. Sasha Parnes was getting really rattled at being made to play over and over again, what to him must have seemed a rather trivial piece of music. One more rehearsal was demanded by Lance Fairfax. Halfway through, he came storming out of the control room and screamed at us that there was a little bell being played often during the performance. We looked at each other in amazement. We knew of no bell apart from the tubular bells that had been played correctly. Fairfax went back and we started playing again. I glanced round and saw, to my delight, that Sasha Parnes was dangling his car keys in front of his microphone. This time Fairfax was purple with rage and stamped around looking for the small bell he had heard. He didn't think of looking in Sasha's pocket. Sasha caught my eye and winked at me. The next run-through, he took mercy on poor Fairfax and allowed it to be played without the little bell accompaniment. Actually Lance Fairfax went on to become one of the most distinguished administrators in ENSA, with the rank of Colonel. Basil Dean, ENSA's boss praised him in his autobiography. Perhaps I misjudged him

Jerusalem was a marvellous place for a young musical soldier to serve in. It lived and breathed music. During the week I could go from house to house where there were musical performances of some sort - string quartets, song recitals, and solo instrument recitals. There was even a house with a long upper room with, unusual for Jerusalem, a wooden floor, on which complete ballets were performed. The musicians and dancers were all amateurs - but really gifted amateurs at that. One of my favourite places was owned by a lady named Mrs. Krongold. She had a glorious voice and sang Russian lieder. I often used to play her accompaniments on her piano. Her bungalow was huge and shaped like a grand piano. The living room was the large curved end of the piano. In the end of the curve there was a platform on which was her own grand piano - a fine Blüthner - and behind it was a great curved window, covered at concert times by elegant curtains. The part of the house that represented the keyboard end of a piano had all the other rooms, kitchen, bathroom and several bedrooms. From this the size of the building can be sensed.

Sometimes I would be joined in concerts by Corporal Toby Blowers, a regular army soldier. He had a well-trained bass-baritone voice and had a wide repertoire. I found him to be a real enigma. It was obvious that he was very highly cultured and very well educated. Yet, once he got anywhere near alcoholic drinks, he became a real berserker, and would fight anyone who got in his way. He was always in trouble in the Army. But stand him, when sober, on the platform and his beautiful voice shone through loud and clear. In Mrs. Krongold's house he was always the perfect gentleman but down in the Mea Shearim, the Hassidic Jewish quarter where liquor was to be very cheaply purchased, Toby became a fighting maniac.

I made several friends from amongst the civilian population of Jerusalem. I never know how to differentiate between friends and acquaintances – they all seem to be friends to me!

Here are some of them:

The Felber Family. I suppose they were my dearest friends and remained so after the War, many of them until this day. I was visiting the Zionist Ladies office to ask for help in arranging a holiday on a kibbutz. The lady who helped me was Helen Felber. In conversation she learnt that I was a musician and, as her husband Alfred was also one, she invited me to their flat for the evening Sabbath meal. She warned me not to talk religion with him. I did not need the warning – I wouldn't have done so in any case. Alfred and I got on like a house on fire. We discussed many musical subjects with enthusiasm. He was a Mus. Bac. and far more learned than I. I remember on one occasion when I was invited to the Passover meal, we were arguing some obscure thing in counterpoint. He promptly got his textbook (Prout, no less!) on the subject. As he opened the book, out fell a dried crumb of bread. (When a student he must have been studying it, whilst eating a meal.) There was a moment of extreme panic. The whole apartment had to be ritually cleansed and eating utensils replaced with

fresh clean ones. Occasionally I had to be his Shabat Goy. As fire must not be started or put out on the Sabbath, he had invented a device that switched off the electric lights when it was time to go to bed. It was an alarm clock with electric wire dangling from it. Half the time it did not work. Then I, as the Shabat Goy, was asked to switch off all the lights before I left to go to my barracks. I tried to tell him that fire needs oxygen to exist and electric light bulbs filaments glow in an atmosphere of vacuum, therefore his precautions were really not necessary. He was adamant. Electric light bulbs were fire. And that was that! I was at only one other time a Shabat Goy. Walking down the Mea Shearim, a man, a member of the Hassidim, beckoned me into his house. He signalled to me that he wanted me to turn off his Primus stove, which was burning merrily on the floor in the middle of the room. I cheerfully obliged and, smiling, turned to the man hoping to be my usual friendly sort with him. He was having nothing of that. Almost physically he ushered me out of the house and slammed the door behind me.

Many years later Alfred and Helen came to visit us in England. I took them to the school where I was teaching – a brand new school only just built and opened. I handed them over to the Head of Religion who welcomed his telling the pupils about the Jewish religion. He brought all his traditional religious paraphernalia and had the pupils thoroughly entranced by his talk and demonstration.

I was a lonely soldier miles from home. I loved the Felbers as I would my own parents. To this day I still am in touch with their son Moshe and their daughter Vardith.

Ura'am Sadomsky. He was a Jewish civilian clerk working converting currencies on the same table as I. His father was the owner of the Carmel Oriental Wine Company. I used to enjoy chatting with him in our spare moments between batches of acquittance rolls to be converted. I gather that Ura'am means "Awakener of the Nation" – or so he said. When my parents acquired a new cat they asked me to name it. I suggested Ura'am. The real Ura'am was most offended. He did not think a cat should be named after him. Actually my parents eventually called it "Rammy".

I was invited to his wedding to a beautiful girl named Erella (I think this means "Angel" – a very suitable name for her). It took place in his parents' garden where an elegant canopy had been set up. I was most surprised to see that a dirty old beggar was allowed to walk amongst the guests, scrounging money. Apparently because the beggars had unearthed the Wailing Wall by digging, following a rumour that there was buried treasure there, they are now considered to have a holy permission to beg unmolested on any occasion.

Mrs. Yellin, a very talented cellist, lived right near to the Jerusalem Conservatoire of Music. She occasionally gave concerts in the large living room of her house, string quartets or solo cello. I was always welcome to attend. I and Ron Fountain were invited to parties there, including one very jolly Hannukah fancy dress party. I attended Music Theory lectures given by Mrs. Yellin but found them to be too simple so I stopped going.

Hans (later known as Hanoch) Jacoby was a composer. Mrs. Yellin arranged for me to be interviewed by him with a view to my becoming his pupil. Jacoby questioned me and came to the conclusion that I was not, in any way, up to the standard of accomplishment he required to take me on as a pupil. His actual words were, "I only teach geniuses". He had been a pupil of Hindemith in Germany and taught his methods. All I wanted was to learn how to write modern counterpoint not the motoric and playful polyphonically weird meanderings of Hindemith. I had a narrow escape. Apparently he later began to write simple songs and easy pieces for orchestra, so I might have been able to get some help from him if I'd persisted. I had to wait till my return to England to achieve my ambition

Jusef an Arab servant in the Pay Corps headquarters was a friendly chap. He spoke good English and was always most helpful to me. When we had our morning 'elevenses' he sold us rings of bread together with a handful of Dead Sea salt mixed with herbs. Delicious! In conversation he learnt from me that I had enjoyed a

meal in an Arab restaurant near Zion Square – especially kabobs. From then on he persistently invited me to come and eat kabobs in his house. Eventually I agreed to go there. He lived in a decidedly seedy quarter in the Old City. I entered his home via a hole in a stone wall. There was one small dark room with a Primus stove burning in the middle of it. His mother was cooking the kabobs there. Jusef had married a 12 year old girl who had just recently produced their first baby. She seemed to be quite disinterested in her baby and was playing with a doll. The grandmother was nursing the baby. I ate my kabobs – all of them – I was the only one eating. The next morning I went down with full blown dysentery.

Ibrahim was the other servant in our HQ. He invited two or three of us soldiers to his wedding. He lived in a fine house some distance away from our office, near to the Allenby Barracks. We and the other guests (all men) sat cross-legged on a carpet round a splendid display of food on the floor. We helped ourselves with our fingers. There was no sign of the new wife. We never got to meet her. She was working in the kitchen with the other women, keeping us men well fed. As an honoured guest I was expected to eat the eye-ball of a sheep. Rather reluctantly I put the horrible thing in my mouth and chased it round and round, trying to spear it with my teeth. Eventually I succeeded. A ghastly mess ensued which I hastily swallowed, gagging it down – much to the amusement of the Arab guests.

Malki was a kind and gentle Arab who worked with me in the camp Post Office. He was an ardent Roman Catholic. We always used to pull his leg and he accepted all our joshing with the same sweet smile on his face. He taught me several words in Arabic – not the sort of words one would normally use in polite conversation and also taught me to sing an Arabic pop song. He turned up in the Office the day after Palm Sunday, bringing the beautifully woven ‘palm’ that he had borne in the religious procession. He was very proud of it.

An Armenian gentleman whom I had got to know quite well - I can't remember his long name except that it started with 'A' and ended with 'ian'. He was about the oldest civilian clerk in our Office, very quiet and a hard worker. At that time I was working in the HQ. One of my jobs was to examine new civilian candidates who wanted to work in the Pay Office. I had to compose an exam paper featuring Maths and English comprehension. The Armenian sidled up to me and told me that his nephew was sitting the exam and that if I fiddled it so that he passed, I would be rewarded monetarily. I was quite indignant and told him that if the nephew passed the exam he would get the job – if not he wouldn't. Of course, the Armenian was only carrying out the traditional procedure he and the other local inhabitants followed. Bribery was commonplace in the Middle East. He naturally presumed that I would carry out his wishes, yet at the same time pretend showing indignant opposition to it. He need not have worried in any case. The nephew, a very intelligent young man, passed the exam with flying colours – the top marks of all the other candidates. The Armenian tried to offer me a plain envelope. Of course, I refused it. Next day it came to me in the post. It contained £2 – a lot of money in those days. I said nothing but took the money to Christchurch and put it in the Poor Box. I got to know the nephew quite well. He was very active in the Scout movement. One day he invited me to the Scout Gang Show in the Hall in the Old City's Armenian Quarter. I changed into my Rover Scout uniform and started to enter the warren of small lanes and alleys that were the Quarter. There stood an Armenian boy scout who directed me up a lane where another boy scout stood. He in turn passed me on to another and so on till I reached the Hall. I was welcomed with as much ceremony as if I had been Baden Powell himself. The Gang Show was great – full of exciting Armenian music and dancing. The nephew was once given a phial of some medicine by his doctor and told to be injected in a clinic where he'd have to pay for it. At that time I was a medical orderly. He begged me to go to his house, bringing our hypodermic syringe, and give him the injection. I had never given one before but knew how it was done. He bared his backside, I wiped the skin with cotton wool soaked in alcohol, and nervously plunged the needle in. He expressed his satisfaction for my efforts. I could have been severely punished for using Army medical equipment on a civilian bum.

Dr. Joe and Mrs Weiss. He was a civilian clerk in the Pay Office. Both he and his wife were enthusiastic bridge players. He invited me to join in the games with them. I hated all sorts of games and never played them.

However I knew two Pay Corps comrades who did enjoy bridge so I suggested bringing them to his house to play with them. Mrs. Weiss told us that she would bake a cake but would require us to buy the sugar for it. Sugar was rationed in those days. Soldiers could buy it. It came in solid cones about six inches in height. After coffee and cake, my two colleagues would form a foursome with the Weisses and play bridge, whilst I would sit on a settee and read or doze. Those evenings were very pleasant. Sometimes I would baby-sit for the Weisses' little daughter.

Moussa Absy. Absy, an Arab, was always known by his surname, never his first name. He was a very talented silversmith and owned a small shop in the Street of the Christians in the Old City. I liked him immensely. His silver jewellery was exquisitely formed. I bought several pieces from him to send home to my mother and sister. Sometimes I would go into his little shop just to drink coffee and to chat with him. The Pay Corps ran out of cap badges whilst I was working in the HQ so I suggested to the Sergeant Major that Absy might be able to make new ones for us. I gave him my badge from which he made a mould in silver sand. I never saw how he continued but I guess he poured molten brass into his mould and produced all the badges we required. The SM was delighted with the result. I introduced Ron Fountain to him. Ron was already friendly with nearly all the Arabs in that part of the Old City. He could speak a little Arabic and was much admired by those Arabs for making the effort to do so. They called him Abu Hassan, apparently an honour to have been so named. He and Absy decided that I should also acquire an Arabic name. Because I was always singing they called me Abdel Hamarr, which means I believe "Servant of the Donkeys" – not a polite name. I remonstrated, so they changed it to Abdel Asfur – "Servant of the Birds" – much nicer. From then on I was always known as that to all the inhabitants whenever I went into the Arab Quarters. It was a matter of affectionate amusement to them.

Aubrey Silver was a senior officer in the Palestine Police. He was a talented musician and conducted the Palestine Police Orchestra. I came across him frequently. Several shows that I was in needed an orchestra accompaniment. It was always his orchestra. He was really friendly to me and willing to help if I wanted his orchestra to accompany me in any of my comic performances. I remember one distinctly. I appeared in my hired 'Professor Dannattsky' costume to give a violin performance. He got one of the flautists to play repeatedly the little two note tune that runs below the melody of Offenbach's *Barcarolle*. I let the poor man chunter away at it whilst I gave out my string of gags. Then eventually I played the *Barcarolle* melody. I am no violinist and it sounded horrible, all out of tune and with a scraped tone. Aubrey and the orchestra were in fits of laughter. I don't know how the poor flute player managed to keep going!

Sascha Parnes, a virtuoso violinist. I first got to know him in a broadcast given by the Palestine Broadcasting Company (PBS). He had a bubbling sense of humour that appeared, surprisingly, on all sorts of occasions. During the rehearsal for a Grand Variety Concert in aid of the Toc H War Comforts in the Middle East, he and I sat together listening to Aubrey Silver's conducting his Palestine Police Syncopated Orchestra. Sascha was nursing his magnificent Amati violin. (Actually it was not his – he told me it was on loan to him.) Suddenly, to my astonishment, in the middle of a jazzy Charlestone tune, he picked up his violin and joined in, playing it just like a banjo. He had a quartet consisting of himself on violin, Ariele Mirkin on viola, Daniel Hofmekler on cello and Ariele Sachs on piano. In another Toc H Concert, he played the second movement (Canzonetta) from the Op. 35 Violin Concerto by Tchaikowsky, accompanied by me on the YMCA organ. We had a rehearsal that consisted of one run-through. I was playing the orchestral part and felt rather insecure about it. I asked him if we could have another run-through. He refused point blank. Apparently he was quite satisfied with my playing – I suppose a compliment to my performance.

Ruth Belkine. I had a lot to do with Ruth as she was, I suppose, the programmes manager of the Palestine Broadcasting Company. Whenever I was engaged to perform in a broadcast, I had to do it through her. It was to her that I introduced my Army comrade, John Barlow, to sing in a broadcast. He had such a fine voice that she helped him to develop by introducing him to a civilian singing teacher. She set up a series of cinema organ broadcasts for me to play. I am not a cinema organist but I could play that sort of music (sort of) when

required. Some time later Nelson Elms, the famous cinema organist of the Empire Leicester Square, by then a soldier, was posted to Jerusalem. So Ruth gently explained to me that Nelson was a much better player than I and would take over the broadcasts. I was naturally disappointed but realised that she was right. As it happened, very soon after that I was transferred to ENSA so I couldn't have continued being a cinema organist. After the War she came to England to work for the BBC in the Broadcasts Overseas Department, handling their broadcasts to the new State of Israel.

Leslie Ling was an English civilian officer of the YMCA. He ran the YMCA Hostel and Canteen in Jerusalem. When he first arrived, his name rang a bell with me. A Leslie Ling had organised the annual Southend-on-Sea Music Festivals. I asked him if he were that Leslie Ling. He was. I then said that, as a ten year old boy, I had been entered for two piano classes in that Festival. He asked me my name. I said, "Norman Dannatt." He immediately said, "Norman Frederick Dannatt, 294 Westborough Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Solo Piano and Piano Trio Classes." What a fabulous memory! After hundreds of entries over about fourteen years he had remembered little me in exact detail. I wondered if he also remembered that I had made a complete cock-up of both performances, got low marks and scathing comments from the Adjudicator. He and I were both involved in concerts in the YMCA in Jerusalem and I often used to go to the YMCA Canteen for better meals than the Army ones I got in our barracks. After the War he set up a Travel Bureau for 'Guided Tours of the Holy Land'. I guess he must have been planning such tours in his usual meticulous detail, whilst administering the YMCA Hostel and Canteen.

Mr. Mirsky had a photographic shop near the Jaffa gate. I used to take all my films to him for development. He was very friendly and most obliging. My camera took 127 size films – not easy to obtain in Wartime Jerusalem. Mr. Mirsky would occasionally get me one and, in fact, kept me supplied throughout my stay there. I often had contact pictures – very small – if I could not afford enlargements. He was equally happy to supply me with either. I remember him as a cheerful and chatty little man. His fingers were stained brown through constant dipping in photographic chemicals.

The Rev. Canon Martin, an Englishman, was the Vicar of Christchurch, the Parish Church of England near the Jaffa Gate. I was his organist during the years I was stationed in Jerusalem. He was a good and kind man and always helpful to any of the Forces who visited his church. After every Sunday evening service he invited Service men and women into the church hall for refreshments and little impromptu entertainments, in which I often took part.

In our barracks there was a little group of very Christian soldiers. We called them the Holy Joes. They formed a study group in Christchurch under the guidance of the Curate. As I played the organ in the church, they expected me to join their group. I went along to their meeting. What they were discussing was such obscure theology that I had no idea what it was all about. I must have shown my ignorance as they sneered at me and poked fun at anything I said. That was enough for me so I left them to their own devices. I had much more, better, things to do.

On Sunday mornings all of us in Schneller had a splendid privilege - we were allowed an extra hour in bed. We were woken at seven o'clock and not the usual six o'clock. Every Sunday morning the Holy Joes used to rise at six to go to the Schneller chapel for Holy Communion. Those in our barrack room used to make sure that we knew that they had risen by moving about noisily. I suppose that they felt that we should really have been with them in the chapel for Holy Communion so they would remind us of the fact. Shouting and throwing things at them made no difference. Perhaps they believed themselves to be rather like the early Christian martyrs.

One Sunday morning we were dreaming there peacefully when an enormous clanging sound woke us all up at six o'clock. It was the Schneller peal of bells in the tower over the chapel. The buggers had gone into Jerusalem to see Flash Harry, the Chief Army Chaplain, and had persuaded him to give permission for them to

ring the Schneller bells at 6 a.m. for Holy Communion. Flash Harry was a full colonel. The officer in charge of the Pay Office was only a lieutenant colonel so Flash Harry held precedence and the bells went on ringing for several disgusting Sundays. Then, suddenly, all was blissfully quiet at 6 a.m. No bells shook us from our slumbers. It seems that, during the night, some conspirators had climbed the tower into the bell loft, disconnected all the bell ropes and spirited them away to where nobody had any hope of finding them. We were all delighted, the Holy Joes were furious, as was Flash Harry. Our Colonel was so satisfied with the outcome that he did not instigate any investigation - not that it mattered too much to him as he did not live on the premises.

The effect on me by all this religious turmoil was to drive me further away from any belief than I had had before. I was not impressed by the behaviour of the missionaries. Their main ambition was to covert Muslim Arabs and Jews to Christianity. They did this by nobbling young and impressionable youngsters by making friends with them and introducing them to an interesting social life. We used to say that, as soon as a convert had been made, the missionary concerned would cut another notch in his ecclesiastical rifle butt. Their



activities destroyed families. I knew a Jewish family who lost their son to Christianity and from then on declared him dead, going into permanent mourning. Till the missionaries took their son away from them, they were a happy loving family and had become utterly devastated to think that their boy would desert them. Despite my lack of religious belief, I still played the Christchurch organ for the services and I even took part in regular religious broadcasts to the troops in the Palestine Broadcasting Service studios. I played the piano and joined in the singing of hymns. I loved the music. But was indifferent to the pious content of the services.

My work in the section ground on with its monotonous dreariness. Every day a pile of acquittance rolls was put on my desk to convert. I was always good at maths (distinction in the Matriculation exams at school). Whereas all the other soldiers needed to consult their conversion tables each time they converted an amount of money, I could always do it in my head. I was therefore quicker than they were.

There was, however, something that suddenly raised a diversion for me. The captain in charge of our section was completely barmy. He had illusions of grandeur and religious mania. Every day he would stride from his billet at the end of one of the Orthodox Jewish markets, imperiously ordering the market-goers out of his way and striking them with his baton if they did not move.

He found out that I was a musician and could write music. All day long he sat writing hymns and, as soon as he had completed one, he'd sweep from his office, slam the hymn he'd written on my desk and order me to compose a hymn-tune for it. I quite enjoyed doing this as it certainly made a break in the monotony of converting currencies. However it did not please an old regular army sergeant who sat nearby.

This sergeant, we found out later, had surreptitiously gone to the Colonel's headquarters and had reported the hymn writing and tune composing to the sergeant major. The next week two sergeants arriving in the section and announced that they were there to carry out an audit. They went through the paces of checking the correctness of each pay clerk's conversions but were really there to check on me and our captain. To their surprise and that of the sergeant major, it was found that the average number of acquittance rolls converted each day by the other pay soldiers was about one hundred, whereas I had converted four hundred. Hymn tunes and all! My speed at mental arithmetic had won the day.

The rocket then went up. The captain was relieved of his position and put in close confinement awaiting

cashiering. The colonel and his staff realised however that, in me, they had found a real treasure, a mathematical genius and an ideal candidate for a position in the HQ office. Little did they know! I was rapidly transferred to the main office where I sat at a desk next to the sergeant major. He was a lovely man, much older than the rest of us, amiable and with a fund of dirty jokes. I liked him immensely. Of course, all I became was an office boy. I cheerfully did odd jobs all day. There were four other soldiers in that office - the colonel, his major aide-de-camp, the sergeant major and a snide little lance corporal.

On my first day in the office, I received a letter. It was from Mr. Wells, the father of my bosom pal Ron. There were only a few lines. Ron was a Royal Engineers lieutenant in charge of a bomb disposal squad in Alexandria. He had tried to disarm a bomb but it had detonated before he could work on it. Mr. Wells said that Ron was now with the angels in heaven. I could not stop the tears. The sergeant major saw the state I was in and asked me what was up. I told him and then experienced the remarkable way which soldiers dealt with this type of situation. He poured out sympathy coupled with a firm insistence that I must pull myself together and face the fact that in wartime soldiers do get killed. I have always missed Ron, he was really my best friend. I would never see him again if I were fortunate enough to come out of the war intact.

The trouble soon started when a Rolls Royce drove into the camp with two Palestine Policemen in it. They walked into the office and announced that they had come from Sir Harold MacMichael the High Commissioner. They had to collect Private Dannatt to take him to Government House to accompany Aromatic MacMintoe for her singing lessons. The expression on the sergeant major's face was worth seeing. Neither he nor the Colonel could do anything about it. I had to go, as it was, in a way, a Royal Command Performance. I quite enjoyed the occasional day out to Government House. I was given refreshments by Lady MacMichael and her daughter was always pleasantly friendly. However, suddenly the commands ceased; the Rolls Royce stopped coming and my enjoyable days out to Government House were a thing of the past. Somehow the colonel's aide de camp had prevailed with higher up Military Authorities to get my services exclusively dedicated to military matters.

In my free time I began to get more and more engagements to play in broadcasts and concerts. The YMCA had a magnificent auditorium with a giant, four-manual Austin organ that I regularly played for concerts, variety shows and interval music for films. One of my comrades, a very talented entertainer named Ted Barnard, began to show skill at script writing. He invented an imaginary group of zanies called The Barrack Room Boys. Once a week he wrote a whole episode of their adventures, together with their pet donkey and a rather engaging bed-bug whom no-one wanted to kill, as he had such appealing eyes. This was broadcast to the troops in Palestine. Amongst other parts that I played, I was the pet donkey, because I could make a convincing braying sound. The broadcast included, apart from the Barrack Room Boys, visiting guest artistes from other regiments in Jerusalem. One of them was so good, he stayed on as a Barrack Room Boy and became a good friend. Sometime in his past, he had suffered a nervous complaint in his face that caused the peculiar rictus to remain. This gave his expression an amusing quizzical look with one eye more open than the other, especially as he wore a monocle. (That's him on the left in the photo.) The broadcasts were so successful that our producer decided to make a one-off stage presentation of the show, no expenses spared, to take place in the YMCA Auditorium. We played to a full house of members of the Forces. To our great disappointment, the show was not a success. What had been a very successful radio show just did not transfer to a visual stage performance.



I gave a weekly cinema organ broadcast on the YMCA organ. I played novelty pieces and selections from the shows. For this I was paid the enormous sum of £1 per broadcast. The sound engineer was my old friend Mr. Powitzer (of Adolf Hitler fame). A Palestine policeman, John Humphries, was the announcer and compered my broadcasts. During one broadcast an old Hassidic Jew had been visiting the YMCA for some reason. He had got himself lost in the corridors of the YMCA and had found himself underneath the stage. He went up a flight of stairs and landed up on the stage in front of the microphone. The poor old man was quite bewildered and, standing there, he said, "Mayesh?" into the microphone. That means, "What's the matter?" There was an immediate panic. Armed police appeared from all directions and the poor old fellow was arrested and taken away. That was the end of my broadcast for the day.



I was invited to a party given by some Jewish friends. Naturally I gravitated to the piano and began to play. Whilst I was playing Judy Garland's famous song, "*Somewhere over the Rainbow*", a pretty little girl came and sang along with me. She sounded exactly like Judy Garland. She was sixteen years old. I told her that she ought to make something of her voice and promised to try and get her a broadcast at the Palestine Broadcasting Service. This was quickly arranged and she had an audition, with my accompaniment. This led to several following broadcasts and increasing fame for her.



One day I had some time off and went for a walk with her. After a while we sat on a bench in one of the parks and she asked me, "Are you a sport, Norman?" I answered, "Not really, although I did play tennis once." She then said, "That's not what I meant." It then quickly dawned on me exactly what she did mean. Apparently she was after more than my piano playing. Later I introduced her to Ron Fountain who quickly showed her that he was indeed a sport. After him came Ted Barnard and probably several other of my comrades. She used to take each one home to her house for a bit of nooky. Her mother was always in the house at the time and did not seem to worry too much about it. The posed picture and our adoring gazes at each other are very misleading.

Some years later I met her whilst walking down the Jaffa Road. She was dressed in the height of fashion, including a mink coat. Apparently she was working in a nightclub in Haifa, where she had become very popular,

probably for her singing as well!

Amongst the members of a new draft of Pay Corps soldiers to appear at Schneller was an excellent musician named Jack Hucklesby. He was also an organist (much better than I) and a choral conductor. He started the Pay Corps Choir that, in no time at all, achieved a very commendable standard of singing. He also built up a choir of soldiers and civilians in Christchurch and the music of the church reached higher levels than ever before. At Easter we performed Stainer's "Crucifixion" to an appreciative full congregation. Jack conducted and I played the organ.

Every Christmas Day during the war, there was a broadcast from all corners of the Empire, culminating in the King's Speech. One Christmas it was arranged that part of the broadcast was to come from Palestine. The YMCA auditorium was full of troops singing "The Holy City" whilst I played the organ. Our whole broadcast

was phoney from start to finish. The listeners, world wide, were led to believe that the broadcast was coming from Bethlehem. It started with a lone sentry marching up and down outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Actually he was in the broadcasting studio in Jerusalem. The producer had imported three flagstones into the studio and the soldier had to march up and down on them, whilst meditating about the birth of Christ in that very place (Bethlehem?) centuries before. Then, apparently, the Church of the Nativity was full of soldiers singing "The Holy City" whilst I played the organ there. (To my knowledge there isn't an organ in that church.) To complete the deception, the broadcast was actually recorded the week before Christmas. The broadcasting studio in Jerusalem was not powerful enough to broadcast to the world. Normally any broadcast of that importance was transmitted by telephone from Jerusalem to Cairo, which had a powerful transmitter. However there was always an element of risk. Frequently, wandering Bedouin Arabs would come across the telephone line, shin up the pole and cut the wire off to repair their tents or their camels' saddles or even to sell for its basic copper. Consequently a broadcast as important as the Christmas one was recorded a week prior to the actual transmission and taken down to Cairo in a military staff car. Recording in those days was done on the old 78 shellac discs. It was years before tape recording was available. On this occasion the whole enterprise had to be carried out in complete secrecy. We were all sworn to silence. There was a British war journalist in town - Chapman, I think it was - who would have blown the gaff if he had known about it, especially the bit about the sentry on duty outside the Church of the Nativity.

My parents heard the broadcast and were thrilled to bits.

One of our sergeants must have been a travel agent in Civvie Street. He organised outings and tours for us on our days off and, even for a week's leave. The first outing was to Tel Aviv. We paid two piastres each (about five pence) for the bus ride. My Army pay at that time was just over fifteen shillings a week. This fine sergeant also arranged a packed lunch for each of us, included in the price. We had a glorious day by the seaside, bathing, swimming and sunbathing. On the return trip, across the fertile plain leading to the hills, he stopped the bus at an orange grove. He hopped out and returned a little while later with the Jewish owner together with two huge, man-sized wicker baskets (reminiscent of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves). They hoisted the baskets up and tipped them onto the floor of the bus. Out poured hundreds of ripe oranges that rolled right down to the end of the bus. We all helped ourselves to our share of the fruit and filled our haversacks. The sergeant told us that the war had ruined the export trade for oranges, leaving the owners of the orange groves with millions of unsellable oranges. They could not be left to rot on the ground, as that would damage the trees. Quick sales such as we had just made were the only salvation the owners had left to them. Our sergeant had paid just five piastres (about one shilling) for each basket full. We heard later that pits began to be dug and surplus oranges tipped into them. There they rotted and fermented, making superb food for the cattle.

On another occasion an outing was planned to go to Jerash in Transjordan. Our bus travelled down through the bleak Hills of Judea - the Wilderness - until it reached the River Jordan. We crossed the famous Jordan Bridge and soon set off across a very dusty plain towards Jerash. Although the weather was hot we had to have the

windows and door closed otherwise we would have been covered in the dusty sand. On arrival at Jerash, the sergeant handed out pack lunches. Inside each pack was fresh bread, and a lump of cheese. Actually it was blue cheese, quite a delicacy in Palestine. How he had got hold of blue cheese I have no idea but it was a real treat to most of us. There was also an orange, a banana and a bar of chocolate.

Jerash was a wonderful sight. Before us lay a complete, though ruined, Roman town. Magnificent pillars still stood each side of the main street and round the forum.



The street was paved, unaltered, since the days the Romans left it. There was even a covered sewer running down the centre that we could see through cracks in the paving stones.

The finest trip that this splendid sergeant arranged involved a complete week's leave. Those of us who were due a week off signed on to the holiday he was planning. The coach was to travel up north as far as Lake Galilee, thence to Syria and across to the Lebanon and back down the coast of the Mediterranean, eventually back to Jerusalem.

We set off early in the morning in a hired bus, reaching Lake Galilee in time for lunch (supplied as usual by our sergeant.) We halted on the shores, by a beautiful beach through which bubbled a hot spring. Springs in that part of Palestine were often sulphurous and stank abominably. This one did not stink at all as it was an iodine spring. We relaxed and bathed till it was time to press on for the Syrian border. The land rose gradually and became mountainous as we went up the Golan Heights. By late afternoon we entered Damascus. It was like going into France. I particularly noticed the policemen, dressed in the uniforms such as one would see in Paris. We drove through a square, where a policeman standing on a little plinth controlled the traffic. He seemed very pleased to see us, waved to us and gave us a "Maurice Chevalier" wink of one eye. It all seemed so friendly.

We settled in to the hotel where we were to stay for a few days. It was very cheap accommodation, several beds in each room but clean, comfortable and the food was good. Our sergeant had meticulously planned the holiday on a serviceman's budget to get the best value for the least money.

The next morning, after the inveterate omelette breakfast, we set off on foot to explore Damascus. We were taken to the great Omayyad Mosque, a handsome building, highly decorated with colourful mosaics. I had always understood that the Moslems were forbidden to make pictorial representations of any living thing, flora or fauna. Only Allah can do this (not that he ever does!). This mosque must have been the exception that proved the rule. On the wall, as I remember, there were mosaic pictures of flowers and palm trees. We posed for a photo in the main courtyard. In some Islamic countries, entry to a mosque is denied to infidels like us, but the Syrians made us welcome in theirs.

Travel around the town was easy. There were plenty of trams. We soon learnt not to pay our fares. When the conductor approached us to sell us a ticket, we just said, "Churchill will pay" and he went away. We each appeared to have plenty of money. The currency was mostly in notes, even for quite small amounts. There was

very little coin. We had saved our pay for several weeks prior to the leave - I had saved seven pounds. This I had changed at the frontier into a great wad of notes of various denominations. Our army uniform trousers had a huge pocket in the front of the left leg - I never knew exactly what for, probably to carry maps - and this I stuffed full of banknotes.

We visited the famous "Street Called Straight" of biblical fame. Wasn't it here that St. Paul saw the light? It was a long bazaar, with a very high roof and many shops of all description and was very dark. No wonder St. Paul needed to see the light. In one shop I purchased many items of Damascus silk, beautifully patterned in gorgeous colours. Another shop sold Arabic daggers, the curved ones, in heavily engraved scabbards. They were intended to be souvenirs but they could be used for other, more sinister, purposes. It is totally forbidden for daggers to be sold in Palestine. Previously I had finally persuaded an Arab dealer in Jerusalem secretly to sell me a dagger. He dug it up in his garden where he had kept it, wrapped up in oiled cloth, for fear of being caught with it. Nothing seemed to worry the Syrian dealers, they had plenty on sale, so I bought one of theirs. I also bought a whip with a long wooden handle, beautifully



decorated with inlaid mother of pearl patterning. It had a secret. Unscrew the end of the handle and out came a vicious looking stiletto.

My sister Gladys had always wanted a pair of antique earrings. The Arab silversmiths are experts at silver filigree jewellery. Their silver always came from the same source - Maria Theresa dollars. Maria Theresa and her kingdom had faded away into History centuries before but her large silver dollars (thalers) were still the most sought after coins throughout the Arabic countries, to the extent that they were still being minted in, I believe, Austria. Loads of them were being transported and continually traded by camel caravans throughout the Middle East. They had the reputation of being made of the purest silver that could be melted and drawn out to the finest of filigree wires. One Damascus silversmith had a pair of beautifully worked earrings that, I was sure, would suit Gladys. However it was for pierced ears and hers were not. I asked the silversmith if he had a similar pair for unpierced ears. He didn't but that did not stop him from making a sale. He didn't bat an eyelid but quickly clipped the hooks from the earrings and soldered a pair of screw fittings on instead. Silver has to be soldered in an oxygen free atmosphere, which he achieved by placing the earrings onto a block of charcoal and blowing a hot gas flame on to it by means of a blowpipe he held in his mouth. I then asked him if he could make the bright new silver filigree look more antique. Nonplussed, he calmly held the earrings in the yellow gas flame till they were covered with soot. This he almost rubbed off till they just looked dirty. I began to get worried. I need not have done as he dipped the earrings in hot beeswax and quickly withdrew them. Then he polished the beeswax to a glowing sheen. Lo and behold, there, before my very eyes, were Gladys's genuine antique earrings. I posted them off to her and later received a letter from her expressing her complete delight with them.

Our stay in Damascus soon passed and we were on the road again. The bus climbed the mountainous road till we reached Baalbek in Lebanon. We could see the spectacular pillars of Baalbek sticking up far off on the horizon long before we reached them. As we drew near they gradually took shape until, on arriving at the site, they were revealed in all their Corinthian splendour. Even though they were ruins, they were still sufficiently intact to show what a resplendent sight they must have been when they were first built. I wandered around taking photographs and admiring the beauty of stonework carved all those centuries ago.



Our well-organised sergeant had, as usual, brought a packed lunch each, that we sat and ate on great fallen blocks of white stone. Then, from somewhere, he produced an Arab who spoke perfect English and gave us an excellent guided tour of the site, explaining to us in the most interesting way, all about the history of Baalbek and the all of the different techniques of each of the carvings on the stone and their significance. The frequently to be seen symbolic pattern of what we were led to believe was 'egg and arrow' he told us was, in fact, vagina and penis. We



live and learn!



We set off up the mountain road till we reached the snow level. We could see the patches of white long before we reached the snow but when we finally arrived at the first large patch, the bus stopped and we all descended. Then, as might be expected, we got out and indulged in a stupid snow ball fight. Then, all feeling slightly damp, we got back in the bus and in some discomfort continued on our way to Beirut.



In the late afternoon we entered that beautiful city and were taken to our hotel. There was a meal awaiting our arrival, we were introduced to our bedrooms and we cleaned ourselves up and went out on the town. Together with several friends, I went to the cinema to see the film, *Gone with the Wind*. I say, "See *Gone with the Wind*" as that is about all we were able to do. Although the sound was in English, the local inhabitants, who read the subtitles out loud, drowned it out as the film proceeded.

The next day we explored the city and strolled along the picturesque promenade. That evening we had the amusing sight of a group of very drunk Australians who stripped off and bathed in one of the fountains in a city square. They were cheered on by

laughing locals and half their police force. Eventually the police arrested the revellers and led them off to the jail, still laughing heartily at them.



The splendid sergeant, ever enterprising, laid on a trip to the Beirut Races for us. The jockeys paraded their smart little Arab steeds before the vast audience of race-goers including the RAPC men. We could choose the horse we fancied to win the race. I did

not know much about racing but I did know something about horses. I chose one that had sturdy legs but was not too heavy in the body. I told my comrade that that was the one to back. They all paid out their money and the horse came in first. They were delighted to have won so much money. I'm not a betting man so I won not a penny but the eternal gratitude of my friends. I was much more interested in a group of local musicians playing near the track.



Our holiday was drawing to an end. We set off south following the Mediterranean coast, passing through the historical towns of Tyre and Sidon and, all too soon, arrived back in Jerusalem.

I enjoyed one more of our sergeant's escorted tours. It was to the Arnon Gorge in Transjordan. Our bus descended through the Wilderness as far as Kallia on the Dead Sea. The waters of the Dead Sea were rich in potassium salts and I remembered from my chemistry lessons that the symbol for potassium was "K", short for

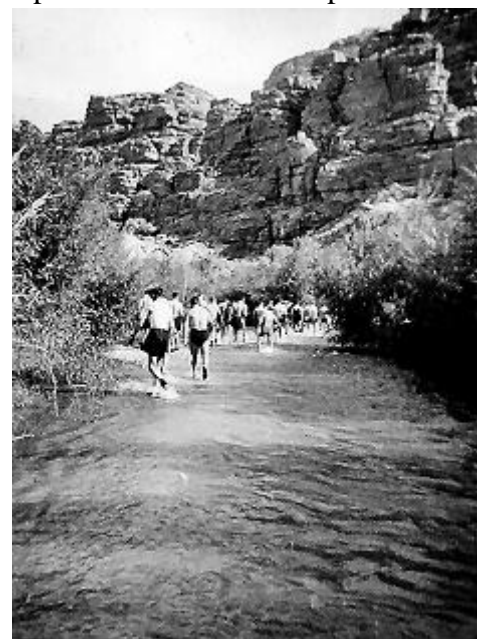


Kallium. I had previously visited that strange sea on other occasions and bathed in the water where it is impossible to sink, but this time we embarked on a small steamer which sailed down the Dead Sea as far as the gorge where the river Arnon poured into the Sea. One day later on, the man sitting on my right in the picture, suddenly disappeared from the Pay Corps.



He was a professional archaeologist of some high repute and a friend of Flinders Petrie. His reputation got him a transfer to the Diplomatic Corps. He finished up as the Governor of a province in Aden.

We changed into our bathing costumes and, having been warned by the sergeant, gently lowered ourselves over the side of the boat, into the water. It was essential that we did not allow any of the water into our mouths as the strong minerals in it could cause our throats to constrict and choke us. We swam ashore and found ourselves in the pleasantly warm shallows of the river's mouth. It swarmed with little fish that attached themselves on to the hairs of our legs. Instinct told them to grab anything to hold onto to prevent them from being rushed out into the deadly waters of the Dead Sea. We all made our way, paddling, up through the shallow waters of the river till we reached an awe-inspiring waterfall. In that narrow gorge the din of the falling water was quite deafening. Like idiots, several of us decided to climb the falls. It was comparatively easy to make our way from rock to rock as we ascended but, coming back down, was not so easy. The rocks were quite slippery and several of us lost our footing and were carried down by the rush of the water into the great pool below. I was nearly to the lowest rocks when I slipped and fell into the foaming waters below. It was not exactly dangerous in the pool and we all quickly swam to safety. However, I found, to my distress, that I had lost my glasses. These glasses were very fashionable for all musicians, especially those who were fans of Glen Miller, being rimless exactly like his. They were also very expensive to buy. I had to revert to my boring old Army steel rimmed glasses, designed to fit under gas masks. Eventually I saved up enough to purchase another rimless pair from the Jewish optician in the Jaffa Road.



I had an invitation to go to a party given by some Jewish friends in Tel Aviv. I didn't know if it were for my own sweet self or for my piano playing. As it was I had a lovely time, playing for singing and dancing. Two days later a staff sergeant told me that a girl in the party called Hannah had fallen for me hook line and sinker and wanted to meet me at the Weizmann Institute on Saturday. Highly intrigued I went and there stood a lovely young thing. She wanted to hear me play the organ at Christchurch and from then on took over my life. Apparently she loved organ music and the Jewish synagogues do not have organs. Whenever I had a bit of free time, she was there (I suspected that staff sergeant of letting her know). We went to the cinema to see "*Hell's a poppin*". It was so funny, I sat there simply convulsed with laughter. Hannah did not even smile. I soon realised that she had no sense of humour at all. She almost mocked me for laughing at what she considered to be a very trivial film. Oh dear, what had I let myself in for? She was also very bossy and demanding. Everything we did together was what she wanted to do. In addition she was always telling me how wonderful the Jewish religion was and especially the wisdom in the Torah. This was not for me – but how to get out of it? I have to admit that in many other ways she was nice to be with and I tend to try to have an easy life without

any aggravation. Consequently, I did nothing about it and just drifted on seeing her at regular intervals and, in a way, enjoying it.



There were other leaves that I managed to take without the help of our enterprising sergeant. Together with my friend, Ted Barnard, the comic in our concert party, I set off for Lake Galilee where we were to stay on a Jewish Settlement, a Kibbutz named En Gev. The Jewish Women's Zionist organisation in Jerusalem organised wonderful holidays for service men and women in Kibbutzim - full board at no



expense at all. Ted and I made our way to Tiberias on Lake Galilee and from thence, by boat, to the other side where lay En Gev. It was quite a small kibbutz, specialising in fishing and growing bananas. We were given a comfortable hut and shown where we could get a meal. Everyone was very friendly, especially a young couple. The man, Hans, was a German who did not know that he was Jewish. The Nazi racists investigating the family history of people they suspected of being Jewish, discovered that Hans was one. He was very blond and looked more Aryan than the average German but he was singled out as a Jew. Somehow he escaped to South Africa and from thence to Palestine, where he became entirely Jewish, adopting the religion and marrying Eugenie, a Jewish girl. He told us that he had never regretted the decision. Ted and I had a lazy week exploring the beautiful countryside around En Gev, swimming in the lake, rowing one of the boats and all the time in the most glorious sunshine. We climbed a nearby mountain, Mount Suscita. What the locals called a mountain would have passed for a large hill back home. Near the top we found a rocky outcrop and took photos of each other, carefully posed to give the impression that we were climbing up a dangerous precipice, but, in reality, one a foot or two above a perfectly safe flat rock. The photos later came out well and looked most convincing.



One day we, together with Hans, went for a long trip to the River Yarmuk, which flowed, into the lake near the south end. We walked through Samakh, a friendly Arab village where we were greeted profusely and responded with our few words of Arabic, to the great amusement of the villagers. We followed the course of the river through a long shallow gorge. The whole area was ablaze with colour from countless oleander bushes with their red blossoms. At one place we found that the path along the bank faded out and we had to climb a narrow pathway up the side of the cliff. It was a bit nerve-wracking as the path was quite narrow and we progressed, walking sideways with our backs to the rock and looking down a long way to the foaming river below. The path entered into a cave and, as we could see that it came out of the cave further on, we went through. To our great terror we found that the cave was swarming with hornets - great big yellow beasts, making a hideous buzzing racket that filled our ears. We rushed through the cave. To our surprise the hornets totally ignored us and went about their business without thinking of stinging us.



The river came out of the gorge to a flat plain with buildings ahead of us. We entered the small village, finding it to be the centre of healing springs - a spa, in fact. Everywhere there were pools of hot bubbling waters. The smell was atrocious, as the springs were sulphurous. Arab men in various stages of undress were taking the waters. We stripped down and lowered ourselves into a steaming pool. The heat was tremendous and came as a great shock. Like the Arabs sitting in the pool, we soon got used to the heat and really enjoyed the experience - apart from the stink. We were also a great source of

amusement to the Arab bathers. We learnt that the village was named al-Hemma, which we understood to be the Arabic for "The Bath".

In the week following the holiday at En Gev I was due to give an organ broadcast at the YMCA. I asked Hans if there were a piano on which I could practice. He took me to a large hut where there was a glorious grand piano - a Steinway. It was a great surprise to find such a beautiful instrument in a small, not very wealthy kibbutz. We were to find in subsequent visits to settlements that, although the settlers laboured very hard through the day, culture of all sorts, especially musical, filled their free time.

Not long after returning to Schneller, I developed a very bad infection on my feet. It was called epidermophytosis. I had caught it whilst bathing in the hot sulphur springs at al-Hemma. Arabs who had infectious diseases used to go to al-Hemma in the mistaken view that the sulphurous waters would cure their ills. One of these Arabs had obviously shared his disease with me. The common name for the disease is Athlete's Foot, a most inappropriate illness for me to get. The symptoms were raw sores all over the foot but in my case the sores had allowed a further septic infection to enter. The infection spread up my leg to the groin. Very serious! I was whipped into the Italian hospital straightaway. Treatment consisted of painting the feet with gentian violet, a singularly useless method as it had no effect on the disease at all. Other unguents and ointments were spread on but to no avail. I was told that once this disease had taken hold it was very difficult to cure in Palestine or any other tropical or sub-tropical country. The only thing that could be done was to send me back to England. This seemed to me to be a very desirable thing, for which it was worth having the disease.

Then, one day, I was put in a wheel chair and taken to an ambulance. I was driven to the Hadassah Jewish Hospital on the top of Mt. Scopus. There I was told that a Jewish specialist, who knew a lot more about tropical diseases than the British doctors, would cure me. I was wheeled into an X-ray room and laid out on a table where I was covered entirely, except for my feet, with thick and heavy lead impregnated rubber sheeting. My feet were then sprayed with very high intensity X-rays.

In the next few days, back at the Italian Hospital, the skin on my feet gradually peeled away and so did the epidermophytosis. The disease was ended and so were my hopes of being sent back to England.

Another of my friends, John Wilson, a fellow member of the Rover Scouts, and I used to hire out a tandem bicycle on our days off and with it we explored the surroundings of Jerusalem. This machine was not really a tandem but two single bicycles, chopped up a bit and re-welded together as a sort of tandem. It was called "The Flying Bedstead". One day we cycled to Ramallah, a nearby Arab town. After a long ride, we stopped to drink at a spring and sat in the shade of a rock for a while. Then we heard to our amazement the sound of the bagpipes. It turned out to be a small boy, a shepherd, who was playing a double reed pipe consisting of two pipes, a melody pipe and a drone. Just like the bagpipes, but whose origin was shrouded in the mists of time. The Ancient Greeks played a similar instrument - the Phrygian pipes.

In Ramallah we left our Flying Bedstead outside the British Police Station for safety, whilst we walked through the town looking at the sights. We passed a school just as the boys were coming out. To our horror they all started picking up stones and throwing them at us. We ran back to the Police Station as fast as we could, followed by the boys, still throwing stones. One or two of them were more persistent than the others were and I got a nasty blow in the back. Two British policemen saw what was happening and came over to us. The boys melted away. Then the policemen took us back to the school and asked us if we could identify any of the boys who'd attacked us. Two of them stood out as ring leaders and we pointed them out to the policemen. I asked one of the policemen what they were going to do with the boys. "Nothing," was the reply, "We are going to their houses and we'll whip their fathers. Then the fathers will punish their sons far more effectively than we are allowed to do." He had a large leather whip in his hand that he cracked impressively.

John and I decided to go for a tour of Palestine on the Flying Bedstead for our next leave. We had to get permission to do so from the military authorities, which they reluctantly gave but with one proviso. We would have to carry a rifle. I respectfully pointed out that it would be impossible to conceal a rifle on the Flying Bedstead. It would be in full view and an enticing invitation for Arabs to attack us for its possession. The rifle was promptly changed for a pistol with a round of bullets. Neither of us had any idea, either how to load the damn thing, let alone fire it. I had fixed my haversack on the front of the handlebars. The pistol plus its bullets were shoved down to the bottom of the haversack and I packed the rest of my belongings on top. No Arab could see what was there.

The Jewish Zionist ladies, at our request, fixed us with a tour to take in Kibbutzim that had troops of the Jewish Scouts. The Jewish Scout movement in Palestine, whilst affiliated to ours, was in many ways quite different. The main difference was that boys and girls all belonged to the same troops. There were no separate Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. They were called Sophim.

We cycled down the spectacular road from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv - all downhill and very windy. On the side of the road I found a hat that an ATS girl must have lost. It was a dress side-cap, quite an expensive item, not the normal army issue but one that could be purchased as an extra. Inside was the name and number of the owner. I decided that I would try and trace the owner through the Pay Corps records when we returned from our tour.



We spent the first night in Tel Aviv in Hannah's house. The Flying Bedstead we hid behind the house but I took my haversack plus pistol inside. Hannah's friend, fifteen year old Brucha, saw me checking on the pistol and asked to see it. To our amazement, she took the pistol, opened it up, checked all the working parts, put it together again, spun it round and round in her hand and clicked the trigger most efficiently. Apparently she belonged to a militant group of young people who used to go to a secret place in the Wilderness of Judea for military training, anticipating when the Jews would take over Palestine after the war. She thoroughly frightened me and I slept that night with the pistol tucked in my pyjamas, just in case she tried to nick it during the night. Incidentally the name of this pretty little girl, Brucha, means "Blessing". I would not like to meet her down an alley on a dark night!

We set off early the next morning riding north along the coast. For refreshment along the way we stopped at a lemon grove where we were allowed to help ourselves to lemons. These were sun-ripened and quite sweet and very thirst quenching.



Our first stop was at a Kibbutz called Pardes Hanna. A troop of Sophim had been allocated a plot of land, a few huts, some agricultural implements, a nanny goat, its kid, and some household equipment. They were then invited to create their own Jewish settlement with help and guidance from the nearby main Kibbutz. We watched a girl milking the nanny goat and then she let us have a go. It's not as easy as it looks. Both goats had an awful aroma, especially the kid.

The young people were very friendly, most spoke English and questioned us about the Scout movement in our country. It seems that there were quite a lot of differences,

mainly, I would think, political. The biggest difference appealed to me and that was that the boys and girls were in a combined membership. It seemed to be a very civilised system. I was given a bed in a two-bed tent that I shared with an eighteen-year-old boy. The beds were very primitive affairs, just wooden frames with woven string stretched across them and straw mattresses on top. We both sat and chatted well into the night before we finally went to sleep. He too was very keen on music and surprised me by telling me that his favourite composer was that great Englishman, Albert Ketèlbey. His favourite piece of music was that wonderful composition, *In a Monastery Garden*. Ah well!

On the following day we set off to cross the Wadi Ara - a much-feared road, as it was reputed to cross through hostile Arab territory. We cycled quickly into the Wadi (a valley) intending to get through it as fast as possible. We need not have feared. The Arabs all turned out to cheer us on, laughing and clapping as we went past each village. They had never seen a tandem bicycle before, especially one with mad Englishmen on it. They made us very welcome in one place, inviting us into a mill where they were grinding flour and giving us each a glass of tea to drink. It was a good thing that they did not know I had a revolver hidden in my haversack or the situation would have been entirely different.



Coming out of the Wadi we got a puncture. We were at the top of a hill overlooking an Arab village in the valley below. There was nothing to do but to repair it on the spot. Fortunately there was a spring nearby where it gushed out into a little pool. We blew up the inner tube and lowered it into the pool, quickly finding the puncture. In doing so we disturbed the mud at the bottom of the pool so that the stream, flowing down the hill towards the village, became very murky. Just as we finished repairing the tube and had started putting it and the tyre back on the tandem, we heard a howl of anguish from the village below. Their polluted water had just reached them and they started up the hill towards us looking most antagonistic. We quickly jumped on the tandem and rode off as fast as we could followed by yelling and gesticulating men. I hesitate to think what would have happened if they had caught us. They would have certainly found the revolver and that would have been the end of us.



Our next stop was Ginneigar, a very big kibbutz in the beautiful Yemek Israel Valley. There was a most active and enthusiastic Sophim troop there who made us very welcome. We were each given a straw hut with a single wood frame bed in it. We had a refreshing wash in the communal washrooms and were taken to the dining hall where



we were served a splendid meal, a most delicious although simple vegetarian savoury. Although the kibbutz was not a vegetarian one, a lot of the meals were. Of course all the members were Jewish but many were not practising Jews and did not follow the strict kosher rules. There was, however, a table or two where the food was very strictly kosher for those who adhered to the rules of their religion. John and I wandered around the settlement admiring the neatly set out plantations of vegetables and fruit trees.

That evening, as dark fell, the boy and girl scouts took us up the side of the valley into the surrounding coniferous forest. Many years ago the settlers had planted the forest and named it Balfour Forest. We were told that it supplied them with renewable timber as well as helping to stabilise the climate. It also gave the young people an initial introduction to dislike of the Arabs. Already they believed firmly that the whole country belonged to the Jews as of right. It said so, didn't it, in the Bible? We could read it for ourselves. God had given the country to the Jews, not the Arabs. Now the Arabs were destroying their trees. The Arabs believed that the land belonged to them. They and their forefathers had lived and owned the land for generations. Consequently they roamed the countryside and let their herds of sheep or goats crop whatever they fancied to eat. When they came to the Balfour Forest, the animals nibbled the bark round the trunks of the trees, effectively ringing them. And a ringed tree died. It seemed a terrible shame to us that these friendly young people should be filled with such hate.

In the middle of the forest we came to a clearing that the scouts used as their meeting place. They lit a bonfire around which we sat and sang scout songs. They sang their Hebrew ones that they translated to us. Many were blatantly political. We taught them to sing our scout songs, all of which were just fun songs, not political at all. Then we all danced the Hora. This is universally danced in Jewish parties of all sorts so it was expected that scouts would dance it round the campfire. You all stand in a circle with your hands on each other's shoulders. Then you prance round and round following a pattern of steps and singing the Hora song. The words are simple. Even we British could sing them. They consisted of "Li li li li li li" repeated over and over. The first three "li's" are syncopated - quaver, crochet, quaver - followed by two quaver "li's" and a crochet one. The tune is simple and very monotonous. Doh', soh, la, soh, fah, me. The circle is danced round and round, getting faster and faster. Even I, with my two left feet, could dance the Hora and did it frequently with Jewish friends in various parts of the country.



We stayed two days in Ginneigar and on the second night we saw a visiting Yiddish theatrical company in the outdoor theatre. They performed a traditional play that neither of us understood. The next morning we set off back to Jerusalem. The Flying Bedstead had served us well. We returned it to its old Jewish owner in better condition than he let us have it. At one time, as we had been cycling along the road from Tel Aviv, it had completely seized up. I could not turn the handlebars and we both fell off. Nearby was a garage. The mechanics came out and were vastly amused at our plight. They showed us that the Flying Bedstead had never been oiled, probably in its whole life. Everything, wheels, gears and steering column were dry as a bone. They pumped oil into every possible place and we cycled off with the bike running sweetly like it had never done before.

When I was back in Schneller, there was a very sad letter waiting for me from Mum. My cousin John Collins had been drowned at sea. He was a soldier posted to Egypt, but on the way the ship he was on had been sunk by a German U-boat. I was very fond of John and knew that all the family and I would miss him too. He was a very talented architect and held a responsible position in Civvie Street. That evening I went to the Zion Cinema and found myself sitting behind a soldier whose hair looked just like John's hair - very blond and silky. I couldn't stop myself. I said out loud, "John Copping". The soldier turned round immediately. It was indeed John. We forgot all about the film and went outside and sat in a café. John told me that he and some other soldiers had found a life raft on the deck of the sinking ship. They got on it and somehow made their way to shore in North Africa. But what a coincidence, my sitting right behind him in the cinema.

Ruth Belkin of the Palestine Broadcasting Service, a Jewish lady who had emigrated to Palestine before the war, remembering how much she had enjoyed the BBC's *Children's Hour* when she was a child, decided to introduce it from the PBS. I was invited to appear as an "Uncle" – Uncle Danny in fact. Several of the other Pay Corps entertainers were invited too, including Ron Fountain (Uncle Ronnie). Everything had to be broadcast live as recording facilities were thin on the ground.

Several children from the British Colony were also invited to take part together with English speaking Jewish children. I think they must have heavily auditioned to select those children because they were all so intelligent and precocious. We played word games with those children. One game consisted of an on-going story. Someone would start the story and leave it suddenly at an awkward or difficult moment in the narrative, pointing to another person to continue it. Part of the fun was to see how the next person managed to extricate himself or herself from the situation and continue the story unabashed. There was one little girl, about eleven years old, simply oozing IQ, whose skill and inventiveness was a marvel to behold. She'd grab the story, twist it mercilessly and hand it on, almost impossible to follow. I once fell foul of her machinations when she pointed at me to continue. I floundered, but being the "funny" Uncle Danny, was able to waffle helplessly but comically.

We soldiers did not last long as participants in the Children's Hour probably because, being a daytime broadcast, it was difficult to fit it in with our military duties. Or probably because we could not stand up to those brilliant little children!

Our Sergeant Major had us on parade one day. He informed us that we were expected to wear our medal ribbons. Very few of us had any, being conscripted civilians. The SM inspected us and stopped in front of one man who had a single ribbon, a very plain one at that. "What do you call this?" asked the SM. He sounded very scathing. The man answered. "The George Cross". This was the highest award for bravery given to a civilian. He had won it for rescuing an airman from a crashed and burning plane. The SM was suitably abashed. We were also expected to wear 'Years of Service' ribbons and 'War Wound' ribbons on our arms. In those days attempts were being made to make real soldiers of us. We had to take part in field exercises. One of these involved running across an obstacle course with all sorts of horrible things to tackle in it. I did very well, running ahead of the pack until, just before the last obstacle (a high wall to climb) my foot hit the end of an old rusty iron ring, such as was bound round a barrel. The other end of the ring sprang up and buried itself in my knee. I pulled it out and ran on, climbing the wall, spurting blood everywhere. I was immediately treated for the cut in the sick bay. I applied for a 'War Wound' ribbon. It was, not surprisingly, refused me.

One of my jobs in the Colonel's office was to follow the progress, throughout the Middle East, of the Field Cashiers. A Field Cashier is an officer who has a truck, together with an assistant (often a non-commissioned officer) and a bag of money. He arrives at an isolated camp, pays the soldiers there, and moves on to the next camp. My job was to read the Daily Orders, check which area a Field Cashier had left and to where he was going. Then I went into the Colonel's office where there was huge map of the Middle East on the wall. It was covered with drawing pins, each of which represented a Field Cashier. I had to find the appropriate drawing pin and move it from where a Field Cashier had been to where he was going. Somehow I managed to lose thirty-five Field Cashiers. My mind could not have been on the job. Probably more concerned about my next musical performance. The Colonel and his Major were furious. Our snide little lance-corporal sidled up to me and told me that he had heard the Major say, "If that Dannatt applies for a transfer to ENSA, I'll see that he gets it." I promptly applied for the transfer, giving all my reasons for wanting to do so. The application, together with sighs of relief from the Colonel, immediately went through to the Army Headquarters. Of course, these things take time and I knew I would have to wait. I was immediately relieved of my job in the HQ office and put into the Post Office, where I was very happy.

I also was given a part time job as an assistant Medical Orderly on the strength of my having once been a Red

Cross Ambulance man and had a certificate in First Aid. I really enjoyed working in the Medical Room. I got a reputation for being good at boils. Several soldiers were afflicted with boils which, when ripe, had to be lanced and cleaned out. The senior Medical Orderly was not very good at this. I discovered that if I gently stretched the skin over the boil and held it for a short time, it would often break open in a far less painful way than being lanced. The pus would then be released and I could clean the boil out easily. Then I would gently remove the core and wash out the hole with acriflavin, a bright yellow antiseptic. One sergeant who really suffered badly from boils sang my praises to all the boil-afflicted men, who came to the Medical Room insisting on having me for their treatment. I would have made a good Harley Street Boil Specialist in Civvy Street.

The Medical Room had one hypodermic syringe for the whole Regiment. This syringe had two needles. Whenever the men had to be mass injected against the various diseases from which we were at risk, these needles were put to use. One would be used and then, after the injection, dropped into a dish of neat alcohol, from which the other would be taken and then used for the next man. The needles, by the time I became Orderly, were seriously blunt. The men used to complain bitterly that injections really hurt and were nearly always followed by bleeding arms. On the day of the mass anti-typhoid injection (TAB) for the whole Regiment I went early into the Medical Room and sharpened the needles, using a fine honing stone that I'd found together with a drop of pure pharmaceutical olive oil. As I sharpened each needle I inspected it under the microscope and kept sharpening till the point seemed to me to be very sharp. The injections were carried out by a one-eyed Czechoslovakian Medical Officer who was generally considered to be useless, especially at giving injections. Then, for the first time in the history of the Regiment, the needles slid in effortlessly and, mostly, painlessly. The doctor's method was rather peculiar. He used to push the needle in without the syringe and then connect the syringe to it. Then he'd push the plunger and give the injection. This was often quite

painful, apart from the pain inflicted by blunt needles. I had the feeling that there was a fundamental fault in this method. I'm sure that air was introduced together with the serum but a private soldier never questions an Army Medical Officer Captain. The whole Regiment was injected and the soldiers commented on the ease in which their skin was punctured without too much pain. Thanks to me and no thanks to that Medical Officer.

Incidentally that same Medical Officer had his own technique for reducing boils. He used that same hypodermic syringe, the needle of which he plunged into the boil and then sucked out the contents of it. Then he'd just stick a plaster over the place. Of course, the core was still there - it could not enter the needle - and the boil flourished and got worse. So the soldier concerned would creep into the Medical Room later on and I'd do the job properly.

The Middle East Military Authorities announced that there was to be a week allocated to celebrate all the Allies who were fighting the war against the Nazis and Fascists. It was to be called "Allies Week", needless to say. All sorts of activities were due to take place. In Jerusalem we were told that there was to be a great concert in the YMCA auditorium, in which performers from the various Allies, who were stationed in the district around Jerusalem, would

JERUSALEM ALLIES WEEK



Programme of Entertainment

1. **RUSSIA PRESENTS:**
Four Russian (Circassian — Chechen) dances typical of the spirit of this brave country:
 1. W H L. A country dance denoting youth and gaiety
 2. ADIGHAN KAFFAR. An old sedate traditional Circassian Dance.
 3. KA PAWKA. An old Circassian partner dance.
 4. CHECHIAN. A lively dance denoting the temperament of the Russian Circassians and Chechens.
2. **GREECE PRESENTS:**
The entertainment group of the Royal Hellenic Army presents a variety of National songs and dances.
3. **INDIA PRESENTS:**
The National dances of old India portraying the mystery and tradition of this age-old country.
4. **FRANCE PRESENTS:**
Three members of the Free French Forces in National Songs of Free France.
5. **EAST AFRICA PRESENTS:**
A lively song provided by members of the East African Forces.
6. **POLAND PRESENTS:**
Pianoforte solos and traditional songs rendered by members of the Polish Forces.
7. **GREAT BRITAIN PRESENTS:**
A combined operation by members of the Royal Navy, The Army and the Royal Air Force:
 1. The R.A.F. & Army Choir in a series of National Songs.
 2. A Hornpipe and Mass March by members of the Royal Navy.
 3. Finale by the Fifteen Army Band and Choir combined.
8. **YUGO-SLAVIA PRESENTS:**
The choir of the Royal Yugo-Slav Guards in National Songs of Yugo-Slavia.

THE KING
The Fifteen Army Band will play the overture and during the interval.

take part. I was asked if I would play the organ to accompany two Free French soldiers who were going to sing. One was from Paris and the other from Algeria, the former a genuine French man and the latter an Arab. To make it appear to be a bigger representation, as Free French servicemen and women were so thin on the ground, I had to wear a French uniform and play the organ as one of them. The uniform was slightly too small for me but I hoped that it would not be too apparent as most eyes would be on the two men singing on the stage. They sang "J'aime toujours ma Normandie" and the "Marsellaise". By the time they reached the "Marsellaise", both men were in tears and sobbed their way through the song. It was not funny. It was in fact a very moving performance. Even the organist's eyes were moist by the end.

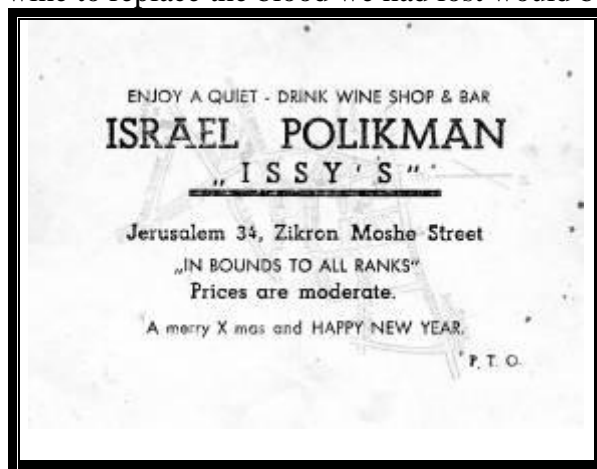
The only allies not available were those from Russia. We had Poles, Greeks, Indians, French, East Africans and, of course, British. Any Russian soldiers were far too busy fighting the Germans away in Russia. However, someone high up remembered that a century earlier, the Tsar of Russia had presented the King of Transjordan with a contingent of Cossacks to be his bodyguard. The poor men were uprooted from their native land and thrust, probably against their wills, to permanent, lifetime servitude in a foreign land. Apparently they had knuckled down to their fate, married Arab girls and made the best of a bad job. Their sons had grown up to take over the position of the guard when their fathers grew too old and had retired. These Russians, we were told, still kept up the Russian tradition of dancing. The sort of dancing where there would be a lot of high kicking, especially from a squatting position. It sounded like a splendid item to be our grand finale.

The Russians were brought by coach from Amman in Transjordan to Jerusalem. They were a very scruffy lot. They had inherited their uniforms from their dads and these uniforms certainly looked their age. Someone in authority had ordered that refreshments should be supplied to the Russians, when they arrived after their long journey from Transjordan. Whoever was given the job of getting the refreshments, remembering that the favourite drink of Russians was vodka, had laid on several bottles and glasses for the men when they arrived. What was not realised, however, was that those men were, by then, more Arab than Russian. They were certainly Arab on their mothers' side and Arabs, especially if they were Moslems, do not drink alcohol. They fell in to drinking the vodka with a will and soon were very decidedly merry. By the time for the finale arrived, they were quite unsteady on their feet. They performed their dance in an exceedingly wobbly style; and when it reached the point when they all were to squat down for the high kicking, they did indeed squat but promptly fell on their backs on the stage and stayed put. The curtains were quickly drawn to tremendous applause and laughter from all the troops in the audience. It had been the highlight of the show.

Later our Sergeant Major had our whole regiment on parade and told us that the wounded were coming in, in large quantities from the Western Desert. There was a desperate need for blood for transfusions. He invited us to volunteer. I was surprised to see how few men did volunteer. The S.M. added that, after the blood had been taken, we would each be given a glass of beer and the rest of the day off. A group of us walked down to the Italian Hospital and offered ourselves as blood donors. To my horror I saw that the doctor who came to take my blood was none other than the one-eyed Czechoslovakian. I lay there on the bed whilst he ineffectively jabbed away at my arm, failing several times to find the vein and getting me into a state of nerves. Eventually the bottle started to fill and then, I don't know what he did wrong but a jet of my blood shot up the wall behind me. I passed out and, when I came round I was lying in the recovery room with all the others. One of the doctors came in and told me that I was unsuitable to give blood as I was not of the right temperament. I felt like telling him that the Czech doctor was not the right sort of doctor to be taking blood from me. We all lay there recovering and looking forward to our glass of beer. There was almost a mutiny when we learnt that there was not to be a glass of beer, but a cup of tea. The ever-resourceful Ron Fountain got up and investigated a cupboard full of bottles. One of the bottles contained neat 100% proof surgical spirit. Ron walked round giving each of us a shot of this alcohol in our tea. Things then improved considerably. When the Medical Officer came in to tell us it was time to go, to his surprise he was met by a very happy group of blood donors. Later we heard that Ron's blood had been rejected. He had been out boozing the night before. He was told that "there was not enough blood in his alcohol".

As we walked away from the Hospital, none too steadily, Ron told us that the best way to replace to blood that had been taken was to drink red wine. The road back to the Schneller Orphanage left the more sedate Italian Quarter and entered a much more scruffy area. This was the Mea Shearim, a Quarter that was populated by highly religious Orthodox Jews, the Hassidim. They were a strange lot, still wearing the traditional costume that they wore when they lived in Europe. The men and boys had long single curls that hung down from either temple. They wore long overcoats that looked more like dressing gowns. On the whole they were a secretive lot and would have nothing to do with us soldiers – except for three owners of liquor bars, of course.

We entered the Mea Shearim, following Ron's instructions, down many little lanes till we came to a bar. The entrance was a door, probably centuries old, very battered and with iron fittings. We entered and went down a few steps to what appeared to be a cellar. Ron knew of this bar owned by a man named Issy. There were, in fact, three of those three bars, Abe's, Issy's and Solly's. Issy's was the nearest and into it we all trooped. Ron told us that the best wine to replace the blood we had lost would be a red one.



It was a seedy little dive, almost certainly the cellar to Izzy's house. The shelves were full of all manner of alcoholic drinks. Just about every type of drink had been copied and reproduced by the winegrowers in Palestine. I suppose that Jewish immigrants from all over the world, wine experts, had brought the knowledge of how to make their particular type of alcoholic drink with them to Palestine. Issy's bar contained all types of wine, liquor and spirit. We ordered, as instructed by Ron, red wine. It was served in tumblers costing only a piastre a glass (there were one hundred piastres in a pound). The wine was called Alicanti, a copy of the Spanish original. We each had several tumblers, enough we estimated, to replace the

lost blood. When we finally rolled back to Schneller, we were all very merry, incurring the wrath of the Officer on duty. We told him it was the glass of beer that we had been given after the blood donation that had caused our inebriation, obviously because the remaining blood in us had been thinned and could not cope with the influx of alcohol. To our surprise, that was accepted and we all went to our beds to sleep it off.

I wrote a silly letter to the ATS girl whose hat I had found. I told her that a British knight on a fiery steed had found the crown of a princess whilst riding through the Holy Land. Her name was Edna. To my delight she answered. She was stationed in Cairo and the next week was due to come to Jerusalem on leave. Would I like to meet her at the West End of the Jaffa Road? Of course I would. It would make a pleasant change from the

omnipresent and not always welcome Hannah. Edna stood there waiting for me. A beautiful young Jewish girl, with long black glossy hair. I handed over the hat. She was overjoyed to receive it, believing that she had seen the last of it. Then she took me to her home to meet her father who, she told me, was a famous author. We had tea together. The father seemed to me to be very old and there was no sign of a mother.

A week or so later I was due for leave. I decided to go to Cairo on my own - quite an adventure. Knowing that Edna was stationed in Cairo, I wrote to her and arranged to meet her there. I got my leave pass and a ticket for the train and set off in it across the Sinai Desert. Cairo was magical. The streets were bustling with all sorts of people of all nationalities. There were shops full of exciting things to buy and not too expensive. My accommodation was in a YMCA hostel, with dormitory beds - something like the youth hostels I'd known before the war. I quickly looked Edna up and, as it was her day off, took her for some sightseeing. We visited



the Cairo Zoo and strolled around the Muski (bazaarland). An old English lady came and introduced herself to us. She told us that she was the widow of an English diplomat and that, in her old age, she got pleasure in guiding the British servicemen round the bazaars. She took us to shops where souvenirs could be purchased. I bought a hanging tapestry and a bottle of scent for my Mum. The old lady advised me which scent to buy. I noticed that each time I bought something, the old lady wrote in a little notebook. I realised that she was in league with the shopkeepers on a commission basis. I later posted the bottle of scent home to my Mum. She wrote back telling me that it had contained no scent at all, just a bottle of water...

Pyramids. To my surprise I met up with an old school friend, Arnold Latcham, who was an organist (he it was who first introduced me to the Pall Mall organ, on which

he used to practice) and he was by way of being an amateur comic, self-named "Jay Kay". I visited his Army camp. He lived in awful conditions in a tent on the desert. It was very dusty. He and his friends had dug a channel all round the tent, buried the skirt of the tent in it and then filled it in. This kept some of the dust out. I was glad that I lived in Schneller. After the War he became news reported for *Reuters*

and then crime reporter for the *Daily Express*. We met up again at Giza, where we saw the Pyramids and the Sphinx. It was a great thrill to me to see these fabulous ancient Egyptian monuments, although I was surprised to see they were made stone of a yellowish colour. Up till then I had seen only black and white photographs of them and they looked pure white. We made a brave attempt to climb up the Cheops Pyramid but only got as far as the first block of stone.



I tried to arrange another meeting with Edna, but she was not very cooperative. I knew then that she was giving me the old "heave-ho". I was not too sorry. It would be back to the demanding Hannah again.

Once again in the Muski I was approached by a big, broadchested Egyptian who offered to guide me round the bazaars. He told me that he was not an official guide but a schoolmaster, teaching English, whose pleasure it was to show servicemen the sights of the Muski on his days off. His English was certainly very good. He did guide me - right to the shops where he could gain the most commission. I did not buy anything and, as it was obvious that he was not really guiding me to the interesting places in the Muski, I endeavoured to take my leave of him. Then he demanded payment and showed his true colours. I quickly left him, cursing me in very picturesque English. Later I heard that this is a very common way for so-called guides to insinuate themselves on gullible tourists, to describe themselves as teachers on their day off or some other fictitious profession.

Back in Jerusalem I was once more working in the Post Office and quite enjoying the life. Daily I would gather the sacks of post and put them on an open truck to take down to the main Army Post Office in the centre of town. It was very dirty work - the sacks were filthy - so I applied for overalls to enable my khaki drill uniform to stay unsoiled. The overalls were a little too big and sagged all over me. I was once told off by an officer for not standing to attention when he was talking to me. I had to point out to him that I was indeed standing to attention - it was the overalls that were standing at ease.

Hannah appeared from time to time and took me over. As usual, she organised my days off to her advantage.

Then something miraculous happened. Something which was to change my life forever. A consignment of ATS girls arrived at Schneller to be pay clerks. We called them "Comforts for the troops". In my trips round the camp, delivering the letters to the soldiers, I met these girls in the huts where they were working. They seemed to my jaded eyes to be pictures of beauty and charm. In one hut the staff sergeant in charge, Staff Sergeant Storey, a good friend of mine, introduced me to the girls, telling them that I was slightly mad (he'd seen me performing my mad pianist act in the concert party.) Storey ran the camp ambulance and first aid squad, of which I was a member.



After their first day's work the girls came up to me and asked me if I would give them a lift down to their billet in the centre of town, when I took the post down. Would I? Indeed I would. They clambered in and we set off. I found myself sitting opposite a pair of beautiful blue eyes. I was quickly attracted, dazzled and very interested. As the girls got off the truck I asked the blue eyes if she would like to come to a party that evening. (I did not have an invitation to a party but I knew of one where I could gatecrash without too much hassle. In Jewish circles this was a quite an acceptable way of behaving. It happened all the time. My conscience was clear.) To my delight she accepted. We met later in the evening and went to the party where we were made very welcome, enjoyed good food and plenty of fun and dancing the Hora. The ATS girl told me

that her name was Marjorie, that she was Welsh and that her father was an officer in the Pay Corps back in England.



I took her to all my favourite places in Jerusalem. I had an old friend named Absy, one of the first Arabs I got to know well. He was an accomplished silversmith in the Old City. In the first few weeks that I had lived in Jerusalem I had visited him and got him to make necklaces for Mum and my sister Gladys, each with an exquisite silver filigree cross. I introduced Marjorie to him and immediately he clapped his hands together. A small boy came running into the shop.



Absy ordered him to fetch coffee. Then I discovered that Marjorie did not like coffee, in fact it was the smell of it that put her off it. The taste of it gave no problems as she had happily eaten a coffeecake at the party. This made a moment of embarrassment. She could not insult Absy by refusing to drink it. The coffee Absy ordered was the traditional Turkish coffee, thick, strong and sweet, in little glasses. I suggested that she hold her nose as she drank. This she did to the enormous amusement of Absy, who promptly invited several of his shopkeeper neighbours in to watch the mad British woman drinking coffee whilst holding her nose. Everyone was happy and laughing together.

In those days the cafés and restaurants in Jerusalem were of two types, the better quality ones were for officers only and the lesser ones for other ranks. This certainly rankled amongst those of the other ranks who would have appreciated the pleasure of eating in more salubrious surroundings. In my last few days in Jerusalem this unfair ruling was suddenly rescinded, I never knew why, and all ranks could now use all the restaurants. I still stuck to the few places that I liked and these were the ones I took Marjorie to. My favourite was a little café owned by a Russian Jewess named Mrs. Pat. I introduced Marjorie to her and she was made as welcome there as I had always been. I also introduced Marjorie to Mrs. Pat's exquisite Strudels, delicious confections made of apple, nuts and honey. If we went together to a cinema, we often skipped the evening meal at Schneller and had dinner in a restaurant where the food was infinitely better. There were also canteens for the troops, the YMCA, the Toc H, St. Andrew's, Sally Army, where the food was good and inexpensive. Unlike in England, the seats in the cinemas had to be booked in advance. Whenever there was a popular film on, you had to be quick off the mark to book a seat. Ticket touts used to buy up rows of seats in advance and then sell them to hopeful viewers. We knew one of these touts, Nissim Shimshi – he worked in the

daytime as a civilian clerk in Schneller. We know him to this day, he has become an old friend. His commercial enterprise as a tout developed into becoming a very successful businessman. Each ticket also bears a revenue stamp – the Government took a cut as well!



This ticket shows the price as 85 mils – about one shilling and nine pence.

I took Marjorie to the Dead Sea, where I photographed her reading her *Woman's Own* magazine, whilst floating in it. It is impossible to sink in those densely salted waters.

Day by day we grew fonder of each other. We explored Jerusalem together, hand in hand. Occasional days off gave us enjoyable outings. Once we went to a little hilltop village called Ain Karim, just outside Jerusalem. There was an old lady missionary living there, Miss Carey, who sold tea and cakes in her retirement to raise a bit of extra money. As we climbed the hill towards Miss Carey's bungalow, we were surrounded by little Arab boys, offering to guide us there. One little boy went up to Marjorie and said, what sounded like, "You want miscarry?" In his innocence the little boy had not realised that he was offering directions to an abortionist. At the bungalow, we had tea and cakes and sat there on the balcony in the glorious sunshine. We were so happy.

We then slowly walked, hand in hand, along the ridge of the hill towards a beauty spot that I had visited once before on my own. It was called "The Oaks". All there was there was a spring of pure water surrounded by shady oak trees - not the oaks that we knew from home but Turkish Oaks, their acorn's cups covered in little curly hairs. Marjorie and I sat down together to admire the magnificent scenery of the surrounding hills and the sparkling view of the white stone buildings of distant Jerusalem. The sun was shining, it was early





spring and the weather was pleasantly cool. The hills around were covered in spring flowers, the biblically so-called "Lilies of the Field" – little anemones, irises, and giant squills. We drank from the delicious cold water coming out of the spring and ate our sandwiches. We were all alone up there till, suddenly, a little Arab boy, a shepherd with his long eared sheep looking more like cocker spaniels, appeared and came up to us, shyly offered us a wooden bowl full of ripe apricots. We took some and, as usual, expected to give the boy some "baksheesh". I took some money out of my pocket but the little boy refused to have it. He was only showing us the time-honoured Arab hospitality given towards strangers in their home area. He smiled gently and showed us a baby lamb, quite recently born, which he handed to Marjorie. She held the friendly little creature in her arms whilst I took a photograph. It was a halcyon day up there in Ain Karim. I was in seventh heaven.

We strolled later to the Garden of Gethsemane where an Irish monk offered to sell us a card on which was printed a prayer and had an olive leaf stuck to it. He told us that if we were to say this prayer ten times in an attitude of holiness, we would be absolved from 100 days of purgatory. He did not like it when I asked him how many days of purgatory I was due to have and I could then purchase sufficient cards to be able to say enough prayers to get off purgatory entirely. The Garden was full of mature olive trees that the monk assured us were there in the time of Christ and that He had knelt there amid them to make his well-known prayer to God. The monk also said that the leaf stuck on the card was from one of those trees and therefore extremely holy. I asked him how many cards he sold each day. When I heard how many, I pointed out that those trees were still full of leaves and, at the rate he was selling the cards, they should have been bare by now. He gave up on me.



Walking down the hill Marjorie told me that she wanted to have two children, a boy and a girl, named Brian and Gillian respectively. I had never given thought to becoming a father one day, but Marjorie's future hopes sparked off thoughts in that direction for me too. And I had no objection to the proposed names.

Just before the next weekend, the staff sergeant in the Orderly Room gave me a message from Hannah. It was the Jewish Feast of Hannukkah next weekend and Hannah had planned my day off to celebrate the Feast with her. Now the cat was amongst the pigeons. I had already told Marjorie all about Hannah and my continued reluctance with regards to her. I hit on the brilliant idea of asking Marjorie if she would pretend to be my fiancée just come out from England. Marjorie willingly agreed and borrowed a ring from one of the ATS girls, an older, nice, friendly lady with a ripe Cockney sense of humour. She was really very old. At least 35. I set off with Marjorie, engagement ring in position, for the Weizmann Institute. There was Hannah waiting. I explained to her, most theatrically that, to my great surprise, my fiancée had been posted from England to Jerusalem and here she was. (Ring in full view!) Hannah was furious! She was livid! She simply turned away and then stamped off. All the other ATS girls had been hiding in the bushes to watch the fun. The old Cockney owner of the ring said later, "Hannah picked up 'er arse with both 'ands and swep' off."

A little later, Marjorie said, "That was not too difficult, pretending to be your fiancée." As far as I was concerned, it was not too difficult pretending that I had a fiancée. We were walking in a beautiful park in Rehavia named King George V Park. As we sat down on a park bench, I turned to her and said, "Would you

really like to become engaged to marry me?" She really would! We kissed and that was that.

We had been invited that evening to the house of my Jewish friends, Alfred and Helen Felber, to join them in their Sabbath evening meal. When we got there, we were not the only guests. Another older couple, both English Jews who had emigrated to Israel before the war, were there. The husband was a jovial man, simply bubbling with fun. The solemnity of the Sabbath feast was punctuated by the appropriate prayers; bursts of laughter at the fun from the friend; and lots of congratulations on our engagement from everyone there.

I wrote home to my parents asking them to send some money from my savings account, with which Marjorie and I bought a beautiful diamond engagement ring from a Jewish jeweller. Owing to the war, the diamond trade (mostly Jewish) had moved from Amsterdam to Netanya in Israel. Diamonds were then obtainable in Israel far easier than anywhere else, probably in the world and, what was more important, more cheaply. So we got a really fine diamond at a price that was within my financial ability to pay. Marjorie has small hands with tiny fingers. The jeweller had to make the ring smaller to fit her.



Both of us were due to have a week's leave. We went to the Jewish Zionist Women's office to enquire about having a holiday on a kibbutz. The lady there who arranged the holiday for us was none other than our friend Helen Felber. She recommended Affikim, a settlement near the south of Lake Galilee.

We were not the only ones from Schneller going to Affikim. Another soldier, Simpson, and his fiancée, an ATS girl, were also on the bus with us setting off for the same place. Both were very religious and let it be known on all possible occasions. When we reached Affikim we were received by a friendly Jewish settler, who took us to our accommodation. He presumed that each couple would like a hut to stay in. Immediately Simpson firmly stated that he and his fiancée were not yet married and therefore could not sleep together in the same hut. Marjorie and I were so embarrassed that we also made the same protestation. Had Simpson and his girl not been there, we would happily have accepted a single hut. As it was we were accommodated in two huts near to each other. But we spent the whole week in just one of them.

Affikim is a beautiful kibbutz. Just about every type of cultivation was carried out there, together with animal farming - cows, chickens and rabbits. It was apparently not all religious and kosher rules did not seem to apply, except for one or two tables in the dining hall that were for those who remained strict Jews. Communist principles applied there. Nobody owned anything privately. Even the children seemed to belong to the kibbutz, not to their parents. They lived and slept in a crèche and were educated in the same building. At the end of a day's work the parents collected their children and played with them on the lawns in the shade of leafy trees. Some indulged in cultural activities - music or sport. It seemed to us to be a splendid arrangement in many

ways. The parents came fresh in the evening to their children, specially the very young ones and all seemed delighted to be together again. When it was bedtime the parents walked to the crèche, kissed their children and handed them over to the trained nurses who looked after them. Then the parents went their own ways to take part in a variety of activities or just to repair to their own huts. We spoke with several of these parents and they told us that they were very contented with this way of life.

The meals were taken in the huge communal dining hall



- excellent food, mostly vegetarian. Working in the kitchens was the least desirable job on the kibbutz so each member had to do his or her turn of duty in the kitchens, regardless of what job was their speciality. Even the kibbutz doctors and nurses had to take their turn.

One day we saw the settlers crowded round the notice board, obviously in a state of considerable anger. We asked what the matter was, but they politely and gently refused to tell us. Obviously we could not read about what it was on the notice board as it was all in Hebrew. Later we persuaded one of the settlers to tell us what it was all about. Apparently the day before, two Polish officers had taken a taxi and refused to pay the Jewish driver. They had then killed him. In the investigation that followed, all the Poles in their regiment had closed ranks and refused to reveal who the murderers were. Many of the settlers remembered the anti-Semitism and pogroms they had experienced in Poland, carried out by the Polish people, before they immigrated to Palestine and resented the fact that it had appeared to have followed them here. We were told that the reason they kept the news from us was that they did not want to embarrass us and spoil our holiday. We were continually impressed by the kindness of the settlers and the way they set about doing everything to make our holiday better. They explained their philosophy to us. There was no money – the place was fully communistically run. Should any settler wish to visit relatives in some other part of Palestine, they were given enough money just for the trip. They told us that very rarely did any settler want to leave, they were all so contented with their life as true communists.

We strolled through the settlement admiring all the different activities going on there. We entered a huge building from which a lot of noise was coming. It was a box factory. Boxes of all types and size were made to order there and were sent all over Palestine. There were several fields with various types of cultivation, all neatly laid out. There was corn, of course, but a very important crop was millet. We were served cooked millet as a vegetable with our dinners and also with milk and sugar as a cereal for breakfast. We saw orange, grapefruit and lemon groves, all with fully ripe fruit waiting to be picked.



Marjorie and I explored the district around the southern end of Lake Galilee, wandering happily, hand in hand, through beautiful countryside. We looked at the River Jordan as it exited from the lake. It appeared to

us to be a sluggish river with brown water, quite unlike what my imagination from Bible stories had given it. We wandered on to Lake Galilee, a vast expanse of water glittering in the sunlight. It looked very enticing so we swam in its warm waters and sunbathed on its banks. Of course I had to take a picture of us both. We visited Degania A, the first Jewish kibbutz to be created. It was a lovely place, cool and shaded by many mature trees of all varieties.



One day, Simpson and his fiancée joined us on a walk to Safad, one of the holy Jewish cities. We could see it on the horizon. Just as we were about to set off, we were joined by an Air Force man - a very unpleasant character of obscure nationality. We told him that we were friends on holiday together and did not want him with us. He totally ignored this and continued on the walk with us. No matter how far we walked towards Safad, it always appeared as far away as before. We realised that we could not reach it and back in one day so we returned to Affikim.



It was a pity that we had been saddled with this RAF man. I do not like to be rude to anyone but this man was impossible.

The next day the four of us decided to walk to the Al Hamma hot springs on the River Yarmuk. We had to prepare our trip in complete secrecy to avoid having the Air Force man with us. We waited till he went back to his hut after breakfast and set off at speed towards the River Yarmuk. We hurried along the road until we could not be seen any more from Affikim and then took it in a more leisurely way. I led us along the path that Ted Barnard and I had taken two years before.



The oleanders were in full bloom everywhere along the banks, a gorgeous bright red. The air was clean and scented and the sound of the river as it rushed over the rocks filled the valley. We negotiated the narrow cliff walk, through the stalagmite/stalagmite caves where the hornets lived, still actively buzzing around and, fortunately, ignoring us. As we climbed higher along the path we looked down to the river below. The rocks in the water looked, from where we were standing, like pebbles but we realised that they were actually quite huge. Further on we could hear the sound of rushing waters so we decided to explore further than Ted and I had done. Near the top of

the cliff we found a deep cave out of which poured rapidly gushing water, which fell as a waterfall to the river below. We changed into our bathing costumes and revelled in the cool waters as they bounced all over us.

When we reached the hot springs at al-Hemma we found a pool some distance from the main concourse where we could put our costumes on again and bath in the steaming waters. Hanging all over the place was the stinking miasma of sulfuretted hydrogen. We would have liked to get in the waters together but had we attempted this nearer where the Arab men were all bathing there would have been a very unpleasant incident. The Koran and its Arabic interpreters have decreed that men should not be allowed to see females' wearing scant clothing, so there was an area for men in the open air and one for women in a heavily concealed enclosure.



After we had enjoyed our hot baths we showered under fresh water to remove the stink, dressed and met up again. Simpson's fiancée had become very ill. Her period had started most painfully. She used to suffer from this the same way every month. We got very worried when it was apparent that the pain was so great, that she could hardly walk.

Running along the bank of the Yarmuk was a single-track narrow-gauge railway and near us was a siding. On the siding stood one of those little trucks that used to be seen in early Hollywood comedy films. It had two handles that two people could pump up and down to make the truck progress down the line. We loaded the poor girl onto this truck and the rest of us piled on. Simpson and I pumped away and the little truck shot off along the line, away from al-Hemma, in the direction of Galilee. We made good progress but I dread to think what might have happened had we met a train coming in the opposite direction. Fortunately, not far from Galilee we were able to shunt the truck into another siding. There were shady trees nearby where our invalid was able to rest till the aspirin she had taken had kicked in. The Railway workers must have been puzzled as to

how the truck had changed its place of rest.

Back in Schneller, life continued as before. One new activity started. I with four other Pay Corps Rover Scouts started a Wolf Cub Pack in the British Community School. The 39th Jerusalem Pack. Every Saturday afternoon, those of us who were not on duty went to the school to bring the pleasures of scouting to those boys. The cubs knew me as "Baloo". Every so often we gave them a game that they really enjoyed. It was basically a treasure hunt. John and I would arrive very early at the school and go into the fields around the school, laying out clues for the boys to follow. These were written on slips of paper, which we would conceal in various places, each slip giving a clue to the next one. For instance, a clue would read, "The next clue is in the hollow olive tree". The last clue was always an anagram telling the boys where the prize was hidden, back in the school.

One day we were laying our clues when we noticed that two Arab policemen were following us. They were doing their utmost not to be seen by us, even to the extent of crawling on their stomachs across the stony field. The last clue (in anagram of course) was "Het zepir si tihw Klaea" – ("The prize is with Akela"). Akela was the leader of our Pack, one of my comrades from Schneller. John and I entered the school and changed into our scout uniforms. We went to the front door just as the two panting policemen arrived. They asked me if I had seen two soldiers entering the school - they had not realised that it was us, as dressed as Rover Scouts, we must have appeared to be two different people. I said, "No". Then one of them said, "They are German Spies. We've been following them and have collected all the messages they've left for their fellow spies". In the hand of one of them was a bundle of our slips of paper. I asked him how he knew that they were German spies. He showed me the last anagram slip. "Look sir, it's written in German". I called one of the cubs over and said to him, "What does this say". The cub immediately showed the policeman how the words could be re-arranged to give the final clue.

The poor policemen were crestfallen. Nevertheless I praised them for being so observant, even if mistaken. Then I insisted that they go right round the course of our treasure hunt and replace all the clues. Of course, I had to write out a different final clue. Sometime later I met up with the Chief of Police, an Englishman whom I knew well. I told him the story of the vigilant Arab policemen and he was delighted. He said that he would interview them and praise them for their efforts, although they had been mistaken. He said that it was pleasing to find a couple of Arab policemen who showed initiative.

Our Jewish friend Alfred Felber asked me if it were possible for his eight-year-old son, Moshe, to join our Wolf



Cub Pack. Alfred remembered how much he had enjoyed being in the Scouting movement as a boy in England, long before the family immigrated to Palestine. I was able to arrange this and Moshe turned up each Saturday. Three of us Rovers had a free weekend coming up, so we decided to take the cubs camping. We borrowed enough tents and other camping equipment from the Scout Headquarters and camped

in a field belonging to the Orthodox Greek monastery, right on the top of Mount Scopus. When we had our meals I had to make sure that there was a special kosher meal for Moshe. It was a lovely camp. The boys had a really good time, partly educational and



partly just plain fun and games.

Moshe is sitting in front with his hand in front of his face.

When we got back there came a bombshell. Alfred asked me to come and see him. Apparently the Chief Rabbi had got to hear that we had allowed Moshe to join our Pack and was furious. He was convinced that my sole reason for taking Moshe into the Pack was to convert him to Christianity. Me! The last person who would do such a thing. There was nothing for it. We said a sad farewell to Moshe. Later we were told that Moshe had joined the Sophim scouts attached to the synagogue. Alfred was not pleased, as those scouts were not like ours. They were too politically orientated.

I was suddenly taken ill. Both my ears became terribly painful. Our M.O. diagnosed otitis media. An ambulance was called and I was packed off to the 62nd General Hospital on the top of Mount Scopus, Kaiser Bill's ostentatious palace. I lay in a hospital bed on the third floor of the main palace building feeling dreadful. A doctor examined me and started treatment with a new "wonder" drug called M. & B. 693. This was sulphanilamide. (Now known as Septrin.) He told me that this drug would soon put me right.

It was Christmas Eve. Everyone who was fit enough was already celebrating. But not I ! The painful ears were giving me enough stress to ruin my Christmas for me. In addition, the M. & B. 693 had horrible side effects. It made me dizzy and I could not see clearly. I was given a writing pad on which anyone who had to speak to me could write down what I was obviously unable to hear.

Christmas morning dawned painfully and unpleasantly. When I wanted to go to the toilet, one of the nurses or orderlies had to support me all the way there and back or else the vertigo would have caused me to fall. As I stood up everything seemed to be going round and round.

One of the sergeants was an organist. It had been planned that he was to play for the Christmas Day carol service in the chapel of Kaiser Bill's palace. Unfortunately he had been celebrating too much the night before and had already continued to do so the next morning. He was quite incapable of playing the organ or of doing anything else much. He was totally blotto.

The Padre made enquiries and discovered that there was an organist amongst the patients. Me! He climbed up the three flights of stairs to my ward and shook me awake. "I want you to play for the carol service," he said. He was wasting his time speaking to me. I couldn't hear a word. I passed my pad to him and he wrote on it that he wanted me to play for his service. I explained that it was quite impossible. I was much too ill. I couldn't hear and I was suffering from vertigo. He was one of those clergymen to whom everything could be overcome in the name of the Lord. He was also very jolly and in a jolly way he wrote, "You'll manage, old boy, we'll all help you, won't we?"

Before I could object again he had produced two nurses who dressed me. I was quite incapable of dressing myself. Then, with one nurse under each armpit, I was steered towards the stairs. They eased me, staggering, down those three flights of stairs and, at the bottom, guided me through the hospital, across the grounds, to the chapel.

This chapel was a gigantic affair - very Germanic, gloomy, high and covered with carvings of German eagles. The organ was in an eerie, a shelf halfway up the wall of the building, at the opposite end to the altar. We had to get up there somehow. Not so easy, as the way up was by a narrow spiral staircase. Those two nurses, with great difficulty, shunted me between them on the long climb to the organ loft. Once there, I collapsed. I told the nurses that they would have to ask the padre to send me someone to pump the organ and someone to follow the service, so as to interpret what was going on, as I could hear nothing.

What happened then I can only surmise. The Padre must have told the sergeant major to find two men, one to pump and the other to keep me informed as to when to play. The sergeant major must have relayed the message to a passing sergeant, who must have detailed some lance corporal to go and find two men to help me in the organ loft. The lance corporal must have found two men and told them, "You and you, you're wanted in the organ loft." The two men he found were a black Nigerian and a locally enlisted orthodox Jew. They were sent up to me without explanation. The black man could speak no, or very little, English. The orthodox Jew resented enormously being forced to enter a Christian church and to take part in a Christian church service. I showed the black man how to pump the organ. He was delighted! With a happy smile that showed all of his beautiful white teeth, he started pumping and, from then on, I couldn't stop him. He even pumped all the way through the Padre's sermon. The Jew sat, hunched up, on a chair and glowered. Otherwise he took no further part in the proceedings. I was desperate, I was also marooned and there was nothing I could do about it.

I took my seat at the organ and fumbled my way through some sort of involuntary. My back was to the chancel and the only way I had of interpreting the progress of the service was to look in a small mirror, much like the driving mirror in a car, which was placed above my head. My vision was rather blurred but I could just make out what the Padre was doing. When he lifted a book, I presumed it was the hymnbook, so that when he faced the congregation and appeared to say something to them, I knew I could start playing the carol. All seemed to go well following this method. Then the Padre settled down to his sermon. I watched him as carefully as I could till I saw him pick up a book and turn to the congregation to say something. That was my cue so I burst in with the opening bars of *O come all ye faithful*. Unfortunately the Padre had not picked up the hymnbook - it was his Bible from which he intended to read a text. There was considerable confusion. I played on manfully and all ended disastrously. As far as I was concerned it served him right. Afterwards he tried to accuse me of not paying attention in the service. I offered him my pad to write what he was angrily saying to me and, I suppose, he realised that I was incapable of hearing anything so he shut up and stormed away. Hardly the Christmas spirit for a Padre to show. Christmas for me was a non-event. I did not feel like eating turkey or Christmas pudding and I felt positively worse when a group of visiting "God Botherers", civilians from one of the churches, appeared and sang carols at me. I pulled the blankets over my head and refused to join in. It was even worse when some of them tried to cheer me up with hearty Christmas waffle.

I continued with the M. & B. 693 feeling dizzier and dizzier all the while till the course of treatment had finished.

Marjorie came to visit me. I was beginning to feel better but I must have looked dreadful. My head was bandaged, with great pads to absorb the discharge from my ears. The whole effect looked like a turban. I managed to get up and dress in my Army patient's uniform; and even took a photograph of Marjorie and me together, using the delayed action device on the camera.



On my last day in the hospital, I was taken to the E.N.T specialist who syringed my ears. Painfully! He told me he had to remove all the debris.



Back in Schneller, life went on as usual till Marjorie's friend, Peggy, announced that she was getting married to her Palestine policeman fiancé. We went down to the Old City, to a bazaar where materials of all sorts were sold. There the girls chose suitable material for dresses for a bride and a bridesmaid. Marjorie is a very good needlewoman and soon made beautiful dresses for the occasion. The wedding was booked to take place in Christchurch.

As church organist I offered a sort of package deal. Naturally I played the *Lohengrin*, music *Here comes the Bride*. Then I played the chosen hymns. And finally I belted out Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*. Where I sat I had a good view of the congregation. I was able to see when the last guest had left the church. Then I quickly scrambled outside, climbed the ladder leaning against the church tower, up to the window. Climbed into the window, where there was a row of ropes hanging. I pulled these ropes, methodically, to play a cheerful peal for the bridal couple and the guests outside. I have no idea what sort of bells they were but they were referred to as a glockenspiel, so they may have been tubular bells for all I knew. The effect was splendid. I then climbed down the ladder again, in time to take photographs of the happy couple, their bridesmaid and all the guests.

Everyone made their way to Rehavia where our dear friend, Mrs. Krongold, had prepared a splendid wedding breakfast (within the limits of wartime rationing, of course). It was so kind of her to do this in her beautiful piano-shaped bungalow. It drew a lovely day to a fine, emotionally clad, ending. Marjorie and I felt quite envious of Peggy's marital happiness.

Not far from Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho there is an inn, the so-called site of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Near there is a path that leads down a valley through



the Wilderness of Judea to one of the most beautiful spots in Palestine – the Wadi Kelt. It is a large cleft in the desert where water pours down from the hills above. In ancient times the Romans had built an aqueduct which guided the water in a

disciplined way towards Jericho. Some of this aqueduct still remains but where it is damaged the water gushes into the cleft as a beautiful waterfall. This was a favourite place for a day out for us soldiers and ATS girls. In the heat of the day it was quite cool and sheltered from the sun down there. We lazed about and bathed in the cool waters till it was time to go back to Jerusalem. I needed to return earlier than the others as I had to play the organ at Christchurch for Evensong. It was terribly hot outside the Wadi so I soaked my towel with water and wrapped it round my head. I set

off up the path but before I got halfway, the water had evaporated and still the sun beat down on me. I rested in the shade of rocks from time to time and then finally reached the road. I collapsed from heat exhaustion outside the inn. An Arab saw me and lifted me into the inn, where he washed me in cool water and gave me some to drink. I suppose he saved my life. I wonder if that Arab was a reincarnation of the original Good Samaritan?



For our next leave, we decided to go to Cairo and Luxor. Also joining us was my old school friend, Gerald Buckley. We got permission to go and received travel passes to Cairo but when we arrived at Jerusalem railway station, we were informed that the train had been requisitioned by a whole regiment of infantry that was going to fight in the Western Desert. There was no room for Gerald and me, although Marjorie could join a group of WRENS, the girls in the Navy, as there was room in the girls' First Class compartment.

Gerald and I had to make our own way to Cairo by whatever means we could. We rushed to the bus station and

caught a bus to Hebron, as that seemed to be on the way. The only available transport from then on was a decrepit old truck, full of Arabs and their goats. They cheerfully accepted us on board and we had a hilarious journey all the way to Beersheba. The Arabs looked on us as mad Englishmen for wanting to travel so haphazardly to Cairo.

At Beersheba, hungry and despondent, we wandered through the market. We purchased some Arab chapatis (flat pancake-like bread) and some sheep cheese. Then we went out into the desert along the road to Cairo and



stood there, hoping to hitch a lift. Absolutely nothing came. All we could do was to prepare to spend the night in the desert. It was getting freezing cold as it always did at night. The sand retained the warmth from the sun so we found a lump of wood and dug a couple of holes in which to lie and cover ourselves with sand. Just as we were about to lie down we heard the sound of a distant motor. We jumped up and ran for the road, just in time to stop a British Army ambulance. The driver willingly let us get inside where there were two stretchers on which we lay down and went to sleep. The ambulance stopped at an army way-station at Al-Arish for

petrol; and food for the driver and us. Just as we were about to set off again, up came a very seedy, scruffy looking soldier who announced that he was suffering from some obscure complaint that required him to lie down and rest frequently. He produced some bored orderly officer who, for peace and quiet, just confirmed that the soldier should lie down on one of the stretchers in the ambulance. That meant that Gerald and I would have to take it in turn to use the other stretcher or to lie on the floor. This way we managed to pass the rest of the night whilst the disreputable soldier slept soundly the whole way. Next morning he cheerfully told us that he had lied to the officer and that there was absolutely nothing wrong with him.

We arrived in Cairo early in the morning and found accommodation in the Toc H Hostel. Then we went to the YWCA Hostel to join up with Marjorie. She was very surprised to see us as she fully expected that we would never be able to reach Cairo.



We spent the whole day exploring the wonders of Cairo. In one bazaar we came across another school friend of ours, Vic Phillips. I was very surprised to find him in the Army, as at school he suffered from weak bones that fractured at the least provocation. Apparently he had been cured.

We went to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx at Giza. The hot weather had not

yet arrived – it was springtime in Egypt. We soldiers still wore our warm winter uniforms. Marjorie, as an ATS girl, was permitted to wear civvie clothes. It was quite comfortable walking around in the desert. The Sphinx was still the same – the foreground of this



photograph was the only thing to have altered. Marjorie and I attempted to climb up the side of Cheops's pyramid. We should have done it with help from one of the guides who knew the best route to take. As it was, we got halfway up and then stuck. Any further trying to climb seemed too nerve-wracking so we went down again - much more difficult than climbing up!



The next day we went to Memphis and Saqqara, the former being a beautiful palm grove with a giant sphinx statue carved from alabaster and two huge statues of Ramses II lying on their backs. Saqqara was way out in the desert so we hired a guide and a donkey each to take us there. We saw another pyramid, the famous Step Pyramid, much smaller than those at Giza. Our guide then intended to take us to see the underground Serapeum, a weird subway system of



tunnels lit only by little electric light bulbs. Just as we started to go there a monstrous sandstorm started. It was truly frightening. Visibility was nil. I think that the donkeys knew their way without looking because they steadily progressed in the right direction whilst the guide walked beside unconcerned. Marjorie had a large silk scarf which we cut into three pieces and each wrapped round our noses and mouths. Once in the Serapeum we felt safe again. The tunnels were built in ancient times to house the tombs of 25 sacred bulls, embalmed and put in enormous sarcophagi of solid granite. The mind boggles as to how those giant sarcophagi were taken down into the tunnels.

The tunnels were built in ancient times to

The rest of our leave was to be spent in Luxor. The YMCA, who ran a very successful tourist bureau for the forces, booked a stay for us in a hotel called *Hotel des Familles* and tickets for the train. That evening we set off on the long, tedious journey to Luxor. Sleeping on those wooden seats in the carriages was anything but comfortable. To make things worse, every hour an Arab came into our carriage and squirted fly-killer everywhere, including all over us. We could not dissuade him. He had his job to do, although I am sure that, had we given him some baksheesh, he would have left us in peace.



At dawn we arrived in Luxor and were taken to the hotel, *L'Hotel des Familles*. We were delighted with the place. It stood back from the noisy main street in a cool leafy garden. The rooms were clean and the beds comfortable. The meals were rather monotonous, consisting always of fried eggs, chips and aubergine with bread, usually served in the gardens under the shade of a canopy of vines. The YMCA had laid on a guide for us. He introduced himself as Hassani, a skinny, energetic man, with a good knowledge of English. His father had been the guide to the archaeologists who had worked on the Mortuary Temple of Queen Hapshetsut. We were met by Hassani with a horse drawn gharry. I felt really sorry for the poor

horse. It was thin and showed all its bones through its skin and there were sores where the harnesses had



enormous penis, which stuck out, in an erect position in front of him. Of course, later on every girl insisted on being taken back by her boy friend to see what it was all about. Marjorie was no exception!

The next day, early, Hassani collected us all for a day trip to Thebes, on the other side of the Nile. He had booked a felucca that sailed us in a dignified way across the river. There, waiting for us were the most antiquated Chevrolets, held together with ropes and nails. Hassani referred to them as "American Donkeys". We climbed aboard one and it groaned its way

rubbed. Cruelty to animals seemed to be very common to Egyptians. Their poor little donkeys carried great weights on their backs and were whipped if they did not move quick enough.

The first trip with Hassani was to the Temple of Luxor, a splendid ruin with still much of it intact and standing. At one point Hassani made the girls in his party walk away whilst he took the men into a corner of the temple. There he showed us men a carved relief of the god of fertility on the wall. This god only had one leg, apparently to give more emphasis to his



across the desert, the driver not bothering to use the clutch to change gear. The noise was horrible and did not give any great conviction as to safe arrival anywhere. Nevertheless they did get us to the various antiquities that we were able to visit. At midday, near to the famous Mortuary Temple of Queen Hapshetsut, with its impressive row of pillars set in front of massive, frowning cliffs, Hassani announced that we were going to the Temple of Lunch. It was a great barn of a place with tables and chairs and a generous supply of sandwiches, boiled eggs and hot tea. After all our traipsing around ruins and temples we fell onto the food with great enthusiasm. Never had such a prosaic meal tasted so good.

After visits to many fascinating tombs of kings, queens and nobles, Hassani took us to the jewel of all the tombs - that of Tut Ankh Amun. All of its fabulous treasures are now in the Cairo Museum and, apart from brilliant wall paintings, all that there is to see is King Tut's great sarcophagus. It is a most spectacular place and really worth seeing. Photography was forbidden.

The brief stay in Luxor was soon to end. On that last evening I walked with Marjorie to the Temple of Luxor in the moonlight. It seemed impossible to imagine a more romantic place. Even the god of fertility did not seem entirely out of place there!

Back in Cairo we learnt that there was no vacancies at all in the train going back to Jerusalem, not even for the girls. We would have to hitch hike. A bus took us to Ishmaliya by the Suez Canal. We stood by the road hoping to get a lift. Nobody stopped for us. The lorries and trucks were far too busy and full, driving back and forth, coping with all the military needed in the great push in the Western Desert. Finally along came an American lorry that stopped for a while, but not to pick us up. Only two or three of us were standing there, the others were in a café opposite. When we asked for a lift, one of the American soldiers made it quite plain that he thoroughly disliked the Slimy Limeys and did not want to let us into the lorry. Then occurred a big argument between the two Americans. The other man, much more friendly, wanted to help us. Finally he

succeeded in getting his own way and let us get in the back. We quickly called all the others and they ran out of the café and got on the lorry. The nasty American nearly had a fit. He had only agreed to us few; and now the fucking lorry was full of fucking Limeys. But by that time the nice one was driving across the Canal on the way to Palestine.



We had a short "comfort" break halfway across the Sinai desert - easier for the men than for the girls. The nasty American told us, in a bad-tempered way, that they were going to Tel Aviv so we would have to dismount at the parting of the ways in Palestine. For some reason, when we reached that point, Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, neither of the Americans noticed the direction signs and we ploughed on towards Jerusalem. Of course, we did not say anything. When eventually we found ourselves in the suburbs of Jerusalem instead of Tel Aviv the nasty American gave way to the most vicious display of cursing us for not telling him. We professed complete ignorance of the fact, of course, and hopped off the lorry, thanking the two of them profusely for their kindness. The nice American was hugely amused!

Every night I used to walk Marjorie back to her billet in the centre of town. The girls were quartered above a row of shops next to the Police Station. Our usual routine was to go to the cycle sheds behind the shops to indulge in an affectionate few minutes together in the dark - not necessarily alone, as other couples also knew of the cycle sheds.

As I walked away in the direction of Schneller, I passed a group of Palestine policemen moving towards the Police Station and the girls' billet. Only they were not Palestine policemen! They were Jewish terrorists, disguised in stolen police uniforms. As I continued up the Jaffa Road, there was an enormous explosion behind me. I turned and ran towards the billet but was stopped by two Military Police who ordered me to go at once back to my regiment. I had no choice but to obey, worried out of my mind by what might have happened to the girls.

At Schneller I was given a rifle with "one up the spout" and loaded onto an open truck with several of my comrades. We were put in charge of a very young second lieutenant - a chinless wonder who had probably gained his commission straight from the cadet corps in his public school. We drove down the street and then the young officer screamed for the truck to stop. He ordered us to present arms in a firing position. None of us had had any experience of this so we made an immense clatter of hoisting up our guns. He had seen two men crawling along the pavement behind a garden wall. "Put your hands up", shouted our lieutenant to the two men. One of them stood up and said, "Oh shut up, sonny, you've just ruined our chance of catching the terrorists in that house, with the noise of all your toy soldiers". We just fell about laughing and there was nothing the red-faced lieutenant could do about it. But believe it or not, he did the very same thing moments later, when he saw a shadowy figure of a man standing on a balcony. This time the man, another Palestine policeman, gave the lieutenant some choice language to our great delight and amusement.



The next morning we learned that the girls' billet had indeed been blown up with the girls in it. One wall had

been blown onto the beds but by good fortune none of the girls were in bed yet. Only one girl was slightly injured, ironically a locally enlisted Jewish girl. The word went around amongst our fellows, that had any of our British girls suffered, we would have rioted in the Jewish part of the town. An understandable, but stupid reaction! We later heard that the Jewish terrorists were led by a man called Begin, who later became the Prime Minister of the young state of Israel - a hero of his people. Like all terrorists he was not concerned about collateral damage or deaths, in this case of young British ATS girls.

The immediate reaction of the Pay Corps command was to transfer the girls to Schneller. Our officers were turfed out of their comfortable bungalows in our compound and sent to be billeted in Allenby Barracks, on the other side of town. The bungalows were in an area enclosed by a high brick wall. We other ranks were informed that that area was strictly out of bounds to us. It became known as "The Harem" and we half expected to see a big black eunuch with a scimitar standing guard outside the gates.

Unfortunately for Marjorie and me there was no cycle shed there.

Our next leave was due to take place some months later so we both booked a holiday, through the YMCA, at a famous resort in the mountains of the Lebanon.

Then came a great shock to us both! My transfer to ENSA came through. I had almost forgotten that I had applied for it so many months before. Marjorie was in tears. Neither of us wanted to be parted. There was nothing we could do about it. I had to go. Marjorie went on holiday to the Lebanon on her own.

I went through all the formalities of being discharged from the Army to the "Y" Reserve, whatever that means. I was put on a train to Cairo with all my equipment, kit bags, haversack, small side bag, gas mask, blanket, tin helmet and so on. At Cairo a friendly ENSA driver collected me from the station and took me to the ENSA HQ. This was a building that had previously been a harem belonging to the Egyptian royal family. King Faroukh had actually been born there.

My first job was to visit the accounts department to collect some money. To my amazement, the whole of ENSA, concert party people, musicians, administrative staff and local employees, were paid by a few men sitting in one office. What a difference from the Pay Corps, where so many people worked, paying soldiers by the day. Here, apparently, I was to be paid by the fortnight. And in advance – two weeks! From being a one pound five shillings a week soldier, I found myself becoming a four pound ten shillings a week ENSA artiste. In addition I was handed nine pounds and told to find myself lodgings. £9 would pay for the coming fortnight. All I had to do was to present a receipt from the lodgings back to the office. What a civilised way of doing things, thought I. With £18 in my pocket I felt like a millionaire. I walked out of the office into the crowded streets of Cairo to look for accommodation. It was a bit bewildering.

I just followed my nose, up various side streets, looking for a place to stay. Of course I remembered in which direction I was walking, so that I could find my way back to the ENSA HQ. Then, walking down a quiet road, I saw the very place. It was a little hotel straight out of a Van Gogh painting. It even had the little orange trees in wooden tubs outside. I walked in and registered at the reception. The clerk seemed a little surprised to see me but accepted me and gave me a room - a nice, clean and comfortable room with a wash bowl and running water. The bed was comfortable too. And only £4 a week. I would make 10 shillings profit out of the deal.

I went back to the ENSA HQ to collect my gear and took it to the hotel. After I had settled in I went back to the office to find out what I was to do as a member of ENSA.

I was put in the "Good Music" Department. This consisted of three men. An officer, whom I knew from Jerusalem (I think he had been partly responsible for my transfer), Lieutenant Michael Vickers. He had only

known me as the organist of Christchurch, hence my attachment to the "Good Music" Department. A stupid name. What is all the other music in the concert parties etc.? "Bad Music"? The other two were a sergeant and a corporal. I soon found that all I was doing was writing music. For instance, a visiting orchestra might be short of a violin part. I would have to write it for them. In those days there were no biro's - I had to write with a pen and bendy nib, dipped in liquid ink. It was thoroughly boring. Is this what I had left my darling Marjorie to do all day? The lieutenant and the corporal spent the whole day composing music. One of them, I can't remember whom, was composing a ballet about a chess game. I had a feeling that it had already been done, *Checkmate* by Bliss, but I didn't say anything. The sergeant fancied himself as a singer and took me into a rehearsal room to accompany him. He chose a song with a frantically, impossibly nasty and difficult accompaniment, which I would have had to practice quite a lot. He expected me to sight-read it and when I fluffed it, he was very scathing. Actually that was the best thing he could have done for he must have reported to higher authority that I was no good for the "Good Music" department as I couldn't even accompany a simple "Good Music" song.

The next day I was told to report to the office where I was told that I had to join a touring concert party, the *Keep it Dark* company. My heart sang! I was introduced to Jack Telman, the manager of the party. He told me the reason why I was joining his show. The previous pianist, a sergeant, was always drunk and incapable of playing the show reliably. He had been chucked out of ENSA, back to his regiment. Unfortunately he had disappeared taking all the music with him.

Jack himself had composed most of the music of the show. This meant that he would have to sit down and write it all again. I met all the other members of the company and, as fast as Jack wrote a page or so of a song, I rehearsed it with whoever was supposed to perform it. This meant that I had a good opportunity of learning the music thoroughly. It was excellent material that Jack had written. I began to be filled with admiration for the man. Before the war he had been a chartered accountant, but as his health was not considered to be good enough to join the forces, he had been put in the Pay Corps as a civilian clerk. There, realising the stupidity of the accounting system, which I have already remarked upon, he had set to work to alter it, in the department in which he worked. When the senior officers saw what was happening he was quickly chucked out of the Pay Corps. His methods would have reduced the number of men working and consequently, higher up, the number of senior officers required.

We rehearsed hard during the day and each evening I walked back to my little Van Goch hotel, following the twisted route that I had originally taken. One day, as I walked out of the hotel, I happened to glance to the right, up the street in the opposite direction to which I had arrived there. At the end of the street, I saw a cinema, which I knew was only a short distance from ENSA HQ. I must have taken a very roundabout way of getting to the hotel. So I turned right and walked towards the cinema. At the end of the street, I saw to my horror, a huge poster declaring that the whole area was "RED LAMP" – brothels – and totally out of bounds to the troops. I was completely shaken and turned, almost running, back down the street, entered the hotel, reclaimed my equipment, paid, and shot off down the side streets to ENSA HQ.



I must admit that I had often wondered why there was so much to-ing and fro-ing all night in my hotel, but as I was a heavy sleeper, it had not worried me. I suppose that I was quite innocent of the ways of the evil world in those days! This was the second time I had been billeted in a brothel. Once in England and once in Egypt. I must have been very naïve that I was totally unaware till later, in both cases.



Talking to other ENSA soldiers, I learnt that there was a vacancy at a boarding house, *Elysée Pension*, run by an old French woman. It was on the third floor of an apartment block. I moved in there and found myself sharing a room with three other men. There was a delightful Egyptian servant, a woman named Fifi. I'm not sure if that were her real name but it was what we called her. She was a Moslem but not a very strict one, at least in the apartment, where she did not cover her face from us, although she did cover her hair. However, before going out into the street she put a veil in front of her face. She spoke only three words of English. When we thanked her for anything she would reply, "Don't-a mention it!" If we needed a bath, we had to operate an antiquated geyser in the bathroom. It was thoroughly frightening.

Nine times out of ten we had to get Fifi or the old landlady to come and get it working, which consisted of banging it hard at the appropriate time and place. And even then it did not always work.

The company consisted of Jack Telman, himself – producer, writer, composer and comedian. There was a lady comedienne, Wynne Boulton, whom I did not like at all as a person, but I admired her as a comic. A lady singer, Doris Ingham, very Welsh, sang well and exhibited a rather unpleasant snobbishness about the soldier members of the company (the stage manager, Ray Wharton, and me.) She considered us to be somewhat inferior as we were not civilian artistes and frequently said so. There was a lovely little soubrette, Hope Jackman. She was very talented as a singer and dancer and was also full of fun. The other man, a light comedian, was Ron Johnson and he had a wooden leg. He had lost his leg in his late teens when the doctors could not cure a serious infection in his knee. Of course, that was before the days of penicillin. He was a lovely man, very friendly to me, and with a splendid dry sense of humour. On the stage, apart from a slight limp, you would not have known of his handicap. To complete the company, were two dancers, Nan and Jeanne. I don't think I knew their surnames. They danced in flimsy, almost see-through costumes – much to the delight of their servicemen audiences – a dance which they described as "floaty floaty". They also took part in sketches.

Apart from individual acts, all the company took part in the sketches that had been written by Jack. It seemed to me to be a very good show, what little of it I was learning from the sheets of music that were written by Jack and passed to me for rehearsal.

We were then told that we had to set off for Cyprus. I was given the rank of corporal, which puzzled me as the previous pianist was a sergeant. Jack advised me to buy corporal's stripes on detachable armbands, so that I could wear them if necessary and take them off to appear to be a civilian artiste. I was also quickly measured and given two dinner jackets, one black and the other white, together with white shirts and a black bow tie.

The show was far from ready. Jack was still writing the music but we had to go. We loaded our luggage and theatrical props onto an ENSA coach and set off in the direction of Port Said. This was the life for me! I was at last on the road.

Port Said was a bustling town. The harbour was full of shouting Egyptian Arabs loading and unloading ships.

Much of their cargo seemed to be warlike equipment for the forces. The battles in the Western Desert had finally gone our way in the great push made by General Montgomery and the Eighth Army. Travel in the Mediterranean was now safe for our shipping.

We were loaded onto a small steamer and given cabins. The civilian artistes were given a cabin each but Ray and I, being soldiers, had to share one. I began to learn that there was a social difference between civilians and soldiers – rather like that between officers and other ranks. There was a small saloon with a decrepit piano. We would have to continue our rehearsals there.

We stood on the deck of the ship watching the busy life of the dockside. Suddenly an Army ambulance arrived. Out stepped two Military Policemen and two civilians, a man and a woman under armed escort. The Police marched the civilians up the gangplank, down the steps into the bowels of our ship. There they were locked up in the brig. We enquired as to what was their crime. We were told that they were Cypriot lepers being taken to a leper colony on Cyprus.

The crossing to Cyprus was quite uneventful. We docked at Limassol but were not allowed to go ashore. We had to wait whilst they unloaded the cargo. It was fertiliser, manure from Egypt, possibly gathered daily in Bedouin camps. The stench was awful. I stood on the decks watching the whole process and became aware that two people were standing beside me. They were the two lepers! Somehow they had escaped from down below. I was terrified that I might have caught the disease from them. The policemen quickly ushered them down below again but that did not allay my fears.

Eventually we went ashore and were picked up by an ENSA coach that took us to Nicosia, the capital city of Cyprus. We crossed a dusty plain where frequent dust “devils” could be seen, columns of twisting sand whirling up from the ground like miniature versions of the hurricane twisters of America.

Our hotel stood in the main square. We were all given rooms, except Doris Ingham who had to go to an annexe nearby. As usual, the civilian artistes had a room each and Ray and I, the soldier artistes, had to share one. Doris was furious and began a tirade against Ray and me, trying to insist that we should have been put in an Army camp, to allow her to have a room in the main hotel. She really believed that we soldiers were inferior beings.

We continued our rehearsals in the bar of the hotel till the whole show was buttoned up. Then we were given a few days off to recover. Jack, as manager, had the job of getting the money and paying us. I was given £9. I felt as rich as Croesus.

We all went out onto the town and looked around. Nicosia is a pretty little place, well treed and full of colourful blossoms such as bougainvillea, pomegranate and passion flower. We went to the local bazaars to admire all the wonderful things they had to sell. I soon discovered that Jack was something of a wheeler-dealer. Sunglasses were for sale everywhere so Jack bought lots of them. He had heard that they were scarce in other parts of the Middle East. At his advice I bought a few too.

As I enjoy looking at old buildings, I amused myself doing this on my own. I wandered down quaint little lanes and found many interesting little byways. I’ve no idea what the others got up to.

A few of us went to the local swimming pool. The girl in the foreground is Hope Jackman. I am peeking out from behind the tree. There I met an Air Force man who told me that he was from America but, being of British birth, he had wanted to do his bit for the war effort. He then told me that he was a sound engineer in a film studio in Hollywood. He'd been working on films starring Deanna Durbin. He astonished me by telling me that Deanna's magnificent voice, that I had admired so much, was really a rather feeble voice. All its fine quality was due to his and other technicians' efforts. Apparently, according to him, her anticipated concert in our Albert Hall had to be cancelled because her voice was not good enough for that place. I didn't know whether to believe him or not. He could have been an insignificant little man who just made up the story to puff himself up.



Back at the hotel, the girls all appeared with huge bottles of Chanel No. 5. They had bought them ever so cheaply in the bazaar. Apparently the raw essence for manufacturing Chanel No. 5 is produced in Cyprus but because of the war, it could no longer be exported to France where the famous scent was made. The Cypriots, quite sensibly, made it themselves and sold it to any passing servicewomen and ENSA artistes.

One evening Jack suggested that we men should visit some of the night-clubs. We soon found that these were merely excuses for being brothels. The girls, ostensibly entertainers, were really the prostitutes. We were told to look how they were dressed. Those with short skirts had venereal diseases. Those with long skirts were disease free – but only up to the time of the latest medical examination. The examinations were carried out quite frequently. One place we visited was in a sordid cellar. Half a dozen girls friggged about in a travesty of dancing. Then they came over to us to try and sell us their wares. They were really the most unpleasant people, despite their put-on gaiety. One came up to me and stroked my face with a hand, which stunk from tobacco and possibly, something else. I recoiled in disgust. Jack said, "Let's get out of here", and we all set off up the stairs. The girls all lined up and spat at us, whilst cursing us for rejecting their advances. They screamed at us all the way out into the street. I was really glad to get away from that place.

On another afternoon I called at the Pay Corps office where there were several soldiers I knew from Schneller. They suggested that we went to a night-club together that evening. This was a much better place with high-class girls, all of whom were genuine artistes as well as being prostitutes. Entry to the place was by purchasing a bottle of Cypriot sherry, named (perhaps appropriately) Aphrodite. It cost one shilling.

Inside there was a large oval railed-off arena, with tables and chairs all round it. My friends all led me to a table right at the far ends of the arena. They explained that one of the girls, actually a German who had lived on in Cyprus since being marooned there by the war, was an accomplished ballet dancer. She was physically well endowed and went by the nickname of "Shuddering Udders". The table they had chosen was ideal for seeing her at her best, so they said.

I was tucking in to my bottle of Aphrodite. It tasted very sweet and gave the impression of being a soft drink just like lemonade. That was very deceiving. In fact, unbeknown to me, I was getting tighter and tighter. "Shuddering Udders" began her solo dance. It was excellent – all on point. The grand finale was for her to gather herself up at the far end of the arena and then to rush across towards us, at high speed and still on point. She reached us and came to a rigid stop on the tips of her toes – all except her ample bosom. That decidedly did not come to a halt. It bounced up and down, showing the absence of a bra and also showing the reason for her nickname. I was helpless with laughter which, combined with my skinful of Aphrodite, caused me to lean

back in my chair. Over I went on to the floor. I do not remember much more after that, except the vague feeling that my friends were helping me along the road. They must have delivered me to the hotel, undressed me and put me to bed. The next morning I learnt that I must hold Aphrodite in greater respect.

Doris Ingham went to the bazaar and bought herself an elegant pair of gold earrings. The only problem was that her ears were not pierced. She told me that she needed this to be done but that she was terrified by the thought of it. We were sitting in the restaurant of the hotel. Nearby, at another table, was a little Greek Cypriot. He came across and introduced himself to us as a surgeon from the local hospital. He very kindly offered to pierce Doris's ears painlessly.

The next day Doris begged me to accompany her to the hospital, to hold her hand during the operation, and give her courage. To our amazement, the doctor turned out to be the senior surgeon and he had booked the main operating theatre to carry out the piercing. I suppose he wanted to impress the British lady. I was not allowed to go in with her to hold her hand.

I had to sit in a small room and wait. There were several medical books on the shelves. I took one down and read up the symptoms of leprosy. And I found that I had indeed got every symptom! I was simply terrified.

In the meantime, to save Doris any pain, the doctor had decided to give her ears local anaesthetic injections. This was stupid to start with, as putting in the hypodermic needle would give exactly the same pain that an ordinary needle would do, to make a hole for an earring on its own. Unfortunately the anaesthetic entering her earlobe caused it to swell up. The same happened to the other earlobe but, perhaps due to less anaesthetic being used, the swelling was not so great. Consequently the doctor failed to make the holes match on both earlobes. When we got back to the hotel and the anaesthetic had worn off, one earring was seen to be higher than the other. Doris was furious. The next morning she had to go back to the hospital, to have it corrected. I refused to go with her.

To my delight and great relief, news came to the hotel about those Cypriot lepers. They were not lepers at all! Just two Cypriots who had hit on a crafty scheme to get back to Cyprus at no expense. For several weeks they had eaten nothing but mushrooms and that had so disturbed their metabolism that they appeared to have the early stages of leprosy. As soon as they reached the leper colony, they were quickly diagnosed as free from leprosy and discharged. Just what they wanted!

One afternoon I was resting in my room and I heard a screaming coming from the corridor outside. I rushed to the door and opened it. There I saw one of our girls struggling with a young RAF officer. She was bedraggled and her blouse was undone. I quickly shouted to the man that he should stop what he was doing. The girl then said that he had sexually attacked her in her bedroom. The officer immediately contradicted that. "She invited me in and led me on". I could see what had happened quite obviously. I quickly said to the officer that he should go at once. He demurred, still protesting his innocence and the girl's apparent open invitation to him. I said, once more, that he should go and added that, if he didn't, I would put him under arrest. (I certainly did not know how to do this, even if I were entitled to do so.) This time he took my advice and went away with his tail between his legs, in both meanings. I felt really sorry for him and turned on the girl, accusing her of leading the poor chap on. She shouted at me, "Shut up! It's none of your business!" She then entered her room and slammed the door in my face. I realised that I had inadvertently made an enemy. A thoroughly unpleasant young woman, I thought. Also, as the boys would say, "a cock teaser".

Our show was now ready to go on the road. We were touring along the south coast of Cyprus so a change of hotel was required. The first one was a luxurious hotel on the beach at Farmagusta. It had a balcony overlooking the sea with steps right down to the sands. Every day was spent, as if on holiday, bathing in the marvellous warm waters of the Mediterranean or lounging on the sands. Sometimes we would hire a felucca, a



sailing boat with the traditional balanced single sail. I was the only one who could sail a boat so the others had to crew for me. ‘Going about’ was exciting and could be quite perilous if the wind were strong. Someone had to run along the gunwales and pass the loose flapping sail right over the mast and let it trail back on the other side. The trick was not to let go of the sheet, (the rope fixed to the corner of the sail), with which one controls the positioning of it, relative to the wind and

direction of sail.

We did our first show in an RAF camp. The “theatre” was a large hut with a curved, corrugated iron roof. The stage had this big curve above it that gave no problems till Nan and Jeanne did their “floaty floaty” dance. As they waved their arms above their heads they hit the roof and hurt their hands. They just carried on dancing as if nothing had happened. That’s what we called “real troupers”.

One day, we were also taken up into the hills to Lefkara, the village famous for its beautiful embroidery. Here again, their traditional selling market had folded up due to the war. The market was Germany. The main entrepreneur of the village organised all the ladies to bring their wares for us to see. He had little English but I got on well with him in German. He told me that he used to go frequently each year to Germany with embroidered goods for the top class shops. The work was indeed exquisitely done. The ladies showed it us with natural pride. I purchased all the items that I thought would be useful for Marjorie and me in a future home – mainly table cloths, serviettes and table runners. As they say, it only cost peanuts, and I still had lots of change from my £9 wages.



Once, when bathing, I trod on something on the sand underwater, and an enormous pain shot through my foot. I don’t know how I got out of the water and back to the hotel, limping and in agony. Jack immediately called for a cab and took me to an Army doctor. When I showed him my foot, which had swollen considerably, he roared with laughter. “You’ve trodden on a sea urchin”, he said. He went on to explain that the poison and pain would last for one more tide and was not basically harmful. He thought it was immensely amusing and was still laughing as I limped out of the surgery. Sure enough, after the sea had had one more tide, the pain and swelling went immediately.

This halcyon existence, lounging by the sea all day and shows at night, did not last. We had to move on to the

next area. We moved into the Palace Hotel on the promenade at Limosol. The sea came right up to the sea wall. Jutting out from the promenade was a small jetty where we amused ourselves watching boys diving for coins that we tossed into the water. As the sea was crystal clear, we could watch a coin drift down deep, closely followed by a boy who would retrieve it, pop it into his mouth and surface with it in triumph. Once someone threw a coin in and two boys went after it. Both began fighting under water for possession of the coin. Soon they were both in difficulties and were beginning to drown. Our little soubrette, Hope Jackman, dived in, fully clothed, and proceeded to rescue each child, bringing them one by one to the surface, where she lay them on the jetty.

Then she gave both of them artificial respiration and saved their lives. As she said afterwards, “I once had a boy friend, who was a life saver, and he taught me”. The ENSA authorities were delighted to hear about this



spectacular rescue, published it in the local paper and in Army journals. They only complained that none of the rest of us had taken a photo of the rescue. Both Jack and I had our cameras hanging from our necks at the time and did not have the gumption to use them.



I was now well into the style of accompanying the artistes on the piano. Jack had taught me a most valuable technique. At the end of any musical number, I had to continue playing its tune until the next item. Then, if there were any delay, it would not be as apparent as it would have been with a silent hiatus. I began to have worries about tempos. Doris Ingham had complained that my tempos were either too slow or too quick to start her songs with. Somehow I overcame this by chewing some chewing gum in time to my playing. I can't explain why, but this gave me the confidence that Doris had deprived me of.

It was soon apparent that our show was a good one. ENSA had a very varied reputation. There were some extremely bad shows. I have no idea how the management ever accepted them. They certainly lived up to the name the troops gave to ENSA – “Every Night Something Awful!” Our show was received with enthusiasm everywhere we played. After the performances we were always invited to parties, usually in the officers' messes. I suspected that the invitation was aimed primarily at the girls in our show and that we men were invited merely as a formality. However, Jack's bubbling personality and sense of humour, to say nothing of his ability, at the drop of a hat, to sit down at a piano and keep up the entertainment, made us more acceptable. We were always offered drinks. I stuck to one glass of Guinness, perhaps in the mistaken view that it would give me strength to survive the late nights.

A few days later and further down the coast, we stayed in a seaside hotel in Paphos. We did a show on a Saturday, after which the Army chaplain asked me if I would play the organ for the Sunday service. I happily agreed. There was a shock when I saw the organ. It was a little missionary harmonium, a fold-up job with a very short keyboard and pedals with which to pump it. What's more, it wheezed as I pumped. I think the bellows leaked as I had to pedal very vigorously. Somehow I managed to accompany the singing of the hymns and the Army congregation joined in lustily.

We were invited to visit the monks in the Monastery of Saint Neophytos. This meant a long and dangerous climb in the ENSA coach right up into the mountains. We had been increasingly worried about the erratic driving of the Cypriot ENSA driver. He always



drove with one hand on the steering wheel, whilst the other waved his pipe about to emphasise what he was telling us. The journey was terrifying – great precipitous drops, on the side of the road down to valleys below, that the driver seemed to be deliberately aiming for. We were greatly relieved when we reached the Monastery. Jack had been muttering threats against the driver all the way and he still continued to do so as we entered the building.

The monks made us very welcome and showed us all their ecclesiastical treasures. The interior of the church was spectacularly beautiful. Jack took many photographs with his treasured Leica. I had a more modest Balda folding camera, although it had a very good Schneider Kreutznach lens. The main difference between us was that the Leica took 35mm film and mine took 127 roll film. The former was much easier to obtain in wartime, so Jack could take far more pictures than I could. I used to insist that mine, although less copious,

were nevertheless far better than Jack's. There was always a friendly photographic rivalry between us, which continued for years after the war had ended.

After the tour of the Monastery, the monks offered us refreshments. They consisted of glasses of their home-stilled brandy and bread-rolls and butter. The brandy was dreadful stuff, sheer firewater like the Irish Mountain Dew. The monks were really proud of their liquor so we had to pretend that we liked it. One of the senior monks then invited us to come with him to the end of the garden. There was a sheer cliff looming above, with a large cave in it. We all entered the cave. The monk then announced that this was the tomb of Saint Neophytos – and there, lying on a ledge was the shrivelled up, mummified body of the Saint. The monk then called me over and told me that I was going to be greatly blessed. He asked me to put out my hand and in it he put a brown, shrunken finger. It was the finger of Saint Neophytos, somehow detached from the rest of the body, either by accident or by design. I was definitely not impressed. Or, to my knowledge, blessed.

As we were leaving the Abbot handed Jack a large bottle full of the brandy, in a way that implied that he was highly honouring Jack. It was obvious that he also wanted some sort of payment for it, so Jack coughed up with a good grace. Later, back at the hotel, Jack tried to sell it to the proprietor. The proprietor knew exactly where it had come from, what it was, and its dubious quality, so he politely turned it down. In the end, Jack poured it all down the drain.



We had another lovely day out. Our driver took us right up into the mountains, through lush valleys and steep climbs, in the direction of Troodos and Mount Olympus. We stopped halfway for refreshments in a peach orchard, coolly shaded by leafy trees of all varieties. The beauty of this part of Cyprus is quite spectacular. As we later reached the top of the mountain we encountered the snow line. We were told that Cyprus has this great attribute, that it is possible to go skiing and then after only an hour's driving, to go swimming in the warm waters of the

Mediterranean.

On our way back, our driver became more and more erratic, waved his pipe about more and more, till we were in a state of considerable alarm. Jack asked the driver to stop for a short while whilst we had a comfort break, obviously choosing a well bushed area. Then, when it was time to go on, Jack quickly took the driving seat and refused to let our frightful driver drive any more. Jack was a very good driver and, for the first time, we felt safe. When we got back to Paphos, however there was big trouble. The driver reported what Jack had done to the police. Jack was charged with unauthorised driving; driving without a license; together with all the other little offenses the police could cook up. The rest of us then ganged up and accused the driver of driving without due care and attention; driving so as to put his passengers in danger and whatever else we could cook up. We also said that Jack, by taking over the driving, had saved our lives. Eventually the poor police, in sheer self-defence, decided to drop the case. The next day, ENSA sent another, more reliable, driver to take over and we all breathed a sigh of relief.



Our tour continued to the north of Cyprus. We stayed in a charming little seaside town called Kyrenia. The overall influence in this part of the country was Turkish rather than Greek and no less friendly. We had a day off and were taken to a delightful little sheltered bay. The water was warm and safe to bathe in; and the sand soft and comfortable. We were joined by a jolly group of Royal Corps of Signals soldiers who were on leave. Just off shore was a small island. Those of us who

could swim decided to get to it. I became aware that, bobbing in front of me, was a small barrel. Investigating this was more exciting than continuing swimming to the island so I turned to the shore pushing it in front of me like a float. Everyone, especially the soldiers, was very interested. One soldier, who seemed to know what he was talking about, recognised it as a rum barrel. I managed to get the cork out and we poured a little of the contents into a cup. To everyone's great disappointment, it was only seawater. Jack, ever the enterprising business man, told me to hang on to the barrel till we got back to Farmagusta, as there I could sell it to the wine merchants. He was right. I did indeed sell it and got two and a half Cypriot pounds for it. This was the second piece of commercial advice I took from Jack. Previously it had been the sunglasses in Nicosia.

Our stay in Cyprus was now coming to an end. We did a couple more shows and were once again loaded onto a small steamer, this time on our way to the Lebanon.

The steamer docked at Haifa and we were taken to a small hotel. We were told that we had to stay there for some time till everything was ready for us to go to Syria. I phoned Schneller and asked to speak to the ATS officer in charge of Marjorie's section. I told the lady that I was stuck in Haifa for a time and wondered if Marjorie could get a day's leave and come and see me there. The lady was most friendly and helpful but said that Marjorie was at Allenby Barracks visiting the dentist. She promised to give her leave when she returned and put her on a bus for Haifa. I sat in the hotel fretting at the increasing delay, with no sign of Marjorie's arriving. Suddenly the same girl who had had the contretemps with the young RAF officer in Nicosia, rushed into the room and shouted, "Quick! Come along, Norman, your Marjorie has arrived." I rushed down to the foyer but no one was there. That girl stood peeing herself with laughter. "Had you there, didn't I?" she screamed. I realised that the despicable woman was getting her own back on me for the incident with the young RAF officer. The rest of the company let her know in no uncertain terms what they thought of her for being so mean.

Suddenly we were told that we must get ready to move on. I became desperate. Still no sign of Marjorie. We all got on the coach, there must be no delay, and set off. Poor Marjorie arrived only a few minutes after we had left and, later, I had a letter from her telling me that she was in despair. All the way back to Jerusalem she was in tears. I wasn't much better in the bus to Syria. I occasionally saw that awful girl sniggering at me as I sat there. What a nasty person. Months later we heard that she had married a high-ranking officer. Heaven help him!

We arrived at Damascus late in the evening and settled into a nice hotel. As it was my second time in the city, I promised to show the others the sights of interest on the next day. Of course the first place to see was the Street called Straight. None of us knew where we were going to do our next shows. Jack alone knew and, because there was a war on everything had to be hush-hush, he had to keep the information to himself. What he did know, actually, was the next country we were due to visit after Syria. This gave him the ideal information for his wheeler-dealing. Jack, Ronnie and I had purchased the sunglasses in Cyprus, which were scarce in Syria. Jack also knew that the next country was short of souvenir daggers. His instinct led him to the appropriate dealer in Damascus who wanted sunglasses. This dealer took our sunglasses and, in no time, found a fellow

dealer who could let him have enough daggers. They were finely made – engraved Damascus steel blades, curved, and with highly decorated scabbards. We both went back to our hotel, fully satisfied with the deal and packed the daggers in our luggage. The girls, in the meantime, visited the shops and bought lengths of beautiful Damascus silk.

To our disappointment we found that we were not to do any shows in Syria. In the late afternoon we were taken to the bus station for the Nairn Coach. This coach is like a gigantic



sausage with huge wheels fitted out with enormous tyres. An articulated cab towed it. We all got in the sausage and found it to be a very comfortable place – luxurious seats, rather like those in aeroplanes, that let down to become satisfactory beds. As soon as we were seated the doors were closed and the whole compartment hermetically sealed. The air-conditioning was turned on and we sat in a pleasant cool atmosphere. We set off and, as night fell, went to sleep. At around 1 o'clock, the bus stopped and we were invited to get out for refreshments. As we stepped out we were struck by freezing cold air. The desert there at night can be very cold. The Arabs served us tea or coffee and small, sweet cakes. We quickly mounted the bus and set off in our beautiful air-conditioned atmosphere; and went to sleep again.



We woke up again in brilliant sunshine. The bus stopped, the doors opened and we stepped out into an oven. We were in Baghdad. The heat was really oppressive. A coach took us to our lodgings that turned out to be, to our surprise, the YWCA. It seems that there were not enough “YWs” in Baghdad so they were quite happy to accept some “YMs”. As far as I was concerned they were not worried that I was not a “C”. The YWCA was in an alley which, traditionally, had been used for years by Iraqi men as an open-air toilet. They squatted and crapped there and peed against the walls of the hostel. The lady proprietor had complained to the mayor of Baghdad, who, so as not to

offend the susceptibilities of the defecating men, had merely ordered a layer of chlor-de-lime to be spread throughout the alley. The poor men had then to squat in very corrosive chemicals, that burnt their hands if they supported themselves on them; the whole place stunk of chlor-de-lime, in addition to the deposits of the men; and the net result was ten times as bad as it was before. The guests in the hostel just had to suffer in silence. Fortunately the high wall insulated us from the obscenity of the alley but, unfortunately, the only entrance to the hostel was via the alley.

Baghdad was very hot. I found it unbearably so. Night-time was the worst. Our rooms were sweltering hot and sleep was almost impossible. It was suggested to us that the best thing to do was to sleep on the roof of the building. There were already beds up there for that purpose. All we had to do was to take our sheets and pillows up – but – the night was extremely cold so we also had to take blankets up with us. Here was the quandary. If we went to sleep with all the blankets on, we stewed in the heat of the late evening. If we went to sleep with just a sheet or nothing at all over us, we woke up freezing. So some time in the night we'd wake up cold and have to cover ourselves with a blankets as well. And there was also a mosquito net to contend with. Then, as soon as the day broke, the sun came belting down and we were roasting so we just had to get up quickly, gather our bed clothes and escape down into the hostel. Consequent to all this, I hardly had any sleep.

There was an official order from the Military authorities that all of us should take extra salt every day to make up for all the bodily moisture we lost through sweating. In the dining room there was a bowl of salt and a jug of orangeade. We were told to put a tablespoon full of salt in the mouth and to wash it with the orangeade. A thoroughly unpleasant procedure!

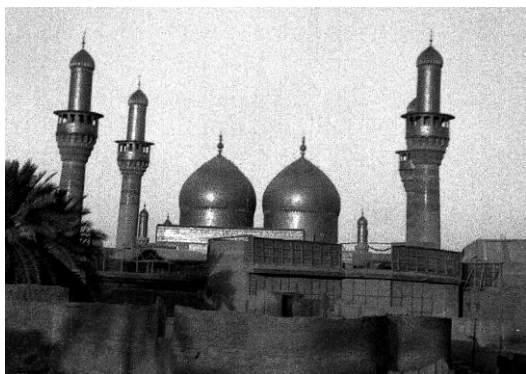
On the first evening we all went to see a show in the gardens of the British High Commissioner, in an open-air theatre that had been set up. The artistes were all soldiers – it was produced by ENSA but the men in it were not ENSA artistes. In a way they were all like me – transferred from the Army. I was the lucky one in that I lived as an ENSA artiste, in hotels. Those soldier artistes were always accommodated in Army camps, often staying in tents. During the show I suddenly felt very unwell. I went into the house and found the bathroom, where I brought up the whole of my dinner. I don't know how I managed to get back to the YWCA. By then I was having attacks of diarrhoea and was running a high temperature. Somehow I got to my bedroom, onto the

bed and I passed out.

I knew nothing more till I came to in an Army hospital ward. Jack and the officer in command of the Baghdad ENSA HQ were both saying, "Wake up, Norman, wake up". I came to and, blearily, looked at them. I was told that I had dysentery and would be a patient in this ward for some time. They were whispering to me. What they wanted me to do was to say nothing about the fact that I was a soldier artiste. My clothes had been brought to the hospital with me. They included my ENSA peaked hat (never worn by an ordinary soldier, only officers) and my shirt without its detachable corporal's stripes. The medical admissions officer had presumed that I was a civilian ENSA artiste and I was put in the officers' ward. Jack stressed to me, in a whisper, that I must not let on that I was an other-rank. The officers' ward was the only one that was air-conditioned. Other-ranks were outside in huts, without air-conditioning and subject to Baghdad's terrible heat. Jack's main concern was for me to get better quickly and to rejoin the show. In the other-ranks' wards that might well be impossible.

In a way, my illness was a good thing. I was not able to join the company on its next short tour, which was to Shiba in the Persian Gulf. That area had an awful reputation as a hellhole. Soldiers tended to be posted there as a punishment station. The Army prison was there – the feared and hated glasshouse. Jack took my place as accompanist in addition to his other performances so the show had to be completely re-arranged.

In the cool of the officer's ward, the treatment started and I quickly got better. My dysentery had turned out to be the mildest form of the disease – Sonné's Dysentery. Many of the officers there had very serious forms of the illness and were fearfully ill. The man in the bed next to me was reckoned to be in danger of dying. The doctors were fighting to keep him alive. He was all skin and bones. For all that, they kept stressing that he try and walk so as not to succumb. I got to know him very well and used to help him to walk – or stagger a little – every day. He told me that if he could manage to put on a little weight he would be repatriated to England. I never knew what finally happened to him. Occasionally, as I got better I wandered in the grounds of the hospital and there, to my surprise, I met Ron Fountain. He had been posted to the Baghdad Pay Office, he considered as a punishment for his habitual Bolshie behaviour. That may well have been true. We arranged to meet again when we were both discharged from the hospital. My stay there was not very long. Just over a week and I was declared fit and sent back to the YMCA.



I realised that I was to have a holiday in Baghdad until the company returned from the Persian Gulf so I determined to make the most of it and get some sightseeing in. I strolled through the hot and dusty streets of the city, viewing the sights and taking photographs. The main buildings were very elegant, especially the mosques. One, The Golden Mosque, that I was only allowed to view from outside it, had a dome covered with gold inlaid tiles that shone magnificently in the sun. One day when I was walking near the River Tigris, I went into an Army canteen. It had a beautiful garden, shaded by a vine growing over trellises. A soldier sat there drinking a cool drink

so I joined him. We talked about the difficulties of making ourselves understood with the locals owing to our lack of the knowledge of their language. He said, "I only learnt Latin, French and German at school". I answered, "So did I". Of course, we soon discovered that we had both been pupils at the Westcliff High School for Boys. We had a pleasant morning, sitting there in the cool, reminiscing.

I contacted the vicar in charge of the British church of Baghdad and



asked if I might be allowed to play the organ. He willingly agreed and I spent an hour or so playing. It was not a very wonderful instrument, so that was enough for me.

Ron Fountain, was released from the hospital and, having been given a few days sick leave, came and joined me. I continued exploring the city, accompanied by Ron. He told me that his father-in-law had been killed in Baghdad in the 1914-1918 war and was buried in the British Army Cemetery there. We had a long walk in the heat to reach the place. It was beautifully kept, clean and tidy and, amongst the long, sad, row of graves we found that of Ron's wife's Dad. I took a photograph of Ron, standing to attention by the grave and saluting. It was a memorable moment. I called on the Ron, one day, in his barracks, just as he was shaving and had only quite recently got up out of bed. He showed me a new razor he had just purchased in the NAAFI. It was an ingenious device called a Valet Razor. A long leather strop could be fed through the razor, which was then pushed along it and back, with the blade whipping to and fro, being sharpened. I was most impressed so Ron took me to the NAAFI where I bought one for myself. That razor blade lasted me for several months, although I had to buy several new strops, mainly due to carelessness on my part whereby the razor slipped and cut them in half.



Eventually the company returned from the Persian Gulf, worn out by the persistent heat and humidity. Jack was glad to see me well again – being accompanist as well as comic was very stressful. We were put on a train for Habbaniya, where there was an enormous Air Force camp. The theatre was a huge hanger, in which a stage had been built, almost as big as that of a West End theatre. Our whole company was stricken by Gypsy Tummy – not dysentery thank goodness, but enteritis. The symptoms were just as devastating. On our first night show, Jack went through the curtains to the front of the stage to make an announcement. He said, “Well boys, the whole company has got Montezuma’s Revenge; so if during the show one or other of the artistes suddenly looks thoughtful and rushes off the stage, you’ll know why. You will be relieved to know that he or she will soon be back, after he or she has also been relieved”. This was greeted by howls of laughter, cat-calls and loud applause. Tinged, I’m sure, by considerable sympathy, as they, every one of them, had had experience of the same complaint, at some time or other.



My piano was placed in the hall, just in front of the stage. Right above it was a large fan fixed to the ceiling. It was ideal for keeping me cool but hazardous for my sheet music on the piano’s music stand. As I put the music there, the fan blew it away. This would not do for the good of my performance. A brilliant idea struck me. I had already got my rhythm helping chewing gum going in my mouth. I took a piece of well-masticated gum and stuck bits of it on the music stand. Then, as each number was about to be played, I quickly adhered the music to the stand. Had I but known it, I was the inventor, years before, of Bluetack.

Backstage, in the ladies’ dressing room and in the men’s dressing room, there was a bucket each, together with an Iraqi servant whose job it was to keep them emptied.

The show went well, more hilariously than in previous locations. At each hiatus, whoever remained on the stage (unless it were a solo item) kept the fun going by making gags at the expense of the departing member. When a soloist disappeared I kept things going by playing the piano. If I had to rush off, there was always someone of the stage to keep the pot boiling, so to speak. If not, Jack would dash out and tell jokes, that is if he

were not already indisposed.

After the show we were all invited to a party in the officers' mess. There the medical officer came up to us and told us that the best cure for gypsy tummy was a tumbler full of a 50/50 mixture of Guinness and rum. This medicine he supplied to us and we started the treatment. The MO insisted that one tumbler was not really enough to effect a cure, so we had more than one each. If I remember rightly, the party went with a swing after that. I don't know if the Guinness/rum medicine really worked but, at least, it took your mind off the gypsy tummy.

Our sleeping quarters were in a long hut, built on stilts above the sand. Each of us was given a small cubicle with a bed in it. The toilets were at the far end of the hut, across the end. They were just like the old-fashioned toilets to be found in gardens behind our country cottages. All they had was a plank with a hole in it and an empty space below leading to the desert floor. This sort of loo was known as a Desert Lily or a Thunder Box. During the night, if I were awake, I could hear the occasional creak-creak, sometimes quite rushed, of one or other of us dashing down the corridor to the loos. When it came my turn, I hurried to a vacant compartment, dashed inside and relieved myself just in time. From underneath me came a howl of anguish. I stood up and looked through the hole. There was an Iraqi servant, whose job it was to empty the trays, looking up at me with something indescribable running down his face. Many years later, I often wondered if that man had been a relative of Saddam Hussein or even his father, and, unwittingly, I had been the cause of all the trouble that had later descended upon Iraq.

We were not due to do another show in the camp but, suddenly a senior Indian officer came up to Jack. He was very irate. "Why are my men denied the chance to see a show?", he demanded to know. There was a rule, set up by ENSA, that we were not to give shows to Indians. Indians in those days meant inhabitants of the whole continent, now, of course, known as India and Pakistan. Jack, in his usual bolshie and democratic way, immediately said that we would indeed put on a show for the Indians. The hall quickly filled with Indian soldiers eager to see an ENSA show that had previously been denied to them.

The show started well until it reached Nan's and Jeanne's floaty floaty dance. As they appeared and danced in their flimsy, almost see-through dresses, there was almost a riot in the audience. Those men must have been Moslems for, denied as they normally were to seeing flimsily clad ladies, could not help themselves from becoming agitated. Many started to rush the stage. Jack immediately drew the curtains and the show came to an ignominious end. The ENSA authorities, in their wisdom, had been right to deny attendance at shows to Indians (or, in fact, to the Pakistanis that these men actually were – or would be in the years to come.)

Once more, after the show, we went to the officers' mess for another party. The MO insisted that his Rum/Guinness treatment should be continued for it to be of any lasting effect. We readily complied and by the end of the evening we were well and truly sloshed. We had to catch the midnight train to Mosul. Somehow we made our way to the station; I'm a bit vague about how we did that. There were no platforms; getting onto the train was by climbing up from the desert sands. Lots of Iraqis were clambering aboard together with their luggage, their crates of chickens, vegetables, boxes of eggs, and even sheep and goats. Hope Jackman suddenly said, "I once had a boyfriend who was an engine driver", and before we knew what was happening, she had us all climbing aboard the engine. "Norman, you're the musician, pull the whistle," she said. Which I did. Hope immediately began to negotiate the engine's levers and the train set off up the track. Iraqis fell off; their parcels fell off; their goats and chicken fell off; there was utter chaos. Somehow the engine driver caught us up and leapt aboard the engine; dragged a giggling Hope away from the levers and drew the train to a halt, way down the track. There was a great international incident over this and we all got into trouble. Threats were made as to future legal action against us, which I'm glad to say never materialised. We got a telling off from the senior officer in the Baghdad ENSA office and that was all. Knowing him, I expect that he was delighted with the whole thing, as the telling off was mild to the extreme. After all, he was the sort of man who would conceal the

fact that I was not an officer, in the Baghdad hospital officers' ward.

Getting into our booked carriage was somewhat of an anti-climax. We had beds onto which we collapsed and let the Guinness and rum mixture carry us off into the arms of Morpheus.



The memory of Mosul as a town has faded into oblivion, apart from two interesting things. One was a mosque whose minaret, like the tower at Pisa, leaned dangerously over. The other was an outstanding trip to the ruins of Nineveh. Colossal winged bulls or lions stood guard before the gates of palaces and temples. Others had been looted years earlier for the British Museum. The sight was magnificent. I took a picture of Jack Telman propping up one of the great carved animals with its human face. I'm sure he was just in time to stop it falling over.

We must have done shows in Mosul but the memory of them has completely gone.

The town of Kirkuk followed Mosul and had as little impression on me as regards to the place itself or our shows. I was definitely not enjoying Iraq. As far as I was concerned it was a dirty place and far too hot and humid. I suppose that the presence of two giant rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates contributed

greatly to the muggy atmosphere. I was really glad when we reached Baghdad and were told that we were going back to Cairo.

We were taken to the airport and put on a plane called an Avro Ansen. It was also called "a Flying Greenhouse". They reckoned it was one of the safest planes around, but one of the most uncomfortable. We sat on the floor either side in the rear of the plane, surrounded by our luggage and props. As we were crossing the desert towards Cairo the plane started bucking about and wallowing to and fro, almost sideways on. Jack said, "I've had enough of this", and went forward into the cockpit to remonstrate with the driver. There, sitting at the controls was none other than Hope Jackman.

"I once had a boyfriend who was an airman", she said.

At last, back in Cairo, we had time to relax. After such a strenuous tour we had a few days off to get over it. The company broke up and I don't know where they went. Only Jack, Ray and I remained. The strain of living in Iraq must have affected me more than I thought because I landed up in hospital. I was not really ill, just suffering from debility or that was what was written on my medical notes. I just took it easy and enjoyed myself, reading and chatting with other patients. In a week I had recovered and went to join Jack. He had been asked to take a scratch company for a short tour of the Cairo district. To my surprise and delight, one of the group was David Nixon, the conjurer, one of my old school friends. I do not remember much about the others, except for Olive Ashley, a musical Variety act, and two sisters, the St. John Sisters. These sisters were middle-aged ladies, Music Hall and Variety artistes, whose act consisted of tap dancing. The costumes they wore were very tight red tunics covered with sequins. These were, they told us, the same costumes they had worn all their performing careers. As soon as each show was over, they would go back on the stage and gather up all the sequins they had shed through their act. Then they would sit down and painstakingly sew them all back on again. Off stage they were much more entertaining. They had a fund of stories, some really quite vulgar or even downright rude. I loved them. They told us that when they first started



their act, their first engagement was in Portsmouth, or Pompey as they called it, when the Fleet was in. This was positively the worst time to have a début. Sailors could be quite devastating as an audience. The climax to their act consisted of their tap dancing up a short flight of stairs, at the back of the stage, to a narrow platform at the top. From there they would launch themselves out towards the audience and land in the middle of the stage on splits. On that first night all their family turned up and sat in the Gods. Grandma was too nervous to climb up there so they got her a seat, adjacent to the central aisle, downstairs. As the girls went up their steps and braced themselves for the great leap to the centre of the stage, Grandma jumped to her feet, running down the aisle and screaming, “Don’t let them do it, they’ll ‘urt themselves”.

David Nixon was a great tease. He was an accomplished pickpocket and used the skill often on the stage with people he had invited up to take part in his tricks. Amazed and embarrassed, soldiers would be handed back their wrist watches immediately after he had shaken hands with them. When we were with him he’d continually be handing us back items of our own property he’d lifted from us. He always started his act with one lighted cigarette and he’d then proceed to produce many more lighted ones from thin air, or behind the ear of a soldier sitting in the audience. I had to sit at the piano playing, naturally of course, *Smoke gets in your Eyes*. The climax of his act was to have a card table on the front of the stage and invite four members of the audience up to sit at the table. Then he gave a pack of cards to them and asked them, one after the other, to shuffle them. When he was satisfied that they had been thoroughly shuffled, he then invited one of them to deal each of them a nap hand of cards. Then he walked to the end of the hall and called out to them, one by one, what card to play, till the game was ended. The players and the audience were totally mystified. How could he possibly know what the next card would be after the pack had been so thoroughly shuffled. I, too, was mystified, till I suddenly realised how it was done. But I won’t tell you, dear reader.

Olive Ashley’s act consisted of a solo xylophone solo, “Now boys, I’m going to play the Overture from William Tell”. Only the way she said it was more like “William T’hell”, much to the amusement of the audience. Then she’d say, “And now for something serious”, and she’d play *The Lost Chord* on her trumpet. For her grand finale, she’d say, “And now boys for a little bit of Old England”, and she play through the whole *Post-horn Gallop*, actually on a post-horn. It was quite an impressive performance and it went down well.

Jack Telman did his usual comedy act, which consisted of telling a string of jokes. He owned a ‘Joke Book’, hand-written by him, which he was continually adding to. We played at one camp near to the Suez Canal. It was a prisoner-of-war camp for Germans. Our audience was not the Germans, of course. The British commanding officer offered to take us round the camp to see the prisoners. He told us that they were all recalcitrant Nazis, members of the crack Sturm Abteilung units. His job, he told us was to break their spirits. They stood there behind the wire fence looking sullen and obstinate. If any one of them were standing too near the fence, the officer would lash out viciously at him with his whip. It was a nasty thing, made out of a stretched and tanned rhinoceros’s penis. If he thought he was going to impress the ladies in our group he was sadly mistaken. Our sympathies actually went out to the German soldiers.

Our show was only a temporary one. ENSA was already planning a show that would make a longer tour, all the way up the Nile as far as the Sudan. It was to be called *Flying Special*, a Comedy, Song and Dance Show. Once more Jack Telman was to be the manager, although this time he would not write all the material. Every artiste was a solo performer, so the show would be more of a variety one. It was called *Flying Special* as it would be flown by plane from place to place.



The only rehearsals were for me. I had to learn the piano accompaniments for each artiste and to rehearse with him or her. As usual Jack was the star of the show, although two others were stars in their own rights. Neil McKay was a very funny Scottish comedian, a star from the Music Halls. He merited the biggest letters of the poster. Dressed in a preposterous kilt and sporran with huge very long boots, he sang comic songs, did funny walks and grotesque dances. He was also by way of being an acrobat as I found out during rehearsals. Doris Palmer was an agéd lady, a comedienne who sang comic songs and had a long stream of very funny patter. The soubrette was Patricia Eaves, whose performance was mainly dancing and Kay Neville was a soprano.

We were told that our first show would be in Kenya. I was delighted to hear this, as I'd always wanted to go to East Africa. We set off south on a Nile hotel boat. Then we found that the Kenya we were going to was, in fact, Qena in Egypt, pronounced the same way. What a disappointment!

Qena was an unpleasant place. It stood below a great plateau that was infested by scorpions. If the wind were blowing strongly, every gust would bring these dangerous insects down on top of us. We had to be always vigilant for fear of being stung. The little boys of the town were given paper bags and each paid one piastre for each bag full of scorpions that they took to the police station. I developed toothache and had to visit an Army dentist. His surgery was a tent. He operated his drill by using a foot pedal. Although this sounds rather primitive, he did a good job on me and my toothache disappeared. We did one show there in a large tent. It did have a stage and I had brought my own ENSA piano, a lovely Knight minipiano.

From Qena we went further south to Luxor where we were given luxurious accommodation in the Savoy Hotel.



As I had been to Luxor before and knew all the ropes, Jack left it to me to arrange sight-seeing while we were there. I promptly looked Hassani up and asked him to guide us. He was delighted to do so, taking us to all the places I had already visited with Marjorie and Gerald. The historical sights of Luxor and Thebes are so interesting and beautiful that I really enjoyed seeing them again and hearing Hassani's amusing descriptions of them.

We did several shows at camps in and around Luxor, all of which proved to be popular. I always travelled in an army truck containing my piano and the prop baskets. Something very frightening happened on one trip. As my Egyptian driver drove, at high speed, along a dusty dirt road, a small boy closely pursued by another chasing him,

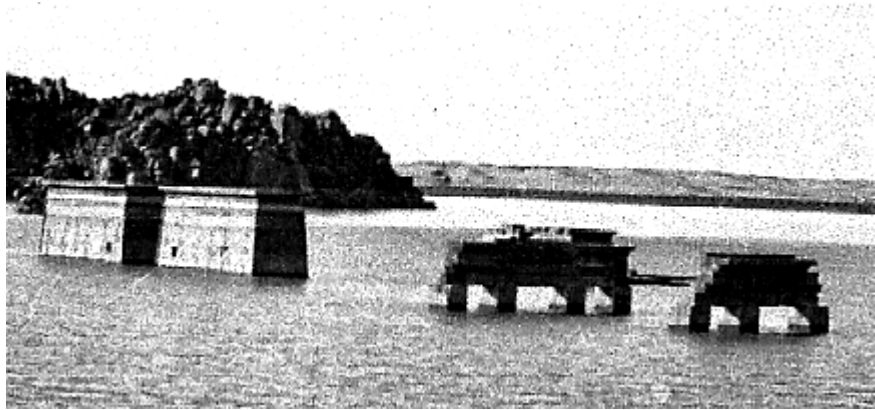
dashed out straight under our truck. The driver was not given a chance to avoid him. We stopped and went back to where the boy lay. He was obviously very badly injured and was unconscious. The driver promptly turned the truck round and made as if to run over the boy again to kill him off. He told me that it would be a more satisfactory way of settling the matter as he could then drive on and forget about it. I was absolutely horrified at the callous way he was going to handle this. I quickly stopped him and made him put the injured boy in the back of the truck. Then I made him drive to the nearest village. We found the boy's father and the village headman and told them that I was going to take the boy to the hospital in Luxor. They promptly got on the truck to come as well. In Luxor I made the driver go immediately to the hospital where the father carried his son into the accident department. A doctor in the A & E Department there very callously said, "Put him down there in the corner". The father lay his poor little crumpled and bleeding son down on the floor in the corner, whilst the doctor continued to sit behind his desk writing, ignoring him. I was disgusted and let the doctor know what I felt. The doctor just took no notice of me. Life must be very cheap there. The next task was to seek out the British Military Police. I reported the accident and gave a full description of it to a policeman. I told them that the driver was not to blame and signed my deposition to that effect. The policeman then said, "It's a pity you didn't kill him – it would have saved us a lot of trouble." He also hinted that I had done a silly thing to have brought the boy's father into it. I then realised why the driver would have

preferred to have driven back and killed the boy outright. At least my conscience was clear.

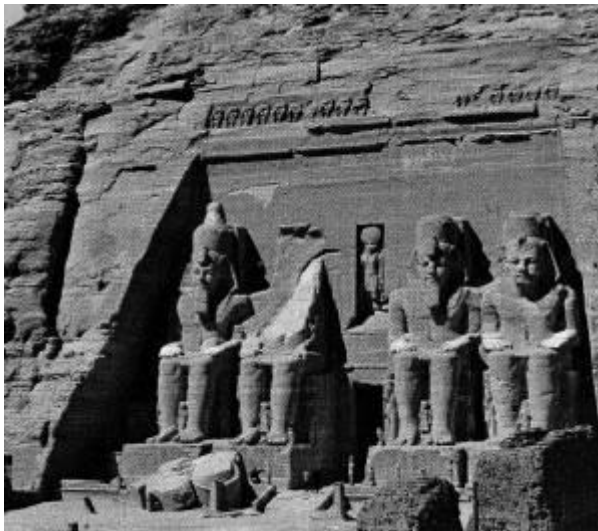
We began to wonder why the show was called *Flying Special* as up to now we had travelled by train and coach. Our next stop was to be Aswan, again to be reached by coach. As there was to be only one show in Aswan, we had time to visit Ancient Egyptian sites, very interesting but not as outstanding as those at Luxor.

The next stage of the journey was also not by plane but, we were delighted to hear, by Nile steamer. All the civilian artistes were given luxury cabins on the upper deck. I, as a soldier artiste, was allocated a very inferior cabin that I would have to share with another soldier. Jack was furious. He stormed up to the steward's office and insisted that I be given a cabin with the other artistes and, such was the force of his personality, I was immediately transferred to a nice cabin on the upper deck.

The cruise up the Nile was brilliant. The river was low so we were able to see the Island of Philae, which was only partly submerged, with its exquisite and well preserved temples sticking out of the water.



Later we passed the gigantic statues of Ramses II at Abu Simbel. This was long before the mighty Aswan dam had been built and would have completely submerged these magnificent statues but for their being hacked out of the living rock and hoisted up higher.



Attached on the side of our steamer was a long barge on which was our luggage and props, including my Knight piano in its wooden case. There were also a lot of the poorer Egyptians living rough on the decks. Some had their little kerosene stoves over which they cooked their

meals. It was a jolly scene, very noisy and happy. Jack and I clambered down onto the deck of the barge, opened our pianos crate, rolled out the piano and, to the delight of all the Egyptian passengers, took it in turn to play. I hardly think the Egyptians understood our music but they seemed to enjoy it.

During the evening, Pat Ayres introduced us to a spiritualistic séance. She wrote all the letters of the alphabet, with chalk, in a circle on a small table. In the middle she put a glass tumbler. We sat round, each with a finger on the tumbler. Suddenly the tumbler began to move and spelled out a message, presumably from someone who had died. It was from Pat's blasphemous grandmother who had died in Durban. The language she used was very picturesque. I was a little sceptical but could, nevertheless, not see how the glass could have been pushed by anyone of us without the others knowing. Suddenly a message



came through for me. It was my old bosom pal, Ron Wells, whom I knew had been killed in a bomb incident in Alexandria. He started the message by spelling out something that I knew could only have come from him. It read, "U R A twerp, Norman." He had once written this in one of my schoolbooks. The message continued, "Tell your parents that there is something wrong with the plans of their bungalow". Then I knew that this whole exercise was phoney as my parents did not have a bungalow. Little did I know!

As there were a lot of soldiers on board, there had to be an officer commanding. He was a pompous and thoroughly nasty little man, a second lieutenant. He must have been reading through the list of soldier passengers because he came storming up to me and accused me of conduct against military discipline. I was naturally wearing civilian clothes and I had a first class cabin! I should be down below with the other ranks!! Then he told me that I would be on a charge was soon as we reached our destination!!!

I immediately went to Jack and told him about this officer. Jack was having none of this. He straightaway tackled the lieutenant and pulled rank. As the manager of the company he had the honorary rank of captain. Jack put on a theatrical performance, as only he could do, telling the officer in no uncertain tones, that I was under his command and that the officer should not interfere. He also said that I was not in the Army as such but had been transferred to the Y Reserve and was as much an ENSA artiste as all the others. The nasty little man, though cowed by Jack's attack, nevertheless insisted that I would be on a charge when we reached our destination.

The steamer finally docked, early in the morning, at Wadi Halfa and Jack quickly went ashore and straight to the Army office there. It was fortuitous that he knew the officer commanding this outpost of the British Empire and was a friend of his. Jack had only just finished telling the commander all about the officer on the boat when that same officer stamped into the tent. In no time the commander put him right and told him that there would be no action taken, as I was, in fact, in the Y Reserve and an ENSA artiste. I heard no more about it.

Wadi Halfa was known as "The White Man's Grave". It was terribly hot there, sandy, dirty and thoroughly unpleasant. There was an area set out as an open-air theatre with a properly built stage. I organised the Nubian servants in putting my piano right at the back of the stage in the shade. By then the sun was risen and the heat was awful. I went with the others to a tent for cool drinks and then took it easy till evening. Unfortunately, in the meantime, the servants had been ordered to clean the stage. This meant moving my piano, to enable them to brush all the sand away. They moved it right to the front of the stage in the boiling sun and then left it there for the rest of the day. By the time of the concert the piano was ruined. The action inside it had been distorted and playing was almost impossible. The camp had an old piano that was kept in a room at the back of the stage. It was wheeled out and I had to play it, warts and all, using the notes that still worked!

We were all very relieved to learn that we were going to be picked up by plane the next morning. Jack was delighted to hear that the pilot was to be an old pal of his, Wing Commander Stretfield, "Stretters" to all his friends and acquaintances. He was considered to be totally mad. When his plane touched down in the desert and he stepped out, it was obvious that he was, to put it nicely, rather eccentric. His costume was picturesque and he had an enormous airman's moustache, a Biggles-like caricature. He bought with him a box of hats. These, he announced, were anti-gremlin hats and he refused to take us on board unless we wore them.

The plane was not exactly the acme of RAF perfection. It was very old and had been used, I believe, as a troop carrier. It was certainly not a civilian tourist plane. The seats were crude bucket seats, very hard and uncomfortable and placed up each side of the cabin space. Our luggage and props together with the piano in its crate were placed at the back of the fuselage. The runway was very short and stony. Stretters roared the plane along the ground and then, just as we thought he was going to drive it straight into the Nile, it slowly groaned its way into the air. It was frankly quite terrifying. But, as it was once said, "We ain't seen nothin' yet".

Flying across desert country is always uncomfortable. There are many shifting pockets of air that carry the plane up and down in frightening jolts. Stretters' plane was not exactly equipped to deal with these hazards. Neither was Stretters, we thought. The plane bucked up and down with all of us hanging on for dear life. Doris Palmer, sitting next to me, was frankly scared stiff. She was also airsick. I let her lie down across my lap and I held her firmly though every jolt and buck. It helped a little but the poor old lady suffered continuously. She was not the least bit grateful to me and continued to treat me afterwards in a very unkind way.



We were very relieved when Stretters touched down in an RAF airfield near Khartoum. We were soon introduced to gracious colonial living in our Hotel. The other guests were all expatriates from Britain – high-ranking civil servants, important businessmen and senior Forces officers, together with their wives respectively. The whole atmosphere was delightfully snobbish. Probably the most important meal of the day was afternoon tea. We sat out on the balcony overlooking the beautiful gardens and immaculately clad Sudanese servants, resplendent in brilliant white costumes and red fezzes, served us tea, small neatly cut sandwiches and cakes. The other guests came and chatted with us. ENSA artistes obviously made an exciting change from the usual run of visitors. I wonder what the high-ranking army officers would have thought and said, if they had known that the ENSA pianist with whom they were chatting, was in reality a mere humble corporal. A very dignified gentleman wearing a dog collar came up

to me and introduced himself as the bishop of Khartoum. He asked me, in one breath, if I could also play the organ and would I play in the Cathedral on Sunday for the morning service. I had only once before played in a cathedral and that was in Jerusalem for the wedding of a Palestine policeman and his ATS bride. Of course I would play! I would be delighted!

On Sunday I arrived at the cathedral to be met by the bishop. He had bad news for me. I could not play the organ. Unfortunately the Nile was not high enough to pump the organ. Just like the organ in St. Andrew's Holborn in London, the river flowing through a turbine powered the organ blower. I suppose they could only use the Khartoum organ when the Nile was inundating. Instead of the organ, I had to play a piano, a grand admittedly, but not a very wonderful one at that. I was extremely disappointed.

The first show was in an open-air theatre attached to a large camp. One of the items consisted of Pat Ayres dancing with my playing her accompaniment and Neil McKay playing his usual comic fool. Pat would start to dance and then pretend to get dizzy and then to faint in a heap on the boards. I then had to jump to my feet and shout, "Is there a doctor in the house?" Immediately Neil would appear, noisily, at the back of the theatre, dressed in an outrageous plus-fours costume, carrying a doctor's bag. He'd walk through the audience cracking jokes with people he passed till he reached the stage. Then he'd open his bag and take out a pantomime doctor's instruments with which he performed a comic operation on Pat. Suddenly she would come to and he sprang back with a remarkable back somersault, landing on my chest as I stood in front of him. From there he'd do another back somersault, landing on his feet by Pat, clutching her knickers in his hand. Surprisingly as he landed on my chest, I hardly felt a thing, it was so skilfully done. (There was one occasion, however, when he landed on my face and broke my glasses!) On the occasion of our first show there, Pat 'fainted' and I rushed to the front of the stage and shouted my line, "Is there a doctor in the house?" Immediately sixteen men rushed to the stage. We were playing an Army hospital! I kept calling out, "Get off, it's only a gag!" Sixteen red-faced army doctors retreated to the laughter and boos of the whole audience. Neil, Pat and I could hardly continue with the sketch for laughing.

On a day off we were taken to the so-called largest native town in the world – Omdurman – famous for battles in the past between General Gordon and the Sudanese Fuzzy-Wuzzies. This time we were welcomed peacefully as potential purchasers of their handmade souvenirs. I bought a small dagger, the scabbard of which had a leather loop to enable it to be worn, attached out of sight, under the upper arm. A vicious little weapon! I also bought six small hand-carved ivory animals. The dealer gave us a lesson in how to tell ivory from bone. Even in hot weather, ivory feels colder to the hand than bone.



After Omdurman we were taken to see the confluence of the Blue Nile and the White Nile. We could clearly see where the two waters joined – one was dirty and muddy and the other was a lighter colour, just less muddy.

Our last show was in a very large Airforce camp. Their stage was a home-made affair, planks fixed across big oil drums. They'd even built a proscenium arch with curtains. On this stage they had put their piano – not a bad one this time. It was once more an open-air theatre. To illuminate the stage (it was already dark in the desert) they had placed a searchlight at the end of the field, directed towards the stage. We were so well lit it was like playing in the Palladium.

Doris Palmer started her act and already the audience was laughing heartily at her comic song when, suddenly, a great roaring was heard overhead. Immediately an enormous plague of locusts descended on us from above. They had been travelling on their way to another field of crops to destroy and had been attracted by the bright light of our stage. In no time at all we were covered with locusts. Before I could stop playing, my keyboard was covered inches deep with the horrible creatures. My fingers had already squashed several and there was their blood on the notes. It was worse for poor Doris. She was covered with wriggling insects and as she was wearing a décolletage dress, many of them had entered it at the top of her bosom and were descending to the depths below. But, comedienne to the last, she clutched the top of her dress and screamed, "Help, send for a search party!"

Someone turned the searchlight off and immediately the locusts took off in the direction of their next meal. I swept the keyboard clean of the dead and dying creatures and wiped the blood off my hand and the notes. Doris extracted the locusts that still remained in her dress and, as soon as the light went on, carried on with her act as if nothing had happened. Although I thoroughly disliked the woman, I really admired her pluck and strength of character. It wasn't till much later that we learnt a few very interesting things about her. She had once been right in the Western Desert, up to the fighting, entertaining the soldiers and had been awarded the African Star medal. She wore the ribbon of that medal with pride. Her age was 75! And, she was suffering from tuberculosis. What a trouper!

The time came to return to Cairo. We fully expected to be flown back there by Stretters but it was not to be. We were told that he was not available. We had to travel by train. Just as we were loading on the train, Doris Palmer disappeared. Somehow she had managed to convince ENSA HQ that she was unfit to travel by train and she got a flight on a civilian plane.

The journey back was uncomfortable in the extreme. Wooden seats, very hot and no refreshments for us. We slept as best as we could on the seats and further beds on brackets that let down from the Wall above us. Periodically an Arab would make his obligatory visit to our compartment to squirt us with evil smelling chemicals to kill the flying insects and those, biting ones, that lived in the cracks between the wooden planks of the seats. Jack tried his hardest to prevent him from doing this, without avail. We drew into Luxor and there,

standing on the platform, was my old friend Hassani the guide. He was delighted to see me and then rushed away as fast as he could. He arrived back just as the train was about to leave and thrust a metal cigarette tin into my hands. It was full of old Romano-Egyptian coins – a present from him.



Back in Cairo, I found that I was due for a week's leave so I immediately set off for Jerusalem. The train left very early in the morning and the journey seemed much longer than the other times that I had done it. In fact I was consumed by impatience. It then reduced its speed to a mere crawl whilst it went up through the foothills leading to Jerusalem, making things much worse for my impatience. Of course, I was longing to be with Marjorie again. Eventually Jerusalem came into view, I got off and waited a considerable time for a bus. Then I had to make two changes of bus before I made my way to Schneller and got there just after lunchtime. Marjorie was just coming out of the ATS mess and was surprised to see me standing there. We hugged and kissed each other with delight. She had the rest of the day off so we went to Jaffa Gate by the Tower of David, where we strolled around admiring that centuries-old building. Fortunately she was due for leave so we both went straight to the offices of Zionist Ladies, who fixed us up with a stay, once more, in Affikim kibbutz. This time we were accommodated in a hut with a double bed, straightaway. The next day, to our dismay, I went down with a high fever. The kibbutz doctor examined me and transferred me to his little hospital. The diagnosis was sandfly fever. Poor Marjorie had to wander about the settlement on her own. Fortunately I recovered quickly, helped by the

doctor's medicines, and rejoined Marjorie but I was very weak and we could not take our usual long walks together.

In Jerusalem I reported to the ENSA office there and was told that I had to join a company in Haifa, a company that was without a pianist. They were all French speaking. Fortunately I had retained enough of my schoolboy French to be able to converse with them, although the set books we had studied were written probably two centuries ago and many of my words and idioms were decidedly old-fashioned and a source of fun to the other artistes. I remember having to write out "l'assistance – the audience" several times as a punishment at school for trying to use "l'audience" to describe the people in a theatre. Here, when I described the people who had filled the hall as "l'assistance", the other artistes fell about with laughter. These days they use "le public".

The star of the show and manager was a black man – an acrobatic tap dancer. As I had no dinner jacket to wear as pianist, he lent me one of his zoot suits with a long jacket and trousers tapering to the ankles. I looked ridiculous. He, however, looked great in such a costume as it was all the rage in those days for black people to wear. As well as accompanying the various acts, I was also able to do my comedy pianist performance.

One of the acts was a rather aged couple, a speciality ballroom dancing couple, in the style of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. They were really very good with their tangos and similar exotic dances. They had been doing their act for years and years, in seaside concert parties all over Britain in the summer and cabarets throughout the rest of the year. I have no idea what their nationality was, probably Hungarian or Romanian, and they spoke no English. He wore a full tails suit, which had seen better days and she had a most elegant evening dress decorated with a fluffy boa. We got on well together in French.

I have no memory of the other acts in the show. The black man was a pronounced hypercondriac, convinced that unless he took the most involved precautions after doing his spectacular and energetic dancing, he would get pneumonia. He would come off the stages, sweating profusely and wrap himself up immediately in towels that the stage manager had ready to hand to him. Then he would squirt some sort of medical diffuser down his

throat. He was a friendly little man and always treated me well.

I think that the show had reached its end and was going back to Cairo, where it would be split up and the artistes who stayed with ENSA, allocated to other shows.

In Cairo I discovered that Jack Telman had finally produced the new show he'd been writing and it was ready to go on the road. I had, necessarily, been replaced as pianist.

Until I got a new show I was given a variety of odd jobs. I took departing companies to Cairo station and saw to their luggage and props being safely loaded onto the train. This involved bribing the head porter. Had I not done so the luggage and props would have disappeared, later to be sold more than likely in the bazaars. The amount of money I gave him was enough for him to share part of it out between all the other porters. ENSA gave me a bribery allowance and I had to write a chit out to claim the money back later.

Olive Ashley, her speciality act, was once more high and dry waiting for a new show. She was put with a company, that had just been formed and needing a speciality act. Their first show was to be in the Cairo Citadel. This great barrack area had a proper theatre with a fine stage. I had to go to the Citadel and check up that everything was all right for the performance. I knew the stage manager, a sergeant, and got on well with him. He was very funny and had an enormous sense of humour. I suspect that he had a theatrical background.

The show went off well that evening and Olive Ashley's act – xylophone, trumpet and posthorn - got a good round of applause.

Unfortunately the others in the company were taken ill and Olive was, once more, left high and dry. A new company had just come to Cairo and was lacking a speciality act – theirs was ill. Olive was put with them. They had a week's rehearsing and re-grouping; then were ready for their first show. It was to be in the Citadel. Poor Olive was most worried. "I was there only last week. The boys won't like that!" she told me.

As usual I went to the Citadel to liaise with the sergeant stage manager. He said, "Is it true that Olive Ashley is coming here again so soon." I told him it was. "The boys won't like that – they'll give her the bird!" he stated. "The bird" is an old theatrical term for barracking.

The show started and was going well. Then came Olive. She played her xylophone and got a slow handclap. The same thing happened after the trumpet and posthorn performances. Poor Olive played on regardless getting redder and redder in the face. She finished her performance, the curtains came down to the same slow handclaps. She swept off the stage and told me that she had never been treated like this before, even in the British variety theatres and music halls.

The speciality act of that company had fully recovered and went back to join them. Olive wasn't needed any more. Another show came into Cairo, having finished its tour. Some of the artistes had ended their Middle East contract and were going back to England so the company needed regrouping. One thing it lacked was a speciality act so Olive Ashley found herself a member of the company. And, surprise, surprise, the first date was to be the Citadel. Olive was furious. She tried her hardest to get a change of company but ENSA was adamant. She had to go with this company.

I went to the Citadel to check up everything with the friendly stage manager. "I can hardly believe it!" he said. "They're actually sending Olive Ashley again?" I assured him that they were. "Well, the boys have really prepared the bird this time for her", he confided.

Poor Olive! She went on the stage to start her act. There was immediately tremendous applause. Genuine

applause at that. She glanced towards me with puzzlement written all over her face. The xylophone solo was received with even greater applause. Her trumpet *Lost Chord* was followed by applause, cheers and whistling. Olive was amazed and mystified. She announced the last solo. "And now boys for a little bit of Old England" and began playing *the Posthorn Gallop*. Immediately the whole audience started barking like the dogs in a hunt in full flight. The troops barked their way solidly through the whole performance till the bitter end, while Olive played her best and loudest, her face getting redder and redder. The applause as she finished was ecstatic and deafening. Some men went onto the stage, lifted Olive onto their shoulders and paraded her throughout the audience, with the men giving her a standing ovation. I have never seen anything like it before. Good old Olive rose to the occasion, acknowledging the applause graciously and waving her hands to the men as if she were royalty. Her escort restored her to the stage where she took bow after bow using the full theatrical curtsies, such as are only seen made by prima ballerinas.

Olive's fear and dread of that evening was replaced by triumphant glory.

I continued to do odd jobs after that whilst I waited for a company to join. A famous French pianist, Gina Bachauer, was in Cairo and I was allocated to her as her stage manager. First thing each morning I collected my van with two giant jet-black Nubian piano shifters. The Nubians were truly enormous, with massive muscular torsos and great arms. They were certainly needed, as the piano was a huge full-sized concert-grand French one – a Pleyel Wolff. Gina always insisted on playing this particular instrument. Watching those Nubians moving and loading the piano was a real experience. They moved as a team, every action exact and controlled. They turned the piano on its side and unscrewed the legs and pedal unit. Then they placed two wide straps under the piano, one at each end. They bent down and put the straps round their necks. Then, straightening up, they walked forwards to the truck, lifted the piano onto it in one smooth movement and strapped it to one side of the truck. After loading the piano stool and the legs, they calmly went to the front of the van and sat down, one being the driver. The other Nubian and I sat on the wide front seat of the van and off we went.

On one occasion, we were driving along a narrow country lane where, in front of us, straddling the road, was a donkey and cart. There was no sign of the owner. Immediately the Nubians stopped the van, jumped out and rushed to the back of the van. The thieves, who had planned this strategy to rob us of what was inside the van, were completely dumfounded when two black giants set upon them and gave them a sound thrashing. To add insult to injury they then showed them that the van contained only a huge grand piano. We left them collapsed and bleeding on the side of the lane and my Nubians roaring with laughter at them.

Our routine was always the same. We would arrive at the venue for the evening's concert just before lunchtime. The Nubians would stay in the van to eat their packed meal. I had a collection of badges for my officer's peaked cap. There was an ENSA badge, a NAAFI badge, a Service Corps badge and a DNSE (Department of National Service Entertainment) badge. Strangely enough, although I was still officially a soldier, I was, in a way, entitled to all of these badges. The concerts always took place in NAAFI canteens in the various camps, so I would put my NAAFI badge on my cap. Then I would walk, in an official way, into the NAAFI and, pointedly, look around. I would even wipe my finger along one of the tables and look at it, as if checking it for dirt. Immediately the NAAFI proprietor, usually a Greek civilian, thinking I was a NAAFI inspector, would rush out of his office and obsequiously ask me if I would like to be his guest for lunch. He would then serve me with a splendid meal, with a bottle of the best local beer. As soon as I had finished my meal I would ask him to prepare the stage for us to install the piano on it. There was nothing he could do about it but to comply in bad grace and very furious that he had let himself be misled into thinking I was an inspector. I was all innocence, as I had not actually told him what I was there for.

Gina's concerts were surprisingly well attended, despite the seriousness of their musical content. She was a superb player with a rather theatrical style of performance which went down well with the troops, even if the

music was sometimes well above their heads.

After the concert, whilst Gina was invited into the Officers' mess for a drink, I got my Nubians to see to the piano. When they had loaded it onto the van, they set off without me, back to ENSA HQ. I travelled back with Gina in her comfortable staff car. Conversation with her was rather one-sided, more like a monologue on her part, and mostly not understood on my part. She spoke very quick French, with which I had difficulties. One word I remember to this day. It was *crépescule*, meaning twilight – a word that had stupidly been taught to me in my first French lessons at school. Here, surprisingly, at last it came in useful in conversation. Gina admiringly spoke about the beautiful Egyptian *crépescule* we were experiencing as we drove along.

When Gina had finished her tour of the Cairo area, I was allocated a new job. I was to be the accompanist for auditions to find soldier artistes for the military concert parties run by ENSA. These auditions were held in the ENSA Theatre in Cairo. Some of the hopeful soldiers would turn up with their sheet music which I was expected to play for them. Often a piece of music had seen better days – folded or tattered through constant use. I would have to prop it up on the piano's music stand and hope that it would not collapse whilst I was playing. Sometimes a soldier would give me his music and announce that he did not sing it in that key and would I kindly transpose it for them. All very good practice for me!

One soldier turned up with a sheet of paper with a lyric written on it but no music. "Can you busk an accompaniment to these words?" he asked. I have always had the gift of making up tunes so I agreed to play for him. To my delight and his too, a satisfactory tune followed his singing of the words. I think that my playing was far better than his singing because he failed the audition and was not accepted by ENSA.

At the end of the session he came up to me and asked me if I were interested in writing tunes to his words. We went together to a café to talk about it. He told me that his name was Peter Myers. He was stationed by the Suez Canal and had a terrible job. It was indeed a dangerous job and had killed the last two operators, both Cypriot soldiers. In that part of the world there were many varieties of nasty little insects, one of which is called the "Woolly Bear". It infested Army blankets and was a real pest. On the outskirts of Peter's camp, a small brick building was constructed. It had no windows and only one door. The door had a hole in it at eye level. In the centre of the building was a tub with a hinged lid and from that lid a string went through the hole in the door to the outside. He had to stack infested blankets all round the tub. Then he poured sulphuric acid into the tub and put a heap of potassium cyanide onto the open lid. He retreated through the door, shut it firmly and pulled the string. This caused the lid to tip its cyanide into the acid, which immediately started to fill the building with very poisonous cyanide fumes. Peter then had to push a cork into the hole, "pretty damn quick!" It was failure to push the cork in quickly that had killed the last two operators. No wonder he wanted to get out of the Army into Peter showed me several lyrics that he had written. They were all excellent, very witty and with a style that flowed so easily that they simply lent themselves to musical accompaniment. As I read them I could hear the tunes running through my brain. I agreed to be his composer and, from then on, a string of lyrics kept arriving in my post. In my spare time I used the piano in one of the ENSA rehearsal rooms to play over the tunes that I had in my head and then write them down. I began to sell original material to ENSA artistes and made a bit of money for Peter and me.



He was an extraordinary person. As a child he was educated in a "free expression" school in Devonshire. The pupils seemed to do just whatever they liked, attending lessons or not as the whim took them. There was no discipline and their behaviour was entirely random. In the sixth form Peter became a prefect. He took to

walking into classes where there were girls who took his fancy, telling the teacher that the head wanted a certain girl, and then he marched off with that girl to the cycle sheds, behind which he had his way with her. Despite all this random education Peter got very good examination results.

When he joined the Army he was given an intelligence test, to find, I suppose, if he were suitable for commissioning. His score in the test went right up, high off the scale of marks from which the IQ could be tested. The army psychologist had to extend the chart artificially to come to a new IQ level. Peter's IQ then stood at 196. Genius level! He was then sent to Oxford University for some sort of speciality intelligence training. His room was the only room in the halls of residence that had a window at street level. This window was closed by pulling a simple lever with a hole in it that dropped over a knob at the bottom of the window frame. Peter could come and go, at whatever hour of the night, simply by climbing through his window into the street. Highly illegal of course but the proctors seemed unaware of it. Worse than that, Peter allowed other undergraduates to come and go through his window, perhaps for a little remuneration, because he was always strapped for money. He had been allocated a college servant, a scout, whom he was expected to pay. On one occasion when he was very lax in paying the scout, the man was so incensed that he cemented the window permanently shut with quick setting cement. Peter and other undergraduates who had been out on the tiles returned to the college, only to find that they could not get in. Peter was immediately sent down and found himself back in the army in, I think, the Service Corps. This was how he was posted to the Middle East and given the menial, and dangerous, job of killing woolly bears.



Peter had gathered a group of soldier entertainers together to form a concert party in their spare time. Whenever I was free I used to go to them and play for their rehearsals. One of the soldiers was a big, clumsy, flat-footed fellow who did conjuring tricks. He had a lovely sense of humour but his tricks were very simple ones. One day he went into a restaurant and took the fez off the head of a waiter and put it on his own head. He then kept it. His name was Tommy Cooper. Later, in Civvie Street, he became one of our most successful comics on the professional stage, with his stupid gags and tricks that seemed to go wrong and, above all, his infectious sense of fun.

One day a notice appeared on the ENSA notice board. It was a list of soldier artistes whose time had expired and were entitled to go back to Britain. My name was on it. Our officer commanding, Colonel Greatrex Newman, came up to me and asked me if I would like to sign on for another year as they were very short of pianists. I knew that Marjorie, a late arriver in the Middle East, still had at least a year to go so I agreed to sign on. I was given a consent form to fill in. The next morning a notice appeared saying that all time-expired men who were married to ladies in the forces could take their wives with them back to Blighty, even if the wives, themselves, were not time expired. My heart sank. I had signed myself away for another year. Then, as I stood looking at the notice board, the Colonel came up to me and said, "You've made a mistake on your form. Would you correct it please?" I took the form from him and tore it up, much to his annoyance. "I've decided, after all, to go back to England", I said. I then wrote to Marjorie suggesting that we get married as soon as possible and telling her the reason why. She was all for it! I put in a formal request to get married and a date was fixed, March 17th, for the ceremony to take place in Cairo. She made the appropriate arrangements with her commanding officer and, in due course, she arrived in Cairo. We were both entitled to a week's leave so we fixed a honeymoon, through the YMCA, for us to go to Luxor.

Our wedding was confirmed by the army authorities and was set to take place on the 17th March 1945. I made all arrangements for a wedding reception in the ENSA canteen, with a nice meal, to which any of my ENSA colleagues around at the time, were invited. The hotel in Luxor that had been fixed for us by the YMCA was to be the Savoy Hotel, a luxury place on the banks of the Nile. The cost for the whole thing, reception and meal, travel and hotel, was exactly £12 for the two of us.

The army had a Registry Office for marriages in the Semiramis Hotel in Cairo. The whole hotel had been taken over by the army as a unit of the HQ. In Cairo at the time there was an army band, part of a concert party,. We had to keep the wedding secret from them as they threatened to stand outside the Semiramis Hotel and play the Wedding March as we came out. I don't think the Top Brass in the hotel would have liked that.

Marjorie and I, together with our witnesses, were marched into the Army Registry office. Marjorie was allowed to wear civilian clothes. She had made herself a very attractive costume and, in my eyes, looked gorgeous. I was in my uniform with the corporal's stripes on display. My best man was Frank Denyer, a school friend who was a meteorologist in a regiment in Cairo that dealt with weather forecasts. Marjorie was "given away" by Lieutenant Michael Vickers, the officer in charge of our Good Music department. The Registrar was Captain George Taylor, a rather dour Scot.

The ceremony went as follows:

Captain Taylor. "I am a – nofficer authorised to carry out marriages in the field. Do you, Corporal Dannatt, take Lance Corporal Vaughan as your lawful wedded wife?"

Corporal Dannatt. "Yessir."

Captain Taylor. "Do you, Lance Corporal Vaughan, take Corporal Dannatt as your lawful wedded husband?"

L/Corporal Vaughan. "Yessir."

Captain Taylor. "I do, herreby, prrronounce you, Corporal Dannatt and Lance Corporal Vaughan, as man and wife."

PAUSE.

Captain Taylor. "Corporal, you may now kiss the Lance Corporal."



We went out onto the beautiful, tree covered, bank of the Nile for photographs. My parents had managed to get me two rolls of Dufaycolour film for the occasion and one of the ENSA workshops men had agreed to take wedding photos with it in my camera and his own. Later, when the film had been developed, it was found that it had been infected with some indigenous Egyptian bacteria, which ruined it almost entirely by marring the film's gelatine coating. Years later, with lots of help from Paint Shop Pro, I was able to resurrect these photos with my computer and remove the worst of the depredations of the bacteria.

We all went back to the canteen for our reception. The food was excellent and



plentiful. I asked the canteen manager to save any left-overs, for us to eat on the train going to Luxor and there was certainly plenty. When the time came to leave for the station, I went to collect the food only to find that the Egyptian servants had nicked the lot.

I knew the head porter at Cairo Station from previous times when I had seen ENSA parties off on their travels. He was the man I used to bribe for the sake of safe loading of the luggage and props. I asked him if he could get a compartment for Marjorie and me exclusively. He agreed when I had given him 35 piastres. I made the great mistake of giving him it before the train departed. Just as it was about to move, he rushed up with two soldiers and all their kit and thrust them into our compartment. They had also given him 35 piastres to get an exclusive compartment.

They were very nice fellows, polite and chatty. We told them that we had just got married and were on our honeymoon. As night approached when we would settle down to try and get some sleep, the good lads piled all their kit between the seats at one end of the compartment, filling the space completely and then laid their blankets across. This enabled Marjorie and I to lie down together as if on a double bed. They just sat down, one on each side of the other end of the compartment. Then, on the uncomfortable wooden seats, they slept as best they could. We slept well. What a peculiar “first night”. Of course, the perambulating Egyptian official with his insecticide spray, disturbed all of our slumbers as usual. And as usual we did not bribe him not to do so. Others must have done, for some compartments along the corridor were spared his punctiliousness as we could hear him passing them by. We awoke as the train was travelling through well-cultivated fields and small villages.



We arrived at Luxor station early in the morning to find that the YMCA had been very thorough in their booking of our holiday. An American donkey was waiting there to take us to the Savoy Hotel. We found it to be very large and luxurious, quite the opposite from the old Hotel des Familles where we had stayed before. We were given a big room, overlooking the Nile, with a double bed and a balcony surrounded by bougainvillea foliage, all in bloom with beautiful mauve blossoms. Strangely, what appear to be mauve petals are, in fact, mauve leaves, so-called petaloid leaves. The actual flowers were very tiny yellow ones. I picked a small bunch and placed it in Marjorie’s hair – gilding the lily so to speak! Then I photographed her, the picture coming out splendidly when we later had it developed. It is my favourite photo of her.

To our surprise, in the next room but one, was David Nixon with his latest girlfriend. I think she must have been one of the ENSA girls in his new show. Once we were all settled in, I contacted Hassani and he agreed to be our guide for the week.

There was another honeymoon couple in a room near to us. They hardly ever left their room, coming out only once, as far as I know, to join us on a Nile cruise in a felucca towards the end of the week. Apparently the poor girl had been ill most of the time.





On the first day, we hired bicycles and explored Luxor. At the far end of the town was a private boarding house run by an garden, luxuriant with orange trees covered with sweet smelling blossoms, which led down to a balcony overlooking the Nile. There we sat, drinking cold lemonade, and enjoying the fascinating view of the river with its vista, ever-changing, of feluccas, rowing boats, steamers and fishermen. To our delight we were joined by the two soldiers we had met on the train. They were actually lodging in that boarding house. When they saw that we had arrived on bicycles, they immediately hired two for themselves and joined us on our continuing exploration of the town.

David Nixon and his girl friend came with us for our first day's outing across the Nile to Thebes. Hassani, had once more hired an "American Donkey" to take us around. This particular Old Crock was even older and more decrepit than others we had ridden in before. The driver never bothered to use his clutch when changing gear. He just thrust the gear lever in with a horrible grinding sound. Apart from that the old car took us around bravely, along unmade roads full of ruts and holes. Hassani's commentary and descriptions of the various places we went to were as amusing and informative as ever. David was most impressed. This time Hassani took us to places we had never been to on previous trips, as well as the obligatory tombs such as that of Tut Ankh Amun. Both David and I were taking photographs. His girl friend followed him around with a notebook. For every picture he took she wrote down the details of the camera exposure at his dictation. For example, in a darkish tomb she had to write the name of the tomb followed by, for example, "f8 – 10 seconds". It was obvious that she was getting fed up with having to do this. We reached a very dark tomb with hardly any light in it. She said, "f2.8 – a fortnight".



In the many of the tombs the attendants, who were friends of Hassani, helped us to take photos by a very ingenious method. They stood at the entrance with a mirror and directed the rays of the sun with it down into the interior of the tomb. Of course we were expected to give them baksheesh for their trouble. Tut Ankh Amun's tomb was an exception, however. I don't think the attendant was a friend of Hassani. He told us that we were forbidden to take our photos there. This tomb, being the most spectacular one in Thebes, was lit by electricity – ideal for photographs without too long an exposure. Both David and I wore light khaki jackets. We hung our cameras round our necks, under the jackets and, just as we reached the sarcophagus of King Tut, we opened the jackets and quickly took our photos. The attendant was furious. He immediately switched off the lights but it was like closing the stable door after the horse had fled. We had our pictures and he could do nothing about it. Hassani was greatly amused that we had put one over on an attendant whom he did not like.



Another tomb was bricked in. No-one was allowed inside as it was a kind of store-room for unidentified mummies. One brick had been left out, through which visitors could peer in at the piles of mummies. David asked me to lend him my camera tripod which he extended and pushed through the hole, stabbing one of the mummies and drawing it up to the hole. He then tore off a bit of the fragile bandaging for a souvenir and offered to do the same for me. I did not fancy having such a souvenir so I declined his offer. Hassani was greatly offended by this action and showed it in no uncertain terms. He was very cold to David thereafter but continued to treat Marjorie and me in his usual friendly way.

When the time came for us to leave, Hassani came to the train as we got on it and presented Marjorie with a brooch for a wedding present. His father had been the guide to Flinders Petrie on previous occasions, years ago. On one trip to the Temple of Hapshetsut, he had picked up a small carved blue stone seal and secreted it

away when no-one was looking. Hassani had inherited several of these illicit items when his father had died. He'd gone to a silver smith and had the seal set in a brooch supported by two silver wings. We were both greatly touched by his kindness. That was the last time we saw him. We always remembered the kind man and his picturesque commentaries. Later we were told that he was a drug addict, on hashish. We had noticed that he rarely ate on our excursions with him but that he seemed to have unbounded energy. Perhaps he gained that from the hashish he took each evening.



On returning to Cairo, we still had a day's leave left so used it exploring that fascinating city. We visited the museum where all the treasures found in Tut Ankh Amun's tomb were on view. A magnificent exhibition. In one square in the centre of the city the Military Authorities put on a display of the wonderful house that was to be available to each returning member of the forces. It was called a Pre-Fab. In our eyes it was wonderful. The outside construction appeared to be made of sheets of asbestos but, inside, it was luxury itself. There were all modern facilities, central heating, bath, fridge, cooker, all connected up as part of the prefabricating. We dreamed of owning one of these and fully expected to get one

on our return. Some hopes, as it turned out!

I saw Marjorie off at the station, fully anticipating that we would soon be together again on our way home. And looking forward to starting our married life in a nice new Pre-fab.

I felt very lonely and needed to have something to keep me occupied, preferably in a show. To my relief a new show, just arrived, needed a pianist.



I was told that I was joining this new company. It would be ENSA's smallest company. Basically it consisted of Paniotis Theodossiou and me. Paniotis was a Greek conjurer, ventriloquist and hypnotist and I was a pianist entertainer. I say basically because we were joined by Paniotis's wife and her brother. They were totally redundant to the show but, somehow, Paniotis had convinced ENSA that they were necessary to his conjuring act. All they did was to stand, one each side of the



stage and catch the handkerchiefs as Paniotis produced them, apparently from nowhere. Otherwise they were a mere decoration in the show. I would not have minded so much. The wife was a lovely lady but her brother was simply horrible, spiteful and thoroughly objectionable. He was only fourteen and should have been in school learning some discipline.

Paniotis was an incredible man. He had been in the Greek army in the Sacre Corps, their commando unit in the desert. One day they caught an Arab with a British revolver hidden beneath his clothes. At that time weapons and equipment were being stolen from the ships unloading at the Egyptian ports and the authorities could not find out how it was being done. Paniotis hypnotised the Arab and got him to reveal where the rest of the stolen goods were. The Sacre Corps drove out into the desert to an oasis and started digging in the sand. There they found an enormous cache of stolen equipment, worth a small fortune, hidden there. For this, Paniotis was awarded the Greek Military Medal and a small pension for life.

On another occasion, Paniotis received a letter signed, "a friend". It was from Syria where his wife was living at the time. The "friend" told him that the wife was having it off with another man. Paniotis was devastated and, even suicidal. Other comrades in the Corps were equally troubled and in despair. Their wives were back in Greece and they were hearing awful rumours about how the wives were being treated by the Germans there. He and a few comrades decided to do something outrageous and did not care if they were killed doing it. There was a small Italian POW camp nearby, which they entered at night and stole the uniforms from the sleeping prisoners. Then, disguised as Italians, they set off, in the dark, in a truck towards the Italian lines. They stopped, hidden behind a dune, some way off from the Italian camp and Paniotis crept forward till he reached the sentry. Hiding nearby he waited till a soldier passed the sentry and gave the password. Before the war Paniotis had been the manager of one of the Fiat motor company's factories in Italy and spoke fluent Italian. He crept back to the truck and then, large as life, they drove forward to the sentry. Paniotis gave the password, went to the HQ tent and told an officer there that he and his men had come from the German lines bringing urgent orders for the General of this unit. Immediately the General and his senior officers were woken up and came to the HQ tent. The General was still in his night-gown, and wore a cloth hat with a long tassel. They all sat down round their table with their maps and prepared to receive the urgent orders from Paniotis. To their great surprise Paniotis and his men lifted their guns and ordered the Italians, together with all their plans, out to the truck and then loaded them on to it. As the Greeks were pointing their guns at their prisoners, none of the other Italians, who were awake at the time, dare to do anything about it. The truck was driven back to the Allied lines. Unfortunately, Paniotis had neglected to tell anyone what they were doing, so the British opened fire on them. Immediately Paniotis ordered the Italian general to take off his long white night-gown, and wave it in the air. This did the trick and the firing stopped. Paniotis insisted to me, that the capture of the plans of the Italian lines was the real reason why our General Montgomery was able to advance so successfully against the Germans. Maybe!

Our show was played to very small camps that had never before received an ENSA show. I thought it was a barely average entertainment. Paniotis's conjuring was run-of-the-mill stuff and his patter lacked the wit that English conjurers usually used. I was, of course, used to the clever patter of David Nixon and the nonsense of Tommy Cooper. His ventriloquism was corny to the extreme, but his hypnotism saved the day. In this he was brilliant. He had soldiers up on the stage doing silly things to the vast amusement of his audiences. I did my usual comic piano solo and told a few jokes. My piano was a very old Minipiano, which had suffered for years from being tugged around the Middle East by ENSA companies. The casework was falling to pieces although the action and tuning was still OK. The ENSA piano technician had given me a hammer and a bag of nails before we set off. If the piano's casing fell to pieces, as it often did, all I had to do was to nail it together again. We had a very old rattly truck, which Paniotis drove. His wife and her brother and I sat behind with the piano, Paniotis's props and our luggage. It was very uncomfortable, especially on some of the unmade roads across the desert. Fortunately all was well between Paniotis and his wife. It turned out that the "friend" who had written to him was really some randy Syrian who had tried to make it with the lady while her husband was

away in the Army and had been well and truly repulsed. Or so she said!

We did a short tour of the Alexandria area and I found myself staying in the same hotel as Jack Telman. Since I last saw him he had met a Naval nursing sister named Frances and they had both fallen in love. He had come to Alexandria to marry her. That was one of the quickest courtships, engagements and marriage ever. I was naturally invited to the wedding. It took place in the British Consulate. Jack's best man was a young fellow who was a comedian in Jack's new show. We had a splendid reception afterwards where I was introduced to a drink called Pink Champagne. It tasted quite innocuous – almost like drinking lemonade but, after a few, I began to be very glad that I did not have a show to do that evening.

I had another surprise. Peter Myers turned up. He had met a Navy WREN named Prudence while they were both on holiday in a Jewish kibbutz in Palestine and they had wanted to get married. They had experienced more difficulty in surmounting the military red tape than Marjorie and I had and were really fighting hard to get permission to marry. Peter had a week's leave in Alexandria to be with Prue. On the girls' afternoon off we all went to their private beach – it had wickerwork barriers to cut that beach off from the rest of the Alexandria hoi-polloi. After Peter had gone back to his camp, I visited the WREN billets occasionally to have afternoon tea with the girls. Their billet (first class) had a beautiful garden where the girls all had afternoon tea served to them by Egyptian servants. They were the Senior Service, of course, and always lived and travelled first class – unlike Marjorie and her fellow ATS girls, who were in the Army! I got to know Prue and her friends well and looked forward to those pleasant afternoons. Then, suddenly, tragedy struck. A group of WRENS were travelling in a Navy truck that crossed a tramway just as the tram arrived. There was a dreadful smash and several girls were injured. Prue only suffered from bruises and scratches but her close friend, Poppy, had one leg completely amputated. The tram driver, whose fault it was, produced a lot of Egyptian friends, who were



supposedly standing nearby, and swore that the traffic lights were in his favour at the crossing. As the girls were in the back of the truck and unable to see anything, their evidence was completely discarded. The tram driver got away with it and poor Poppy was unable to claim any compensation.



I visited the British War Cemetery and found the grave of my dear friend Ron Wells, with just a simple cross, all that remains to be seen of that fine young man, Lieutenant Ron Wells of the Royal Engineers. The ironical thing was that he was a water engineer before the War and yet he got caught up in bomb disposal. One of the bravest jobs a soldier can be called on to do. His memory lingers



in my thoughts of the wonderful friendship that we had together before that dreadful War took him away from us.

My last show was to take place at an Army petrol depot right out in the desert. We drove up to the camp and were met by a very drunken officer. He announced that there was no chance of our giving a show that evening. All the men were too drunk to appreciate it! Earlier in the evening a dispatch rider on a motorbike had arrived and told them that the war with Germany was over. He too, by then, was as merry as the men in the camp. Paniotis asked him if he could borrow the motorbike. The man amiably agreed and Paniotis mounted it and started to drive it in a wide circle round and round. Then to the delight of all the men he proceeded to perform acrobatics on the machine. He drove it standing on the saddle; sitting on the handlebars; jumping off and on it whilst holding the handlebars; facing backwards and generally being a real daredevil. He told us that, before the war, he had a period in which he was a performer in a touring circus show in England. His act was called "The Wall of Death". It was a huge circular arena with sloping sides round which motorcyclists used to roar. Paniotis's speciality act was to drive round and round on a motorbike and sidecar, with a live lion sitting in the sidecar.

Our short tour was soon over. As soon as I returned to the ENSA HQ, I was told that my posting back to England had come through. I gathered all my erstwhile soldierly equipment together and joined a group of men going to a Transit Camp on the banks of the Suez Canal. Reluctantly I found myself back in the Army. I was given an uncomfortable bed in a tent; had to queue each mealtime for my rations, which I had to collect in my mess tin. I was forced to get back to the boring Army discipline till Marjorie came from Jerusalem to the embarkation port. I just had to wait till I could be sent there too. The sergeant major of the camp called me to his office and told me that, as a corporal, I would have to mount the guard the next day. I told him that my rank as a corporal was given me as a pianist. My knowledge of soldiering was flimsy in the extreme. I could not hold a gun, let alone fire it if necessary. I did not know the orders to be given to the men of the guard and I doubted that I could even give them with any sort of authority. But... I was really very willing to have a go and would be delighted to do so if he liked. He turned down my helpful offer and I went back to my tent very satisfied with the outcome.

One day Peter got a lift from his camp, further down the Canal, up to the Transit camp. He brought me an invitation to come to his camp the next evening to take part in a concert that their Entertainments Officer was putting on. He and I would perform some of our songs together. The Officer had promised to make a car available to take me back, late at night, to my camp.

The show began all right till it came to our act. We both went onto the stage and started our first song. The troops received it very politely till I reached the point where I had to play a loud chord. I brought my hands down heartily onto the keyboard and as the chord sounded out, the stage beneath us collapsed and Peter, I and the piano descended into the depths below. That was definitely the end of the show! The men in the audience were delighted and cheered and clapped. The entertainments officer seemed to blame me for the catastrophe by playing too loud a chord. He was so nasty that he went back on his promise and refused to let me have transport back to my camp. I had to walk.

I trudged along the road by the Suez Canal hoping to get a lift from a passing army vehicle but, to my disappointment, every one that passed refused to stop for me. The reason was obvious. It was far too risky. I could have been the decoy for an ambush by hidden Arab thieves. The fact that I was dressed as a soldier meant nothing as Arabs stole uniforms as well as arms and equipment. On and on I went, occasionally passing suspicious little groups of Arabs. It was very scary. I suppose I walked for about two hours when, finally, a driver of a small truck took pity on me and stopped. He asked where I wanted to go. I said, "The Transit Camp". He roared with laughter. "We're already there!" he said. Sure enough, the lights I could see on the

left-hand side were indeed those of my camp. The security of the camp must have been very poor because I crept in unchallenged and fell into my bed without any further incident.

A day or two later, the orders came for me to proceed to Port Said to join the ship back to England. There, I joined a party of men waiting to embark and, to my delight, with them was my Marjorie. We lined up together and climbed up the gangplank to the ship. We were met by an officious sergeant with a clipboard. Both our names were together on it so we expected to get married quarters. He would not believe that we were man and wife. He insisted that we were brother and sister. At first glance we did tend to look alike. We both wore the same rimless spectacles and had the same shaped faces. I could not convince him that we were married. It seemed to me that the man was not very intelligent, so I tried another tack. I told him that we were, indeed, brother and sister but that we belonged to a very old traditional Catholic family and had been given special permission, by the Pope, to get married. "I've 'eard of such things", he said and gave us a cabin together!

A concert party was quickly formed from any volunteers willing to join, including me. I can't remember much about it except that it was very amateur after the professional ENSA artistes I'd known and worked with. I can remember, however, a double act, called the Bathhouse Duo, rapidly formed between a soldier and an ATS girl. He said, "May I hold your Palmolive" and she answered, "Not on your Lifebuoy". They sung famous songs with different words, such as "Loofah come back to me". That gives some idea of the quality of the gags. All I had to do in the show was to play accompaniments and piano duets with another soldier. Thank goodness.

The only other entertainment was hours and hours of tedious Housey-Housey, the then name for Bingo. Neither Marjorie or I played it.



Also on the boat was a group of Palestinian businessmen, the first to be allowed to travel to England since the end of the war with Germany. Amongst them was an old friend of mine, Eddie Jamal. He was a highly educated man, a graduate of the American University of Beirut. Unlike most Arabs, he had had his voice trained to sing European music and had a really beautiful tenor voice. I had accompanied him occasionally back in Jerusalem. He was coming to England to set up a branch of his company, which was called "Zeituna". That was the Arabic word for olive. His family owned vast areas of olive groves and produced olive oil. We agreed to meet later in England.



Now that the war in the Middle East was finally over, our ship could sail unrestricted through the Mediterranean. The weather was fine and for us both it was just like a luxury cruise, except for the constant Army presence with its rules and discipline. We saw lovely distant views of countries we had only read about before. The most spectacular was the Rock of Gibraltar, which rose majestically out of the hazy mist as we approached it. To most people on board, it was merely an opportunity to have a gamble. Everyone who wanted to had bought a ticket. At exactly the time the Captain announced a position of the boat relative to the Rock, the person with the ticket for that time won a large amount of money.

We sailed up the Bay of Biscay, which belied its reputation by giving us a smooth crossing and, eventually, arrived just off England at the tip of Cornwall, Land's End, and thence up the Irish Sea. We were not able to see anything as it was night-time but as dawn came we found ourselves opposite the Isle of Man. As I had been used to years of looking at the muted colours of the Middle East – sandy yellow and dull olive green or dark evergreens, the sight of the Island's rolling bright green fields was quite breathtaking. Thence, on to Scotland, the views were spectacular when the ship sailed near enough for them to be seen.

We finally docked at Greenock and had a long, frustrating, wait for the collection of tickets to the final destination of each of us; passes for disembarkation leave and advance payment of money. There was a perfunctory customs inspection by friendly Customs officers who must have realised that, after years abroad, members of the Forces would have acquired valuable items that could be chargeable. They did, however, inspect more fully the occasional person whom they must have suspected. They did not even look at my luggage.

On shore at last we were given a meal and then put on a train for London. Our tickets were made out to Westcliff-on-Sea, as we had decided to go to my parents' home first. I had "prior rights" as I had been away the longest. Marjorie and I managed to get window seats in the carriage and the train set off through the built-up area of Glasgow. The inhabitants all lined up alongside the track and cheered and clapped us as we rode past. We were, to them, the returning troops who had won the war for them in the Middle East and they were showing their gratitude. We cheerfully waved back.

It was a long tedious journey with a lot of waits at various stations and junctions. I was getting more and more impatient but, eventually, after many changes of trains, we arrived at Westcliff-on-Sea. We called a taxi and gave the address of my parents' new home, 32, Clatterfield Gardens. On arriving there, the taxi driver refused to take our money. He let us know that, as we were returning soldiers to whom he was very grateful, the ride was free.

I could not get to the front door quick enough. I rang the bell and waited excitedly for my parents to answer the door.

The door opened and there stood my Mum and Dad, together with my sister, Gladys, holding her new baby Anna; and also standing there was her other daughter, Caroline, a little toddler. It was a thrilling occasion. I introduced my darling wife and there were hugs and kisses all round. Caroline was overcome and a little frightened by our appearance, because she burst into tears and would have nothing to do with us.

During the meal that followed we could barely find time to eat, as we were kept talking and catching up with the news. They knew that Marjorie and I had determined to have a marriage ceremony in a church for the benefit of both of our families. We discussed the feasibility of doing this and decided to ask Rev. Woods of Pall Mall Church to marry us there. A date was set for the Saturday week.

I needed money so the next day I went by train to Norwood where ENSA had its HQ for its military members. A very officious officer there told me that I must report for duty immediately. I tried to tell him that I was on a month's disembarkation leave but he would not listen. He was short of men and wanted me there at once. Finally I managed to get through to him that I was getting married on Saturday so reluctantly he let me go. I made up my mind that I would not show up there again till my month's leave was up.

We had only a few days to prepare for the wedding. England was in the grips of austerity and rationing.





Mum had saved enough ingredients to make a small wedding cake and only a very modest wedding breakfast was laid out. A friend of Gladys's lent Marjorie a beautiful wedding dress which, fortunately, fitted without alteration. Her bridesmaids were to be her sister, Betty, and little Caroline. Somehow, material had been acquired to make their dresses. I had my good pre-war suit.

My cousin, Gordon, was to be my best man. Marjorie's parents had arranged to get to Westcliff and her father would give her away wearing the Army dress suit of a Pay Corps lieutenant. He was very proud of his Army uniform and the Commission that he gained in the First World War. The bridegroom was ambivalent about wearing the uniform that he had been so reluctant to wear throughout the present War so he wore the pre-war suit, which still fitted perfectly. My old friend and teacher, Donald Sprinck would play the organ and the friends of my youth, Bert Hutton, the choirmaster of St. Andrews Church and his wife would also come.

The day of the wedding dawned. We all got ready and made our way to Pall Mall Church. Somehow rationed petrol had been saved, enough to enable those of the family with cars to drive to the church and to give lifts to others who had no cars. Each car was filled to the brim with guests.

The service went without a hitch. Marjorie's Dad gave her away with considerable dignity. The Rev. Woods carried out the service splendidly, giving in his sermon his delight that his organist had been spared the dangers of war to return to the church for his wedding. Donald Sprinck played magnificently and my best man, Gordon managed to have the ring available, making its second appearance in a wedding ceremony, intact at the correct time.

The reception and the wedding breakfast, such as it was in those austerity times, was a most enjoyable occasion. One of my schoolboy friends, whose name I now forget, took photos with my camera and, also, a short ciné film with my ciné camera using a Pathé film that I managed to get. Both camera film and ciné film were still very difficult to obtain so I was lucky to have managed to get hold of both. After the meal we all went back to the bungalow for photographs in the garden. The weather was glorious; everyone was happy and Marjorie and I were full of joy that we had decided not to rely entirely on a marriage in an Army registry office to make us husband and wife.

As we had already had a honeymoon, to our surprise Mum and Dad had booked a holiday for the four of us in a holiday camp on the Isle of Wight. It was a new camp, only just built that year. The facilities were quite modest compared with camps like Butlins. There was a main building with a clubroom and a larger dining room; and the bedrooms were huts in the grounds. There were no entertainments or hearty "Rise and Shine" activities. The whole affair was pleasant and peaceful. We went on excursions to various parts of the Island that Dad remembered from his boyhood. Sometimes Marjorie and I went on our own and, in fact, spent a lot of time together exploring the countryside.

Then came a terrible shock! Mum came to me and told me that she had taken a great dislike to Marjorie. I had made a very bad mistake in marrying her. Marjorie was not a nice person – I deserved far better. I was horrified and could hardly believe my ears. I *knew* that Marjorie was a really lovely girl, kind, gentle and

always loving. I took Dad aside and asked him what had brought this about. He said that he could not understand Mum's attitude; he could see nothing wrong in Marjorie at all. In the years that followed I gradually found the reason for Mum's antipathy towards Marjorie. She had had an awful childhood, suffering greatly from a drunkard of a father who had periods free from the drink when her sisters were children. Mum had been treated miserably but the sisters had had a happy life. Consequently she was unbearably jealous of them and fell out with each one. This attitude towards her female relatives even carried on to her own daughter, my sister Gladys. She even disliked her own daughter. Then I was born and became the apple of her eye. She absolutely doted on me and, although I was a man and a married one at that, she could not, and would not, realise that I was now some other woman's property. In her eyes I was still her little boy. When she saw me so close and loving with Marjorie, she became impossibly jealous of her. Another fact quickly became apparent. In her mind she had already found a wife for me, the sister of my friend Ron Wells. She had fully expected that I would come back from the war, take up with this girl and marry her. What had put this into her mind I can't imagine, as I had never paid any attention to the girl and, in fact, apart from seeing her occasionally as Ron's sister, I had hardly ever had *anything* to do with her. I tried hard to convince Mum that she was wrong about Marjorie but failed dismally to do so. I loved my mother dearly and it hurt me terribly to find that she had this frame of mind. The holiday on the Island was completely spoiled for Marjorie and me and we could not wait to get back and on to our next stay.

This was to be in Manchester with Marjorie's parents. I soon knew them as Ma and Pa and called them that. Pa was an officer in the Manchester Army Pay Office. They had rented a huge furnished house with lots of rooms. It was very old but comfortable. We had our own room, as did Marjorie's sister Betty and her youngest brother John. Ma was lovely, kind and friendly and very welcoming to me.

I soon learned that Pa was a very inventive businessman before the war. He was a self-made proficiency expert – nowadays called a time and motion man. He'd been responsible for putting at least two failing business firms on their feet again. One had been in Jamaica and, in fact, Marjorie and her brothers and sister had spent part of their childhood on that island. He had re-organised the business methods of Gamages, the big store in Oxford Street and had designed the system for manipulating the BBC's collection of gramophone records. I told him about our friend Eddie Jamal and his desire to set up a company in England to market olive oil. Immediately Pa was interested and wanted to be considered for the job when he left the army. I contacted Eddie who came to Manchester and stayed with us. He and Pa put their heads together to discuss the future company. All was going well until, to our surprise, Eddie went and fell in love with Marjorie's sister Betty. He wanted to marry her, there and then, and take her back to Palestine with him. She was only fifteen and was not having any. We all knew of the risks a young British girl faced in marrying an Arab, even such a nice man as Eddie. Poor Eddie, used to the customs of his own nation, was really shocked to discover that the marriage decision was not made merely in agreement between him and Pa. Betty, unlike Arab girls, had a big say in the matter and that big say was "No!" Eddie finished his stay with us and went back to London.

I was getting more and more keen on photography. I had learned how to develop and print my own pictures and had the burning desire to own an enlarger. The few that could be found in photo shops were far too expensive. Walking through a Manchester side street one day, we saw an enlarger for sale in a second-hand shop. It was quite cheap so I bought it and with great excitement took it back to the house. I could not use it yet as there was no dark room but looked forward eventually to making one somewhere.

One day Marjorie and I were sitting in a bus, which stopped by a factory that was disgorging all the workers at the end of the day. The bus filled with women, all standing. One woman looked at me and, at the top of her voice made disparaging remarks, using very ripe language, about her having to stand whilst a hale and hearty man remained seated – me! I was wearing civilian clothes. She also ratted on about the men of England being away fighting and there was I, still a civilian, sitting there depriving her of a seat. I stood up, very theatrically, showing that I had difficulty with something wrong with one leg. I stood by her and said, "I'm sorry it has

taken me so long to get to my feet , but this war wound in my leg makes it difficult.” She blushed scarlet and tried to get me to sit again. I made a great demonstration of refusing and forced her to sit down, to her great embarrassment and the jeers of her fellow workers. Serve her right!

My embarkation leave was due to come to and end. I left Marjorie with her family and went back to Norwood to report in to the NAAFI HQ. This was in an erstwhile nunnery. It is strange how sensitive I was to the atmosphere of that place. It seemed to have a miasma of something very sinister, probably due to the strange behaviour of the nuns who had lived there before. I was not comfortable there. I missed Marjorie very much and, being young and presumably good looking, I began to be plagued by a group of militant homosexuals who wanted me to be like them and join them in their way of life. I have no objection to homosexuals as such and believe that they are born that way but I complained to the orderly officer, who began to be very worried that there would be a scandal brewing up under his command. In the meantime Marjorie had come to stay with her brother Dave’s wife in Mitcham, a nearby town. I told the officer that I had just got married and was resenting the advances of those men. The outcome was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was given lodging and travel allowance and allowed to stay with Marjorie. I returned each day to my duties in the nunnery and, each evening went home cheerfully to Mitcham.

My duties were mainly to do with keeping up the morale of the soldiers, both NAAFI and ENSA, waiting for their next posting. The sergeant in charge of the ENSA soldiers there arranged entertainments, which consisted mainly of film shows. Whenever there was to be an evening of films, I had to go by Underground to Aldwych, where the ENSA Film Unit was. I collected the films in their big tins and lugged them all the way back to the nunnery. Some evenings, when there were no films, a small group of us made a séance table the way I had learnt to do on the Nile steamer. We had amusing, sometimes hilarious, sessions getting through to various friends and relations who had passed on. I don’t know whether I believed in it or not but frequently I got messages from Ron Wells. Ron’s messages often referred back to their being something wrong with the plans to my parents’ bungalow. The sergeant got regular messages from a deceased friend, a cinema organist, who had died in Manchester.

It became rapidly obvious that the circumcision that I had so determinedly avoided on the ship, the Orbita, was becoming unavoidable. Marriage had aggravated the problem. I reported sick to the M.O., who arranged for me to go to the Royal Albert Hospital at Woolwich. As usual, when a soldier went into hospital, he had to take all his equipment with him. In my case it was two kit bags, a haversack, a water-bottle, a gas mask, a rolled-up gas cape and a blanket. To my indignation, I was also given a Sten gun to carry as well. Travel with this lot was not easy.

I settled in to the ward and had two interviews, one with the surgeon and one with an occupational therapist, a dear old lady who gave me felt, needle and cotton and a paper with the instructions of how to make a soft toy, a baby deer. The day for my operation was fixed and, when it arrived, a one-eyed male orderly nurse came to shave all round my wedding tackle. He was so lethal with his razor, being unable to aim straight owing to his poor vision, that I took the razor from him and shaved myself. I was then given an injection in my arm to calm my nerves and was wheeled into the anaesthetic room. The anaesthetist rolled me onto my stomach and started to push a huge needle painfully into my lower spine. It was the day for minor operations, with us patients lined up as if on a conveyor belt. The man in front of me, who was already in the theatre, being operated on for haemorrhoids, started screaming in pain. We could hear him yelling in our room. Suddenly in rushed a surgeon, who told the anaesthetist that his spinal injections were not working. I was to be given a general anaesthetic instead. As he pulled the needle out of my back, I heard the surgeon say, “This chap is for haemorrhoids, isn’t he?” I was already very doopey from the previous injections but somehow, in blurred speech, I managed to insist, “No, I’m circumcision”, just before the pentathol needle went into the back of my hand. I hesitate to think what might have happened to me if I hadn’t managed to speak out.

When I came round, I found my wedding tackle all bandaged up like a colonel's gouty foot and just as painful. I gradually recovered enough to start showing an interest in life again. I had a book by Haldane about how his vision had been helped considerably by a method called "Sight without Glasses" and that was the name of his book. I was short-sighted so the book appealed to me. The first thing I had to do was to take off my glasses and cease to use them from then on. I measured how far I could see the small type in a book clearly. It was 11 inches. I then began, religiously, carrying out all the exercises daily. The distance increased very satisfactorily. My needlework proceeded to the gratification of the occupational therapist. My little soft toy became a most attractive Bambi and I was quite proud of it.

The stitches had to come out so the same one-eyed orderly nurse came to me to perform the operation. Once again he was clumsy and useless. He jabbed away with his forceps and failed to take hold of a stitch with them. He really hurt me. I took the forceps and the scissors from him and took the stitches out myself. To my delight, I could see to do so without my glasses. The distance of clear vision had increased to over twenty inches. The eye exercises were working well.

As soon as the stitches were gone, I was due to be discharged. I felt really weak and my todger was painful and swollen. I'm sure that I needed another couple of days' rest to recuperate but I had to get up and dress. Then I was given a bus pass to Mitcham and a chit showing that I had a week's convalescence leave. The one-eyed orderly nurse told me that there was a shortage of beds for wounded soldiers, and to bugger off. I answered that I was still a wounded soldier and I needed that bed, but to no avail.

As usual, discharged soldiers had to report to the discharging officer. This one was completely bonkers. He fixed me with his mad eyes and asked me why I wore those glasses. I answered that I had got myopia. He said, "There's no need to be insolent!" Then he discharged me – no mention of my circumcision or how I felt. I saluted and staggered off. Then I put on all my web equipment, hoisted my two kit bags and took the Sten gun under my arm. I felt terrible. Thus loaded I staggered out of the hospital and went down to the bus stop, which fortunately was just outside the main gates. A bus drew up with a cheerful lady conductor, a "Clippie" as they were known. She was kindness itself. Immediately she helped me on to the platform, took all my equipment from me and piled it in the luggage space under the stairs and helped me to sit down on one of the long back seats. I had to lower myself slowly and gingerly to the seat. Anything more vigorous would have put me in great agony. My greatly swollen and bandaged John Thomas reached the seat before I did. The Clippie could see that I was feeling very unwell and responded with great kindness. I suspect that she guessed the root cause of my discomfort. Or something nearby.

Sitting opposite me on the other long seat was a little old lady with a huge handbag on her lap. The following conversation took place, shouted across the space between us for all to hear.

Old lady. "Have you come out of the hospital, soldier?"

Me. "Yes"

Old lady. "What's been wrong with you soldier?"

Me. "I've had an operation."

Old lady. "What was the operation?"

Me. "It was on the lower part of my abdomen." (*I was beginning to get a bit desperate.*)

Old lady. "I know the very operation. I've had it myself"

(I began to feel as if I wanted to stuff a handkerchief in my mouth to stop me from laughing.)

Old lady. *(Producing a visiting card from her huge handbag and passing it across to me. It read. " St. Matthew's Christian Spiritualist Healing Centre", Penge)*

"I know that the wicked surgeons have done their worst but come along to this address next Tuesday and I'll heal you myself
WITH THE LAYING ON OF HANDS."

(The Clippie could not restrain herself and burst out laughing. This time I really did stuff a handkerchief into my mouth.)

I don't know how I managed to get myself from the bus stop in Mitcham, lugging all that equipment. It took me a long time, with frequent pauses to rest. The convalescence really started when I was once more in Marjorie's arms. I presented my soft toy Bambi to our sister-in-law, Joan. She was delighted. She collected deer ornaments and happily placed my Bambi (of which I was very proud) on the mantle-piece. I had a blissful week recovering – especially that one essential part of me, which healed up remarkably quickly, and started doing its duty. Then it was back to Norwood.

I received a letter from Eddie Jamal. He'd got a contract to sing on the BBC and wanted me to be his accompanist. I jumped at the chance. I could get frequent leave from the NAAFI HQ, by the simple means of bribing the sergeant who called the daily roll call, five shillings to miss my name from the list. He actually invited me to do this if I wanted to.

The broadcasts were part of the BBC's Overseas Broadcasting Service, Arabic Section. Eddie had many of the popular "light classical" songs translated into Arabic. Songs such as "Because" and "Trees". He sang them beautifully. The producer was an Iraqi Arab. Immediately he and Eddie fell out. The producer did not approve of Eddie's pronunciation of many words. Poor Eddie had to remember to sing these words in an Iraqi way, with an Iraqi pronunciation. It was as if a singer from Newcastle were trying to sing with a Welsh pronunciation. We were contracted for three broadcasts, with an option for more. Thanks to the Iraqi producer the option never materialised. I was in many ways relieved, for although I enjoyed accompanying Eddie, getting to the broadcasting station all the way from Norwood to Elstree was very tedious and time consuming.

Eddie wanted to import electronic organs to the Middle East so I took him to meet Mr. Midgley in his factory at Park Royal. At the beginning of the war, Midgley and his three brilliant sons had suddenly disappeared. No one knew where they had gone. Now the truth was out. They had been spirited away to the USA to take part in the Manhattan Project. This was the construction of the atom bomb. Apparently Midgley was an expert at making electronic fuses. He and his sons had the doubtful reputation of having designed the fuse for the bomb. To Eddie's and my disappointment, Midgley had given up making organs. Their factory had gone over entirely to the more profitable manufacture of electronic toys. In no way nonplussed, Eddie immediately started importing the toys to the Middle East.

I visited Eddie in his hotel suite and was introduced to the singer, Anne Shelton. Her brother, a very smooth businessman, was already acting as British agent for many of Eddie's enterprises. I was introduced to him as the son-in-law of the man who was to handle the Zeituna olive oil imports to England. The brother immediately said, "I could have done that for you, Eddie!" Some days later Marjorie's father learnt that he was not to be the Zeituna British agent any more. I never saw or heard from Eddie again. As it turned out, it

was all to the good, because the Israelis captured much of the olive producing land of the Arabs. I later heard that Eddie had finally transferred all his business activities to Cairo. I never bothered to check up on his importation of electronic toys from Midgley. I should have done, as there would have been nice commission for me in the deals. But I am no businessman. Thank goodness!



This blissful existence soon ended. When my convalescence leave was over I reported back to Norwood and was immediately told that I was to be posted to ENSA HQ in Hamburg. I was at the same time, elated to be getting back into show business and depressed at having to leave Marjorie. I was sent to Dover by train, again struggling with all my army equipment and set sail for Ostend. Halfway across the Channel a mighty fog descended on us causing us to be halted in mid-crossing for nearly two days. There were no sleeping quarters on the ship and very little food to be had, so when we finally reached Ostend, we were tired, hungry and exhausted. We were fed and

immediately put on the night train for Hamburg. It was crowded with soldiers. We had to take it in turns to sit on the seats or, otherwise, we had to sit on our equipment. If we could find some room, we could sleep on the dirty floor of the compartment. All in all, a horrible, fatiguing and miserable night was endured.

On arrival in Hamburg, I found to my horror that I was to be billeted in a great, gloomy ex-German Army barracks. I struggled up several flights of concrete stairs to a huge smelly and dirty room and settled down to try to get some sleep on the primitive bedding that was supplied to me. Suddenly I was woken up and told to get dressed and ready to move on. I got ready and gathered up all my equipment yet once again and dragged it and myself down the stairs, outside to the street. I was met by a smiling and cheerful ENSA driver with a staff car. He helped me to load all my equipment into the boot and I sat in great comfort beside him in front. This was the beginning of a life of civilised comfort, once more in the caring arms of ENSA.

Hamburg was a pathetic sight. The Allies had bombed it unmercifully. Almost all that could be seen everywhere was destroyed buildings. The people lived as best they could in cellars below the wrecks of their houses. The streets were full of rubble. Attempts were being bravely made to clear the ruins and to try and reconstruct homes out of pieces of scrap building material. Here and there, the air raid shelters, huge towers, could be seen, still intact and standing out of the shambles around them. These shelters were at one time a great success and yet a total failure. They were constructed out of very strong ferro-



concrete and could have probably survived a direct hit from explosive bombs. It was when incendiary bombs fell that they were a disaster. The incendiaries fell onto the streets, which were made of tar macadam, and set fire to them. The roaring flames burnt up all the oxygen out of the air and the poor people in the air raid shelter towers were suffocated to death – thousands of them at a time. The really sad thing was that Hamburg had been an independent state within Germany, a Hansa town, and its Council certainly did not support the Nazis. Much of its business was with Britain and many of its successful companies, especially those concerned with shipping, were happily managed by Anglo-German partnerships. At the outbreak of war the Nazis had moved in and taken the place over.

As we drove, I wondered whether there would be any buildings left for us to live in. In the centre of the city there was an area that had escaped, unscathed. Surprisingly, it was around the central main railway station, the *Hauptbahnhof*. Opposite the entrance to the station there was a row of beautiful hotels and a splendid theatre, the *Schauspielhaus*. My driver took me to a small hotel called *Unter den Linden Hotel*. He told me to go in

and make myself comfortable and report later to the *Schauspielhaus*. A friendly German lady welcomed me and gave me a room on the top floor. The lift was still working. All my equipment and I found our way to the room where we settled in. As soon as I was rested and washed, I made my way to the theatre. An ENSA officer there, Major Neville-Willing, realised that I had had a long and stressful journey and immediately took me to a large dining room. He instructed the German cook to prepare a meal for me and soon I was tucking in to a splendid meal, the likes of which I had never had in an army mess. It turned out that the officer, this major, had been in charge of the Café Royal near Piccadilly in London. He was an expert at catering for connoisseurs and had brought his skills to the ENSA dining room in the theatre. He was also very theatrically camp and flaunted it in his speech and gait. I later found out that he was a very kind man and continually concerned for the well-being of the ENSA personnel under his command. He frequently travelled across the frontier to Denmark and came back with Danish speciality food to enhance our meals.



Well fed and comfortable I was then introduced to my new boss, a sergeant-major named Robin Stark. Robin had been a successful author in Civvie Street and his skills, as such, were now employed by ENSA. He was a quiet, gentle person, quite unlike anything one would expect of a sergeant-major. I soon fell into his way of working. He took me under his wing and taught me how to be a theatrical writer. Regular groups of ENSA artistes, the casts of touring plays, came to our theatre to perform their shows. Our job was to liaise between them and the German Broadcasting Station, the Nord West Deutscher Rundfunk.

This involved arranging broadcast interviews with the actors and writing a short précis of their play, for them to broadcast as a kind of trailer. This liaison also included variety artistes, who could perform part of their stage performances as broadcasts.

I happily trotted to and fro between the theatre and the broadcasting house, a pleasant walk through a part of Hamburg that had escaped the worst of the bombing. The road took me across the bridge over the beautiful Alster, a charming system of lakes. All around the larger lake were elegant tall patrician houses, still intact despite the bombing, and gardens leading down to the water's edge with many weeping willow trees. After the austere Middle East landscapes, these glowing vistas were completely delightful to me.

The broadcasts were made in the Musikhalle, a sumptuous building containing two concert halls, one large and one small. There were also many rooms adapted to broadcasting. At one end of the building there was a curved gallery, in the centre of which was a huge memorial statue to Brahms. It was an allegorical collection of statues, posed ladies (Muses I suppose), rising up to a central point. The extraordinary thing about this memorial was that, despite its gigantic size, it could be rotated by hand, merely by pushing it. All round the outer edge of the gallery were free-standing pillars, each with the bust of a famous composer. The bust on one of the pillars seemed out of place. Its style did not match all the others and the man it represented was, to us British, merely some obscure Nazi composer. The British Army officer in charge of the place asked the German caretaker why this bust, which seemed so out of place, was on that pillar. The caretaker said that previously there had been bust of Mendelssohn. When the Nazis took over, they had told him to remove Mendelssohn's bust and to destroy it. Of course, Mendelssohn was a Jew, even though by religion he was a Christian. Our officer expressed his sorrow at this, as he really enjoyed the music of Mendelssohn. The caretaker then surprised him by saying that so did he enjoy Mendelssohn's music. More than that, he said that he had taken the bust down into the cellars, wrapped it in oiled cloth and had hidden it in a very obscure part of the depths of the place. He then recovered Mendelssohn, cleaned him up and restored him to his rightful place on his pillar. I have no idea what happened to the other, Nazi bust. Perhaps it met the fate that was intended for Mendelssohn.

I got to meet famous actors of the day in the course my liaison work. I also met variety artistes. We had more fun with the latter. The actors we found to be very serious about their work, the variety artistes far more relaxed and full of fun for the most part. One of them was a comedian who had achieved considerable fame, broadcasting in England. He was Michael Howard. All he did was to tell silly “Shaggy Dog” jokes. They were very long jokes and the pay-off at the end of each one was usually so ridiculous that it was often hilariously funny. Michael was very fond of drinking gin. When he arrived he was taken off to the Officers’ Club opposite the theatre and generally fêted. Unfortunately, the only gin that they had in the club was a German gin-type drink called Schlichte. It is much stronger than English gin. Michael lapped it up as if it were the English variety. Soon he was almost incapably sloshed. Someone brought him, staggering helplessly, to the theatre where he was to due to do a show in a few hours. Robin and I took him into our office and started to sober him up. This involved pouring lots of strong coffee into his unwilling mouth. Somehow we managed to make him frequently sick and gradually he became somewhat sober but feeling dreadful. We led him down to the stage and on he went. Surprisingly, once on front of the microphone, his brain seemed to have been taken over by remote control, for he gave a splendid performance and brought the house down with his silly “Shaggy Dog” jokes.



Other artistes came and went on their way to tour Germany. I became friendly with the stage manager and often stood backstage to watch the shows. I even helped him occasionally when there was a complicated scene change. We got to know and see actors such as Naunton Wayne and Basil Radford, the two pompous Englishmen who talked “cricket” in the film *The Lady vanishes*; and Daphne Oxenford, who later became famous with the children of our country in *Listen with Mother* on the radio. I took these people to the broadcasting studios to give extracts from their plays. I was introduced to the splendours of ballet, a theatrical art form I had hardly ever seen before, by watching the Ballet Rambert and the Ballet Jooss. The latter impressed by its sheer athleticism. Madame Rambert always stood in the wings and, if the company performed particularly well, she was often standing there in tears. On the more light-hearted side of show business, I saw the Two Leslies. These men skilfully had the troops roaring with laughter at jokes which carefully obeyed ENSA’s censorship rules, yet still succeeded in

breaking them in doing so. A double entendre can be as naughty as an outright dirty joke and still be unwittingly accepted by the ENSA censor. An actress, Beatrix Lehman, we thought very austere, stand-offish and unfriendly, came with a very serious play. Years later I heard that she had another side to her character. This story may, of course, be apocryphal. She was playing the part of a murderess, who led men on and then murdered them. Playing opposite her, as her latest victim, was an actor named Herbie. He suffered badly from haemorrhoids and was always in agony and very miserable. Beatrix stood, with her back to the audience, at the front of the stage, wearing only a dressing gown. At the back of the stage stood Herbie. As a bell tolled, (the signal that she was about to commit another murder), she opened her dressing gown to reveal to Herbie her enticing naked body. This time, across it, she wore a sash with “Happy Christmas Herbie” printed on it. It cheered poor Herbie up immensely!

He later went to her dressing room to thank her, with tears of happiness in his eyes.

I palled up with an administrative ENSA soldier named Les, who had had a very interesting army career before joining ENSA. He spoke fluent German. In the last months of the war he had been dropped behind enemy lines where he engaged in acts of sabotage with local freedom fighters, some of whom were quite surprisingly



Germans. He had acquired a fine Alsatian dog and he never went anywhere without it. I never knew exactly what his job was in the theatre. He was very secretive so I expect it was involved with security. A German girl, Ursula, nicknamed Uschi, also worked in the theatre offices, as an interpreter. She spoke excellent English. Les fell for her completely and she reciprocated. He wanted to marry her, but somehow she was very suspicious that he might be already be married. She asked me if he were married. I told her that I did not know. Actually I did know!

And he was!

Actually Les finally took Uschi back to England with him. We called on them years later and they were still happily together.



On our free weekends Les and I travelled by the S-Bahn to Poppenbüttel, a village near Hamburg. The S-Bahn corresponds to our District Line in London. We used to spend the day in a farmyard with Uschi's family. This farmyard was a German Army hospital for treating soldiers who needed plastic surgery. Uschi's father was the colonel administrator in charge of the hospital. Her family, mother father and two daughters, lived in a loft above one of the barns, all living and sleeping in one room. It was a very primitive existence in those hard times and, as it was winter with the snow on the ground, very cold and draughty. It was even worse for the wounded German soldiers. Their hospital was a barn and their beds were straw laid on the rough ground. There was one doctor – a plastic surgeon who had to operate under the most appalling conditions. He had no anaesthetics and only the simplest antiseptics. As ENSA staff, Les and I were entitled to an enormous ration each month of booze and cigarettes. I usually got one bottle of English gin, two bottles of German gin (the deadly Schlichte that had laid Michael Howard low); one bottle of champagne or German Sekt; a bottle of a liqueur such as Benedictine or Kümmel; and four bottles of wine. There was no way I could even begin to drink all that. I also got 500 cigarettes, the best English makes. I never smoke. We were absolutely forbidden to let any Germans have our booze and fags ration. In fact, we were absolutely forbidden to fraternise with the Germans. The latter was a ruling that turned out to be completely impossible to insist on. The friendly, big-hearted British soldiers soon put paid to such a stupid regulation and, just as we two did, rapidly became friendly with the eagerly willing Hamburg inhabitants.



Every time we visited Poppenbüttel, Les and I took some of our ration there. The main problem was to get past the Military Police standing in the railway station. As it was a very cold winter we wore our big army greatcoats and underneath them, a sheepskin "liberty bodice". We each made slits in the lining of the coat, then wrapped bottles of booze in newspaper and inserted them inside, one each side. The cigarettes were distributed, unobtrusively, in various pockets. Then I walked confidently past the Military Policemen carrying my large briefcase. Of course I was immediately stopped. They wanted to know what I had in the briefcase. I obediently opened it and showed my sheet music. I then passed by unmolested.

I handed the booze and the cigarettes to the doctor. He used the booze as an anaesthetic, getting his patients drunk before operating. He gave them cigarettes to help steady their nerves. It was a sad, pathetic process and, to my mind, quite unnecessary. The war was over. The wounded German soldiers were human beings and should have been treated as such by the all-conquering British. Despite the evil past of the Nazi regime, these

men were largely not responsible for the wickedness of Hitler and his cronies. They were suffering appallingly from their wounds and could have easily been helped by British doctors or, at least, given medicines and hospital equipment.

One of the patients I shall never forget. He had had the lower part of his face shot away – there was no jaw at all. The surgeon intended to remove some bone from the poor man's leg, with which to start to construct a jaw of sorts. He was given some cigarettes to steady his nerves. It was really pathetic to see him trying to smoke a cigarette through his nose, or trying to stuff food through the gap below his upper jaw. As I walked through the ward I was deeply moved and in tears. Had the war gone another way, it might have been a British soldier lying there.

My cousin, Gordon, was a research scientist in the Woolwich Arsenal. I wrote to him asking if he could get me some simple drugs in bulk. A parcel from him arrived with packets of aspirin and codeine powder. I gave them to Ursula's sister who was secretary to a German doctor. He was desperate for drugs for his patients. He made the powder into little doses wrapped in folded paper. In a small way I was able to help but really, it was only a drop in the ocean of suffering that the war had brought.

As well as the bottles and cigarettes, Les and I also smuggled food to Poppenbüttel the same way. I was quite thin at the time so the extra bulk to my appearance did not look too unusual to the waiting Military Police. Opposite the theatre there was a NAAFI which served soldiers with the traditional NAAFI *cha and a wad* – a cup of tea and a cake. The cakes were usually slabs of spongy material with currents and spice in it. They were quite tasty and really filling. To our friends in Poppenbüttel they were essential additions to their poor diet.

Occasionally we would let the family have a bottle of an alcoholic drink that we all shared together. The father had a small, probably illegal, cache of tinned herrings. He would open one of these for us to share as a meal. In the centre of the village there was an outdoor bread-oven. All the villagers used to take their small rations of flour mixed into dough for the baker to cook for them. The oven was fuelled by chopped wood that the villagers supplied him. I don't know what else was put in the dough but the bread tasted foul.

The British Army of Occupation, to their credit had organised a very efficient system of rationing which, though hardly generous, prevented starvation amongst the German population. The ordinary British soldiers cheerfully broke all the regulations to help add to these rations.



One of the German servants in the theatre was a poor little lady, a hunchback with other physical deformities. She was also mentally retarded. Unfortunately she did not understand the rationing system and was frequently swindled out of her share by unscrupulous shopkeepers. We used to help her by giving her, illegally, extra food from our kitchens. It was most embarrassing as, if any of us handed her some food, she went down on her knees and kissed our feet to show her gratitude. If any ENSA artiste arrived and started to be all temperamental, we would give him or her some food and suggest that it would be a good idea to give it to the poor little handicapped lady. Then she went through her little gratitude ceremony to the great embarrassment of the artiste concerned and even greater amusement of the rest of us. There was a German underground movement called the Werewolves, who could not accept that the war was over and continued to fight on by terrorist methods. We told visitors that our little servant was really the leader of the Werewolves in disguise.

ENSA finally realised that I was an entertainer, not a writer of shortened versions of plays. I was put as pianist in with a tiny group of artistes and given the job of going round the wards of the military hospitals giving shows. The group consisted of artistes who had been liberated from the German concentration camps. There was a Belgian tenor, a Gypsy violinist, a Russian bass and a sixteen-year old Russian girl who played the piano. She was actually a White Russian, a princess in her own right – she said. I accompanied the tenor and the violinist, and the girl accompanied the bass. I think they were actually related, but as neither spoke English I never knew much about them. They had a rudimentary knowledge of German with which we managed to get along in the basic handling of the concerts. An ENSA sergeant was in charge of the group. Before the war he was a seaside concert party entertainer, specialising in children's shows. He was actually very funny with a large stock of very corny jokes, ideally suitable to children, but doubtfully so to the soldier patients in the wards. I enjoyed this work considerably. I had no idea what the Russian bass was singing about but I made up fanciful translations of each song, that I relayed to the patients. His most spectacular song was "The Cavalry of the Steppes", already known to the British in translation. He accompanied himself with two half walnut shells that he clip-clopped together in imitation of horses hooves. It was quite impressive. The Gypsy violinist had a marvellous technique, which consisted of playing slightly out of tune, in the Gypsy style. He introduced me to the music of Lehár (I think that he also was a Hungarian like Lehár) and thus began a lifetime enjoyment for me of Lehár's music.

At one time, we were joined by none other than the famous old Music Hall star, Nellie Wallace. She was accompanied on her tours by another old lady whom we were told was her companion. Nellie was a thoroughly vulgar performer. Her jokes were near the knuckle and always right on the edge being downright dirty. Naturally she went down well with the patients. In one ward however, the poor old girl was thoroughly nonplussed. Our sergeant announced her and she swept in. Usually that got a round of applause. This time, however, she was received in total silence. She stopped dead in her stride and said, "You are permitted to applaud, you know". It seemed that we had been sent, by mistake, to the operations ward. Many of the patients were still dozy after the anaesthetic and the rest were equally dozy after their injections to calm their nerves before their operations. Poor old Nellie. She could not cope with an audience so different from her enthusiastic audiences in the Music Halls. She had been sent to Hamburg in a not-very-good revue with her as leading lady. Basil Dean later noted that many of the youngsters in uniform had not seen her before and did not realise that she was a star. Dissatisfied with her nightly reception, she would put

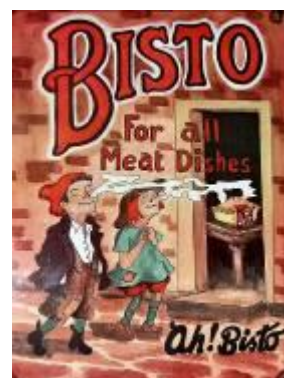


on her uniform (without the ENSA flashes), dash out of the theatre and mingle with the troops, just like any other woman in uniform. "What did you think of the show, luv?" she'd say. And the troops would invariably reply, "Bloody awful!"



double act with his wife, Mimi Laws. Just about everybody knew of her without being

Suddenly ENSA told me that I was to join a new show, about to be put into production. It was to be almost ENSA's last big show before the organisation was wound up. The star would be Bill Whittaker, the red-nosed comic. He was the son of Corum, the ventriloquist, famous before the war as "Corum and Jerry". Bill, unlike many other sons of famous artistes, was determined that he would make his way in the theatre without using his father's name. Other artistes such as Billy Bennett Jnr., and Will Hay Jnr. had no such scruples. So Bill Whittaker was his stage name. He had a solo act and a



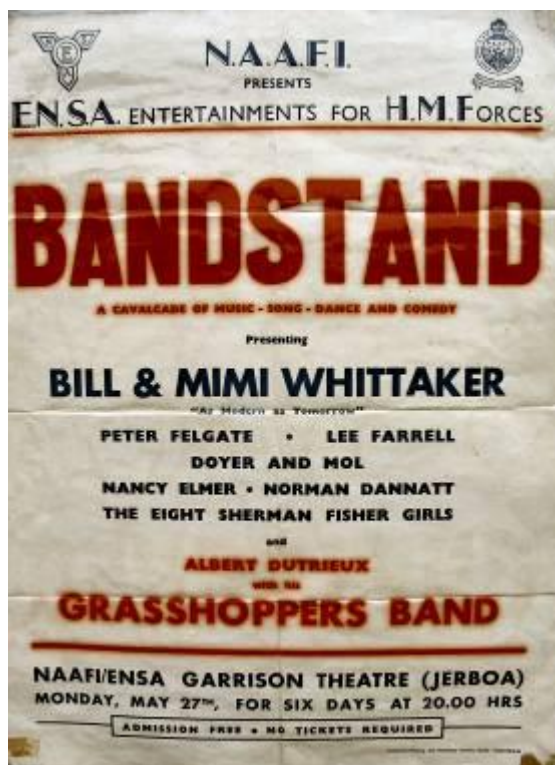
aware that it was she. As a little girl she had posed for the artist who painted the advertisement picture of the little boy and girl sniffing and saying “Ah Bisto!” She was the little girl.

I was introduced to the rest of the cast and rehearsals started immediately. I had to play the piano so that all the artistes could learn the music. I really enjoyed doing this and worked hard at it all day for several days. There



was a light comedian named Peter Felgate, a brilliant dancer who, before the war, starred in the Fol de Rols. He, like me, had been a soldier, a captain in the Royal Artillery, but had managed to get out of the Army to join ENSA. He kept his rank in ENSA. There were two singers, Lee Farrell who sang popular songs and Nancy Elmer, a more serious singer. A ballet dancer, the première ballerina of Holland, whom I knew only as Doyer was partnered by a male ballet dancer, known as Mol. They specialised in amusing types of *pas-de-deaux*. To complete the cast were the Sherman Fisher Girls, chorus girls who were already famous on the stage pre-war.

Instead of a pit orchestra there was a Big Band called the Grasshoppers Band. They were to perform the whole show in a bandstand, actually on the stage. The members were all musicians who had been rescued from



German concentration camps. The leader was a Belgian, Albert Dutrieux, who played fiddle and sax. There were two Dutchmen, a Lithuanian, a Russian and the others whose nationality I can't remember, in all nine musicians, including me on the piano.

Albert Dutrieux was not in good health after years of suffering in the concentration camp. He and his wife had both been rescued together.

She was about to give birth as the show started rehearsing but, sadly, the baby died a few days after she had been born, another little victim of the cruel deprivations of the camps.

There was fiendish activity throughout the theatre. I palled up with the show's stage-manager, another soldier and, when I was not rehearsing, I watched the scenery being prepared and mounted. In the wardrobe department costumes were being prepared, all made of parachute silk, a no longer needed ex-Government property, to fit the entire cast. The show was to be called “Bandstand”, a Cavalcade of Music, Song, Dance and Comedy. The first half was staged as a scene in a park with trees, bushes and statues and in the centre back, a bandstand on which the Grasshoppers Band accompanied the rest of the artistes who performed front stage. In

the second half the bandstand split in half and opened up to make a platform for the band, right across the back of the stage, giving the appearance of a sophisticated night club. Curtaining was hung behind this staging to complete the picture. This curtaining was also made of parachute silk.



As we rehearsed, other members, mostly soldiers, of the ENSA HQ looked in on us and were

very scathing about what we were doing. Many quite openly said that the show would be a flop. I found this very depressing to hear after all our hard work of preparation. I went to the theatre wardrobe to be measured for my costume, which was that of a bandsman, complete with a peaked cap. There was a department in the theatre where musicians worked hard all day orchestrating all the music of the show. Albert Dutrieux collected each piece of music as it was completed and we in the band rehearsed it. Then, when the music of the whole show had been completely orchestrated and rehearsed we had a final run-through with the cast. This led up to the dress rehearsal on the stage of the theatre. I have to admit that this was a bit of a mess and all the spreaders of doom who came to watch let us know that their fears had been confirmed. We had a flop on our hands.

The first night inevitably arrived. The theatre filled up and became the expected full house. Troops came from all round the Hamburg area to see this much-publicised show. I was very excited to be appearing in my first show in a real theatre. The opening was entirely musical and went non-stop from one number to the next, starting with the famous waltz, *Live love and laugh* from the musical *Congress Dances*. The artistes appeared, each waltzing round the stage, till the whole scene was full of swirling people. It was most spectacular. Bill Whittaker and Mimi did one of their comic routines and Peter Felgate joined in another. As they left the stage to great applause, the Sherman Fisher girls appeared dressed in very old-maidish Victorian costumes, complete with poke bonnets and carrying little dolly bags. They stood in a demure row across the stage and sang *You are my Honeysuckle, I am the Bee*. As they sang the lights went out, all but a single spotlight from the back of the theatre. The girls lifted their dolly bags, underneath each of which was sewn a small mirror. It caught the light and each girl directed it to a member of the audience, to whom she sang exclusively. Much to the amusement of the friends of that man around him. Immediately the song finished, we in the band struck up with the famous *Can-Can* from *Orpheus in the Underworld*. The girls hoisted their modest skirts to reveal the traditional French net stockings and frilly knickers and immediately went into the most exciting version of the *Can-Can* I've ever seen. Each girl, in turn, went to the front of the stage to perform her own acrobatic "shine". The audience was ecstatic and cheered and clapped all through the dance. Nothing brightens the war-weary eyes of the troops than the lascivious sight of bare lubricious thighs, framed from above by frilly black knickers and, from below by net stocking held up by black suspenders. ENSA had a rule, strictly enforced, that girls dancing the *Can-Can* or similar acrobatic extravagances must wear two pair of knickers. Then if one of them were to split, the remaining one would be able to hold the fort.



We in the band had our own number to perform, a rousing military march, during which I experienced a most uncanny sensation. The revolving stage started to turn. It felt as if the band was standing still and the whole theatre was turning around us. I saw the towering ranks of balconies and boxes swimming before my eyes. Right at the end of the first half of the show, all the lights went out except for a flickering spot light. Doyer and Mol appeared dressed in Victorian black and white clothes wearing black and white make-up. They went through a balletic performance of one of the early silent movies using exaggerated gestures. I accompanied them from the side of the wings playing a small, tinny piano. At the appropriate points I played the sort of music that was used in the old silent cinemas - *Hearts and Flowers* when the heavy father has thrown his daughter out of the house, never to darken its doors again; and finishing with the traditional chase music, to which Mol chased Doyer round and round the stage. They used the motions seen earlier in the Keystone Cops films, cornering on one leg. It was hilariously funny and brought the first half to an end with the troops roaring with laughter.

The second half opened with the band playing, positioned on the now opened platform, looking more like a Big Band and less like a military band. From then on the show took on a more sophisticated air, just like a modern revue. There were frequent short sketches, dances, and band numbers. Bill, Mimi, Peter and Lee did a very funny version of a seaside pierrot troop doing their show on the pier. It was full of extremely corny jokes that were so corny that they were surprisingly very funny. Here is an example:

Peter: "I say, I say, I say, if it takes a yard and a half of planking to build a hen coop,
how many bags of sawdust will it take to make hens lay doorknobs?"

Bill: "I don't know. What's the answer?"

Peter: "The Flying Scotsman."

Bill: "Where does the Flying Scotsman come in?"

Peter: "Kings Cross."

Bill: "I don't get it!"

Peter: "Well get the next one."

Bill: "Where's it going?"

Peter: "California."

Then the whole troop starts singing "California here I come."

This routine was performed in Victorian times by Peter's grandfather in the old Music Halls. It was funny then and still funny to this day.

The last item was Bill and Mimi doing a version of the famous "Lambeth Walk" in a variety of ways. We had to play the tune as a march, a tango, a waltz and many other styles whilst Bill and Mimi clowned about to the music. At the end of their act the whole of the cast joined them for the curtain calls. We were cheered and cheered to the echo. We got curtain call after curtain call. We obviously had a great success on our hands.





To their credit, all the Doubting Thomases came up to us after the show and admitted that they had been wrong in saying that the show would be a flop.

During the week's run of the show, the girls all turned up one day with magnificent hair-do's. Each girl had acquired extra switches of hair to match her own, which, when in place, gave their coiffures a splendidly sumptuous

appearance. I asked them where they had acquired this extra hair. They told me they had bought it from the theatre's perukier and took me to meet him. He had a large attic under the roof of the theatre. It was long and narrow with cupboards along each side. These cupboards were full of switches of hair, graded by colour from one end of the attic to the other; pure white in the first cupboard going to jet black in the last. He told us that when the terrible air-raids fell on Hamburg, he went out at night and cut the hair off the corpses lying there unattended. After all, as he said, they didn't need the hair any more.

I got on well with the men in the band. Some of them spoke English but mostly we used German, the language they, perforce, had to learn as prisoners of the Germans. Before each show we used to arrive early in the theatre and have a 'Jam Session' together, playing popular tunes of the day by ear and improvising on them. I really enjoyed these pleasant bashes together.

At the end of the week, the show was packed up, the scenery loaded onto a giant articulated lorry, known as a Queen Mary and, with the cast in a coach, set off for Lübeck.



Most of Lübeck, like Hamburg, had been bombed to smithereens by the British Air Force but fortunately the theatre was still intact and so was a row of small hotels by a canal. We moved in and I was given a tiny bedroom in the attic of one of the hotels. It was very comfortable and had a fine view of the Holsten Tor, a mediaeval brick-built gate, and a row of picturesque old warehouses that had survived intact.



We had the Sunday free and in the late evening Bill, the stage manager and I went to the theatre to prepare the stage for the coming show. He and I had palled up, being the only soldier members of the company. On our own we built the whole scene, all the parts of which had been unloaded onto the huge area behind the actual stage. He brought along a bottle of whisky, which we steadily drank throughout the night. It was such hard work that the whisky's intoxicating influence on us had hardly any effect. By dawn the whole stage was set up for the show and we staggered back to our hotel rooms where we fell asleep immediately. We slept throughout the day and, after an early evening meal, trotted along to the theatre in time for the show, feeling fine.

Once more the show was received enthusiastically by the troops, confirming that we indeed had a success on our hands. I was very impressed by the German stagehands. Although they were all suffering from the after effects of the war and very limited rations, they worked hard to keep the show flowing efficiently. Somehow

Bill, despite his lack of German, was able to direct them to his and their satisfaction.

During the days that followed I wandered around Lübeck, admiring the fine old mediaeval buildings that still stood intact. It was known as “The Queen of the Hanse”, being one of the Hanseatic League of cities that, before the war, was largely independent of the Nazis. Like Hamburg, it had always had probably more links with Britain than with Berlin. Also, like Hamburg, it had received more bombing than many other places that were staunchly Nazi. Despite that, we experienced little signs of resentment from the inhabitants. On the contrary, they were friendly and only too willing to put the war behind them, relieved to be free of the grip of Hitler’s government. They were anxious to re-build and start trading with Britain again.

One of the Sherman Fisher girls began to be quite friendly with me. Her nickname was Bunny. The friendship suited us both in many ways. She knew that I was married and loved my wife dearly. She was only waiting for her tour to finish to get back to Feltham where she was to get married. Together we explored Lübeck and visited the British canteens for the traditional “cha and a wad”. The “wads” in Lübeck were more interesting than those in Hamburg, often being decorated with cream or cherries.



We took days out to places of interest. There was always an obliging ENSA driver who’d take us in his car. One sergeant major actually had the great big Mercedes staff car that had belonged to Goering. We really enjoyed travelling in this giant luxury machine, which sped at great speed along the autobahn.

The winter was well over and we rejoiced in a beautiful spring with lots of sunny weather. A trip to the seaside was planned, to Travemünde, the greatest of the Baltic resorts with its delightful beach. Bunny, Doyer and Mol, Nancy, one of the other Sherman Fisher girls plus a very handsome young officer who had attached himself to her (not exactly unwelcome), made up our party. An obliging German boatman took us for a trip as far as the coast of Denmark. He was not allowed to land there unfortunately. The rest of the day we spent in gorgeous sunshine on the lovely sands and returned in plenty of time for the evening show.

On the way back, we stopped by a wood, where the ground was covered in lesser celandines. It made a most beautiful picture – enhanced greatly by including Bunny in the photo that I took of it.

The tour continued to various towns, but only those that had big enough theatres, still intact, for our show. Two of these were delightful small towns that had escaped untouched by the bombing. They were Celle and Bad Salzuflen, with their beautiful half timbered houses. Unlike Hamburg and Lübeck, where the inhabitants had been friendly to us despite the awful bombing, those of Celle and Bad Salzuflen were downright hostile. We were told that the Werewolves were very active in this area and were



performing acts of sabotage. Fortunately we did not experience any of them.



relaxing or clowning about.

Bad Salzuflen gave us a chance for a week of complete relaxation. Our hotel was a fine house in a beautiful park. Already the springtime was in full spate with gorgeous warm weather and the whole town a mass of fruit-tree blossoms. Every garden had these trees that were covered in glowing colours. To me, after all those years in the Middle East with its duller colours, Bad Salzuflen was a complete delight. I wandered through little streets and lanes admiring the magnificent half-timbered houses surrounded by their dazzling blossom-covered trees. All of us spent hours in the park, sunbathing on the lawns leading down to a great lake. I took photos of us



Bill and Mimi were to celebrate their wedding anniversary during the week. I wrote out a piano arrangement of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" and Albert orchestrated it for the band to play. Then on the day of the anniversary, early in the morning, the band gathered outside the window of Bill and Mimi, and burst into full glory playing the Wedding March. It was quite a moving moment for the couple, to be dragged out of deep slumbers by such a loud performance. In the dining room, the girls had decorated their table and made a pretty little centrepiece out of flowers and cotton wool. I wonder how many other married couple had ever had such a spectacular anniversary.

During the day, as was our custom, we went out on visits to local places of interest. We were taken to Celle, which had a magnificent castle with a beautiful Baroque interior. There was an 18th Century organ in the chapel, which I attempted to play. It was a pathetic instrument, neglected through the war years and much in need of renovation. Many of those Baroque organs had a wonderful sound. Sadly, not this one. The staterooms were glorious and in splendid conditions. A local curator who spoke English gave us a guided tour and told us that our Royal Family had connections by marriage with early inhabitants of the place. We were shown paintings of the relatives concerned.



Another outing was not so pleasant. We visited Belsen, the notorious concentration camp, where so many Jews, homosexuals and gypsies were killed and, even worse, experimented upon. So soon after the war, the place still had its sinister appearance and a stinking miasma hung over it. We saw the great ovens where the poor prisoners were burnt, sometimes even before they were dead. As we walked past these dreadful relics, I bent down and picked up a finger, which must have missed being burnt and had fallen out when the inmates were forced to clean out the oven ready for the next burning. This was the place



where the evil “Angel of Death”, Elsa Koch, the camp commandant, had a lampshade made out of the skin of one of the victims. She met her fate in the trials after the war and was hung at Nuremberg. Already there were fine carved stone memorial monuments placed over the mass graves, showing how many Jews lay buried below in each mound but, also, there were great expanses of graves with only simple wooden plaques on view showing how many victims were buried there.



After visiting that ghastly place, we went for a walk through the nearby countryside. I stopped and chatted with German farmers and asked them about the camp. They all told me that they had had no idea about what was going on there. All they knew was that lorries or trains were continually arriving and departing but what they contained they did not know. It would have been impossible to see from outside what was happening there as it was within a gloomy forest.

I received a nasty shock in the post. Marjorie wrote to say that she had been to see a specialist to find out why she had not become pregnant, despite our efforts in that direction. He had told her that it was impossible for her to conceive as things were; and that the only hope was to have a corrective operation. We both longed for children so she agreed to have the operation. It was planned for the following September. I was very depressed at this news and must have shown it to the others. Bunny asked me what was the matter and did her best to cheer me up. I sat in the coach on the long journey to the next town feeling thoroughly miserable and was certainly not good company.



Our next stay was in Iserlohn and immediately I was swept into the full activity of preparing for a week of “Bandstand” performances. I wrote a loving letter to Marjorie, consoling her and telling her that I should really be with her at that time.

Iserlohn was in the industrial area of Germany and had therefore suffered badly during the war. We drove through the Wuppertal with its unusual railway suspended from above. The theatre itself had escaped the bombing. We fancifully discussed amongst ourselves that ENSA must have made arrangements with the RAF to do some discriminate bombing as far as the theatres were concerned. Not only were these building intact even though ruined buildings surrounded them, but the power supply and water were still available for them.



We were taken on an outing to the famous Möhne Dam. The British dam-busters with

their bouncing bombs had knocked a great hole in the wall of the dam and allowed the water to escape with disastrous consequences to the inhabitants living further down the river. In the short time since the end of the war, the industrious Germans had completely rebuilt the dam and the turbines were once again making electricity. We could see by the colour of the replacement masonry where the bombs had hit. Standing on the dam we looked right down the valley and saw the otherwise peaceful houses and farms that had been completely flooding, killing thousands of people. My only reaction was one of sorrow. Not elation at the success of the bouncing bombs.



From Iserlohn we went to Minden. There was no hotel as such, so we were accommodated in what could have been barracks or a hostel. This meant that we did not have a room each but slept in dormitories. To my surprise, we met up with the Russian girl, Eleonora Asmus, whom I had known in Hamburg. She was no longer in ENSA, possibly because her skills as a pianist were rather rudimentary and not required any more. She and many other refugees were living in a big hutted camp, probably an erstwhile concentration camp but thoroughly cleaned and renovated. Their conditions were very good and they were allowed complete freedom to move around the town. She was not happy. Her future was not secure as she could not go to Communist Russia and would have to find a country where she would be accepted as a refugee. I have no idea where she had lived before the war. Whatever she did she seemed to be financially secure. She even owned a Leica camera. Not the cheapest to buy!



Several of us together with the princess and her friends went for a walk into the hills above Minden from where there was a beautiful view of the whole valley, the Minden Gap. On the top of the hill was a giant memorial stature of Kaiser Bill standing in an arrogant position, holding a sword in one hand and his other hand raised in salute. I stood posed for a photo just below him, in the same haughty position, holding my camera tripod, extended, as if it were a sword.



We had an opportunity to go horse riding. Most of the artistes had never ridden a horse before but all went out on their first ride into the countryside and were soon in trouble trying to stay on. I enjoyed my ride immensely, especially riding along a ridge of one of the hills and looking down onto the sweep of an autobahn as it wound round the valley below.

Peter Felgate's army career had come to an end. He was time-expired and anxious to get home, back to England and his family. This left an enormous gap in the show. He was in nearly all the sketches with Bill or Mimi. He also danced with the Sherman Fisher girls. ENSA had a spare artiste without a show, quite an old man and a very dignified Shakespearean actor. He was sent to take Peter's place. When he arrived he was horrified to see what he was going to be expected to do. He, a distinguished straight actor was expected to take part in sketches in a common variety show! There was nothing for it. The show must go on. He had to show that he was a real trooper so he knuckled down to learning the words and rehearsing them with the other artistes. We were such a jolly lot that he gradually began to enjoy himself and entered into the feel of things with gusto. However, there was no way he could sing or dance. He had an insecure sense of rhythm. Bill told me that I would have to do the items with singing and, if possible, some dancing. This would mean stepping down from the bandstand and taking part in these items. The Pierrot sketch involved playing a tiny piano to accompany the songs. Peter had done this very well, together with joining Bill in the comic gags. Our old actor found that he could do the comic gags extremely well but he could not play the piano so I had to do this. A pierrot costume was rapidly made for me and I quickly rehearsed with the others. The sketch ended with a simple dance routine which I had to join in, whilst the band played the tune instead of me on the piano. Surprisingly the old actor, with the bit firmly between his teeth, surprised us all by learning the dance routine. It was not so simple for me. The Sherman Fisher girls took it in turns to drum the steps of the dance routine into me. It was really hard going. My awful childhood experiences as a dancer had filled me



full of inhibitions. Nevertheless the girls were determined and gradually the routine was forced into my memory. I dreaded the first performance on the stage. The sketch proceeded well and, wearing my new Pierrot costume, I played all the tunes perfectly. The last tune was *The Robert E. Lee*. I jumped up and lined up with the other Pierrots as the band started to play. To my complete amazement, and probably that of the girls, I did the whole routine perfectly. It gave me a sense of great elation. From then on I really looked forward to being an all-playing, all-dancing Pierrot. I can remember the steps of that dance routine to this day. I also had to take part in the occasional sketch. One involved my going up to Bill holding a little cigarette butt. Then I asked him for a light. He had just lit a new cigarette so he passed it to me and I lit my cigarette from it. I then kept the new cigarette and passed him my little butt. He took a drag at it and asked me what sort of fag it was. "*Black Cat*," I answered. "This must be one of its kittens," he shouted. (*Black Cat* was a make of cigarette in those days.) I, as a non-smoker, hated doing this.

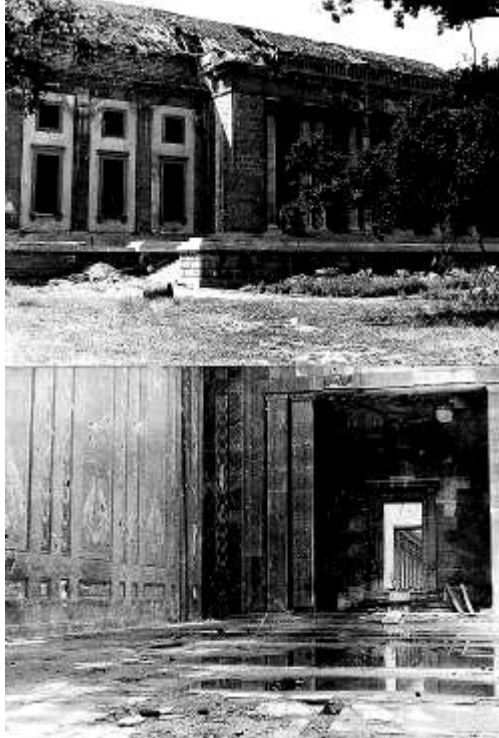


After Minden, our next stay was to be in Berlin. There were enormous difficulties. Berlin was in the middle of the Russian zone and could only be reached by train. And then, under intense supervision, by the suspicious Russian army. The scenery and props had to go by goods train and we had to go by a sleeper train. When we all got on, we found that we were one sleeper compartment short, so Bill the stage manager and I had to share one compartment. There was one narrow bed. As the train started off, there was a lot of joking and leg-pulling going on. My pyjamas had a fancy high collar. I put them on and then put my army web equipment over them. I still had a Sten gun. I also borrowed Bunny's ENSA uniform hat and put that on. Then, donning a false moustache and fancying myself as a Russian guard, I knocked at the door of each compartment and, in a Russian accent, demanded passports. This caused a lot of hilarity. One compartment, however, gave some embarrassment. I knocked and walked in. Two of the girls were in bed together, cuddling each other in a way that can only be described as sexual. It was my first experience of seeing lesbianism. I grasped the situation and with great presence of mind, said in my Russian accent, "Excuse me, Sir". Then I went back to our compartment and discussed with Bill how we could sleep on a single bed. We tried lying down side by side but the one near the edge of the bed tended to fall off, so we tied ourselves together with one of the sheets and succeeded in getting to sleep. The train was quite warm so that lack of the sheet covering us did not matter. I was surprised to find, the next morning, that most of the company had thought at first that I really was a Russian guard.



Berlin was, as we expected, in an advanced state of ruin. We stayed in a fine patrician house that escaped the bombing. Ironically it had belonged to a high NAZI official. It had a beautiful garden with a decorative swimming pool (now empty). All the fine furniture was still intact and the many bookcases were still full of expensive books. Army looting had not reached this house and ENSA saw to it that it would remain so. The weather was still fine and warm so we spent a lot of time lounging in the garden. I also went for walks in the streets in that district. I found a small antiques shop and went in. I got on well with the proprietor, chatting in German. I bought several small items, little tools, that he has acquired from a dentist and paid him with soap. The theatre had also escaped the bombing and was a very fine one with a huge stage, ideal for our show.





We were taken to see Hitler's ruined Chancellery, a great imposing place it must have been. Even partly destroyed it looked magnificent. His great hall, where he met with his generals and party leaders was fairly intact. The huge table with its chairs all round it still stood unscathed. We heard later that when Basil Dean, the head of ENSA, visited the place he coveted a couple of chairs and bribed the Russian guards to let him have them. He then placed them in ENSA prop baskets and took them back to England. Unfortunately, by then, the Customs officials had got wise to the smuggling in their prop baskets by ENSA artistes. They opened his up. Inside they saw Hitler's chairs. Immediately Basil Dean said, "I have brought these back to present them to Drury Lane theatre as a memento of ENSA's work in Berlin". He managed this way to get away with it but the chairs had cost him a lot of money and must have been a great loss to him. It is possible that these chairs were frequently

being bought from the Russian guards by high-ranking American officers. The guards could have had an arrangement with a German furniture factory that was working all out making replacement chairs for them. In Basil Dean's book about ENSA, he tells a different story but, certainly, there was something fishy concerning the chairs, as questions were asked about them in the Houses of Parliament. He said that the chairs were in a pile of rubbish and he resurrected three, all in need of repair and renovation. He brought them back intending them to be used for ENSA props. One was too burnt to be saved. The other two he had renovated. Who knows after all this time what the real truth was?



Suffice to say, that in our small modest way, we ENSA

artistes entered into bribing in order to buy something. In our case it was Hitler's personal notepaper. A German policeman on duty sidled up to us and offered us Hitler's notepaper for a small consideration, preferably in cigarettes or soap. The notepaper was of very good quality with the Nazi emblem and Hitler's address, Obersalzberg, all beautifully engraved in gold on the top of it. We knew, and the policeman knew, that it was phoney. He too had a little factory, a printing shop, somewhere amid the ruins of Berlin, where all the "Hitler's notepaper" was being turned out for him at a rate of knots. He and we had a lot of amusement as we bought some of his notepaper. He

was a very nice man trying hard to survive the horrors of post war Berlin and to feed his family.

In the grounds of the Chancellery was the bunker where Hitler hid from the bombing and where he finally decided to take his own life. Several of us were greeted in the friendliest way by a Russian guard, who happily allowed us to photograph him posed with a few of us.



We went inside the bunker, down long flights of stairs to the depths below. We saw Hitler's personal telephone exchange, his bath, his bed and chair and table. I don't know if they were the originals. Probably, like the Chancellery chairs, they were being sold by the Russian guards and replaced regularly. Adolf's own personal telephone exchange was badly damaged. I picked up a small electric contact from it as a souvenir. On the floor was a very tatty carpet, perhaps the one that Hitler was reputed to have bitten in moments of stress. People had cut pieces off of it as souvenirs so I did as well. I wonder how frequently a new carpet had to be installed there. If you look closely, you can probably see Adolf's teeth marks in it.

Back in our billet, we were told by one of the maids that there was a fine Turkish bath and massage parlour nearby. We all went along there and had a pleasant, if not stifling, time sitting in the hot room. It became my turn to visit the masseuse. She was a gigantic woman, a real



Wagnerian Valkyrie, simply bursting with muscles. I was not allowed to climb onto her bench. She picked me up bodily and lay me down on it. Then she said, in her broken English, "You may have von the

var, but I'm the masseuse!" She then put me through the most excruciating, sadistic session of massage. Strangely enough, I felt really fine afterwards.

My time in ENSA and, in fact, in the Army, was rapidly coming to an end. Our next week's stay was to be in Düsseldorf. As we drove into the town we saw the same dreadful ruins as in all the other big towns. There were surprises. We passed an ultra modern church that was completely intact, surrounded by lots of empty burnt-out shells of dwelling houses. To a non-believer like me there was this question – what sort of a god can keep his church protected and allow his worshippers to perish all around it?

The theatre had been the opera house, a fine building also spared from the bombing. We all realised that this was to be the last week of the show. To most of the artistes their main worry was what their next engagement would be. I had no worries at all. I only wanted to get back to England and my Marjorie and my discharge to Civvie Street.

One day a trip up the Rhine by boat was arranged. I was really looking forward to this but it was not to be. I was called to an Army hospital for a pre-discharge medical examination. The doctor who saw me was a very arrogant Army lady doctor. The examination was extremely thorough, even to my most intimate parts. Of course, the real worry the doctors had about the soldiers on discharge was the venereal diseases, so her main examination, to my considerable embarrassment, was of my wedding tackle. This was known in the Army as a "Short Arm Inspection", previously carried out in my regiment by a very bored male Army doctor who lifted up our todgers, one by one, with his baton to look at them, without touching them with his hands.

It reminded me of the old Army joke:

The men were all on parade, standing at ease, awaiting a Short Arm Inspection. Their sergeant major gave them these instructions:

"H'On the command one, stand to h'attention.

H'On the command two, h'undo your flies.

H'On the command three, take h'out your Short Arm.

H'On the command four, pull back your foreskin.

The Medical Officer will then make 'is Short Arm Inspection.

H'On the command five, replace your foreskin.
H'On the command six, return your Short Arm h'into your trousers.
H'On the command seven, do h'up your flies.
H'On the command eight, stand h'at ease.

Then from the back rank, a dreamy voice could be heard, "Five, four, five, four, five, five, four, five four..."

Of course the ENSA Censor would never allow us to tell this joke to the troops. In any case, it would be a waste of time, as they all knew it. They'd probably join in together with the "tag end" line.

I did not like this lady doctor's fiddling about with my bits and pieces. The worst embarrassment was when she grabbed the lot and asked me to cough.

The rest of the company told me that I had missed a lovely trip. The Rhine steamer was a luxurious boat with every comfort and a nice meal on board. They sailed through the famous Rhine Gorge, a place that I had always longed to see.

I did get one more chance to get in some sightseeing. We visited Cologne, or rather the ruins of Cologne. This time God could not have been paying attention because the great cathedral had received a direct hit. We looked into the chancel and the nave and saw nothing but piles of rubble. Down by the Rhine we saw the ruined bridges, bits of which stuck out of the water like decayed teeth. The rest of the city was just one great area of devastation.

The last night of the show was approached with some hilarity. Before the show started, Bill Whittaker went in front of the curtains and told the assembled troops that this was to be our last show, our demob in fact. "Anything can happen and probably will", said Bill. He received a great cheer from the lads. The fun began when Lee Farrell started to sing *All of a sudden my Heart sings*, a popular song of the day. The first half of the song started on the bottom note of the scale and then went up the scale, each line of the song being the next note. Then, in the second half of the song, each line was sung to a descending note of the same scale. Musically it was very boring but, surprisingly, it was very effective and just about the most popular song at the time. Standing, stage right, just in front of the bushes, was a statue of Cupid with his bow and arrow. The stagehands had rigged up a line from the bow to the top of the stage on the opposite side, stage left. As Lee began to sing the arrow gradually began to ascend, higher and higher, in time with her ascending musical scale. The audience spotted it and started to laugh. The higher it got, the more they laughed. Lee reached her top note, the arrow reaching the top of its flight. She began the musical descent. The arrow did likewise. By this time the audience was nearly falling about with laughter. All credit to Lee. She sang her heart out right to the bitter end and the troops cheered and cheered her. When I started to play my little piano for the Pierrot sketch, I did not notice that there was a wire coming out of the back of it. As I started to play the first notes, from out of the piano came a dreadful cacophony of rattling sounds. The stagehands had put a loud speaker inside the piano and rattled old tin cans backstage in front of a microphone. Naturally I put on a display of surprise and anger for the benefit of the audience and got a big laugh. Fortunately for me the noise ceased as I played for the singing of the rest of the Pierrots. In the second half of the show I had to descend from the band platform to take part in that bit of badinage with Bill Whittaker, with Bill standing there lighting a new cigarette. The stagehand in charge



of stage props normally left a dog-end ready for me on the piano. This time, however, the dog-end was replaced with another one, by a band member. The other one was a dreadful German fag-end made synthetically out of oak leaves – an ersatz product of the end of the war. It tasted awful. Bill took a drag at it and spat the taste out. He must have known that someone in the band was responsible, for he turned to them and shouted, “I’ll get you for this!” He then manfully went on with the rest of the sketch.

The finale of the show was a riot. The audience cheered and whistled and we got more curtain calls than ever before. This was my last show for ENSA and my last show as an artiste of this type, ever.

The whole company went back to Hamburg. I found a letter waiting for me there from Eric, Marjorie’s brother. He had just been demobbed and had started up a radio business in a shop in Eastbourne. Marjorie and her parents had just moved there, together with three of her brothers and her sister, into a very big house in which each had their own big room. Marjorie’s father had also been demobbed despite his brave attempts to be kept on as an Education officer. Eric, in his letter, asked me if I could get him a cathode ray tube on the black market. Television was in its infancy and already Eric was repairing TV sets. I knew a German blackmarketeer who could get anything for a price. He asked me what the sensitivity (“*Empfindlichkeit*”, as he put it) of the tube should be. That meant another exchange of letters with Eric. Time was pressing as I expected every day that my return to England would take place. Eventually I was able to tell the German blackmarketeer what the *Empfindlichkeit* was and he promptly got the tube for me. It looked just like a small TV tube and just as fragile. The carpenter in the ENSA scenery department made me a neat padded wooden box to enable me to carry it back to England in safety.

I also wanted to get a nice present to take home to Marjorie. I visited a fine cosmetics and beauty shop that had survived the bombing and there I purchased a big bottle of Eau de Cologne. Owing to war shortages the scent was in a wine bottle but the label was a proper 5711 Eau de Cologne one. It cost me one bar of soap and a packet of cigarettes. I took it back to the theatre. As I climbed the stairs past the flat of the German stage manager, I could hear a party going on behind the door. Remembering that it was his birthday, I knocked to wish him a Happy Birthday. He opened the door, drunk as a lord and saw the bottle of Eau de Cologne. He grabbed it from me and before I could stop him, pulled out the cork and took a deep drink from it. I shouted out that it was scent, not booze and stopped him drinking any more. I finished up with only half a bottle of Eau de Cologne to take back to Marjorie.

That stage manager always had a very soft spot for me. Some time before, when I was touring the army hospitals doing shows, he had suffered from a painful skin disease, *erisypelas*, on his hands. The German doctors had no medicines with which to treat it. They had told him that only this wonderful new medicine that the British army doctors had would cure him. The wonderful new medicine was Penicillin. After a particularly successful show in one of the hospitals, which was also attended by some of the doctors, we had gone back to their quarters for drinks. I begged them to give me some Penicillin for our stage manager. I explained that he could not easily do his important work for the entertaining of our troops because of the disease. They told me that that was quite impossible. To my delight however, as I walked away, one of the doctors surreptitiously slipped a phial of the precious drug in my hand. I could not see which doctor it was. I gave the phial to our stage manager, who gave it to his doctor and he cured him with it.

The news that the British Customs officers were getting difficult with returning members of ENSA gave me some concern about all the loot with which I was coming back. I was especially worried about Eric’s cathode ray tube. As usual I had to carry all my army web equipment and two kit-bags. I packed all my stuff carefully, putting the cathode ray tube in its box deep down inside a kit-bag. Then I put a few dirty clothes on top, and finally my beautiful Voigtländer camera. I had a procedure in view.

We set sail for England from Cuxhafen in north Germany on one of the notorious Liberty ships. These had

been built at great speed in America to offset the losses of shipping due to the German U-boats. The method of building involved welding the iron plates, not the traditional method of riveting. Gossip had it that the welding would give way in rough seas. On this trip we encountered rough seas. The storm we went through was so terrible that the ship bounced up and down like a yo-yo. The troops were all housed in the bowels of the ship with bunk beds to sleep on. As the ship groaned and creaked its way along, we were convinced that we could hear the welding of the iron plates giving way. It was a terrifying experience. The crewmen were quite blasé about it. The cooks in the galley prepared a meal for us as if all were quite normal. Those of us, who were not writhing in the throes of seasickness on their bunks below, had to climb up the steep stairway to the deck above where the galley was. We were given the traditional American plastic tray on which to collect our food. The tray had compartments moulded in it to receive the food – one for the meat, one for the vegetables, one for the bread and one for the pudding. With the pitching and tossing of the ship, by the time we had managed to negotiate ourselves down the stairway to our quarters, the food had all mixed itself into one unappetising mess all over the tray. Most of us did not eat it.

We landed at Hull and went ashore, right into the arms of the Customs officers. When the officer said to me, “Have you anything to declare?” I said that I had a Voigtländer camera. I opened my kit bag and showed it, sitting in the top, to him. He asked me how much I had paid for it. I said that I did not know as I had won it in a regimental raffle. I must have spoken quite convincingly, because he valued it at 30 pounds and charged me 2 pounds 10 shillings duty. He did not want to see anything else in my bag, although I gave the impression that I was opening it further for him to look in. The scent from my dirty clothes must have decided him against any further inspection and I went on my way rejoicing. Other chaps were not so lucky. That particular Customs officer was a very severe taskmaster. It was very true that returning soldiers often carried loot that they had purchased on the German black market, items of considerable value in many cases. In fact, at the bottom of one of my kit-bags, there were many packets of photographic paper which my German photographer friend had acquired for me, for which I had paid with cigarettes and soap. Photographic paper was almost impossible to buy at that time, either in England or in Germany, except on the black market.

We had a restless overnight stay in a vast transit camp in Hull and the next morning early, we were put on the train for London. All that web equipment and kits bags were not easy to negotiate on a crowded train. Not all the troops were honest citizens. We had thieves amongst us and during the journey several men had things stolen from them. I kept my eye on my equipment or rather, all of me, as I had to sit on it in the corridor. At London I changed to a train for Eastbourne. I had phoned my father-in-law in the Eastbourne Pay Office to say that I was arriving. There in the station, to my delight, was my Marjorie waiting for me. It was wonderful to have her again in my arms and to kiss her. As we stood there, she told me that despite what the gynaecologist in the hospital had told her, she thought that she was pregnant. Our future daughter, Gillian, was determined to confound him. The family doctor later, to our considerable delight, confirmed the pregnancy.

I reported to the ENSA HQ in Norwood and immediately began the process of demobilisation from the Army. The officer in charge wrote in my Army Book that I had been a good and reliable soldier and that I played the piano well. I pondered on my Army career – utterly useless as a Pay Corps soldier; quite good as a medical orderly, especially for boils; average postal worker; and, apparently, I played the piano well. He should have written all that down. At least I finished up with three stripes; although what good I’d have been as a military sergeant, I can’t imagine! I lined up with the other demobees to receive my “Demob. Suit”. I chose a light-brown jacket and dark grey trousers that fitted me quite well. The rest of my army clothes I was allowed to keep. Nothing was said about my ENSA dinner jacket suit and the white alternative jacket that went with it, so I kept them too. I also kept my beautiful soft Australian Army blanket.

My old friend Keith Howarth, also demobbed, had an old car. Petrol was heavily rationed. As a demobee he was entitled to petrol coupons. If I pretended to be his father-in-law, also demobbed, I could claim extra coupons for myself to use when I borrow his car. This I did and Keith acquired more coupons, in effect, than

he was entitled to. Those days, everyone was on the fiddle!

We settled in to one of the big rooms of the family house. Whilst I was away, Marjorie had acquired some furniture for us. There was a rationing scheme for furniture. Newly married couples were entitled to several items and were given coupons for them. These were a table, four chairs, a wardrobe, a tall-boy, and a double bed with mattress. Marjorie decided against the double bed in favour of a much better double box mattress bed, plus an additional mattress for extra comfort, for which she had had to pay a lot more. This she purchased from the famous, highly reputed, chain furniture store, Old Times Furnishing. Some years later the box mattress gave signs of internal collapse so I carefully undid the cloth cover to repair what was wrong inside. I found that it had been built almost entirely of old orange boxes nailed together. It was quite irreparable. So much for the Old Times



Furnishing's much vaunted reputation.

Eric was delighted with the cathode ray tube. It was exactly what he wanted for his business. My father-in-law, known to us all as Pa, was doing very well as Education officer in the Eastbourne Pay Office. He saw for himself a good future, till retirement, as an officer in the Education Corps. It was not to be, however. Despite his considerable talent as a teacher, he was rapidly demobilised and thrown, unemployed, to seek whatever work he could get. His age was against him. Only the younger officers were offered the chance for further enlistment. Fortunately his pre-war experience in commerce, especially in purchasing and organisation, enabled him to get a job with an estate agent. Thus settled he studied the art of valuation and became a Fellow of the Valuers Association, with the letters F.V.A. after his name.

As soon as all Marjorie's brothers were demobilised, we arranged for the lot, with their wives, to come and spend a long weekend in the big house. It was the first time everyone was free and able to get together. Fortunately the house was big enough. There were enough bedrooms for everyone with the exception of Eric and his family, as they were already living in a house nearby. I had already met Eric, the first to be out of the Forces – he had been an electronics scientist engaged on RADAR in the RAF. The others were Dave (really Cyril, but he disliked that name and only Pa used it) fresh out of the Army, together with his wife Joan whom we already knew; Ken, Navy, an expert in aeroplane construction; and Glyn, a Marines despatch rider. John, still a schoolboy, completed the list of sons. Betty was the only other girl. We all posed for photographs in the garden, taken with my camera which had a delayed action switch, enabling me to join in. Betty sat with Jenifer, Eric's little daughter. The brothers and I posed in our demob suits, but put on very untidily so that we all looked scruffy. Pa was disgusted. He did not approve of our disrespect for the Forces (or even their demob suits). Worse was to come in this respect.

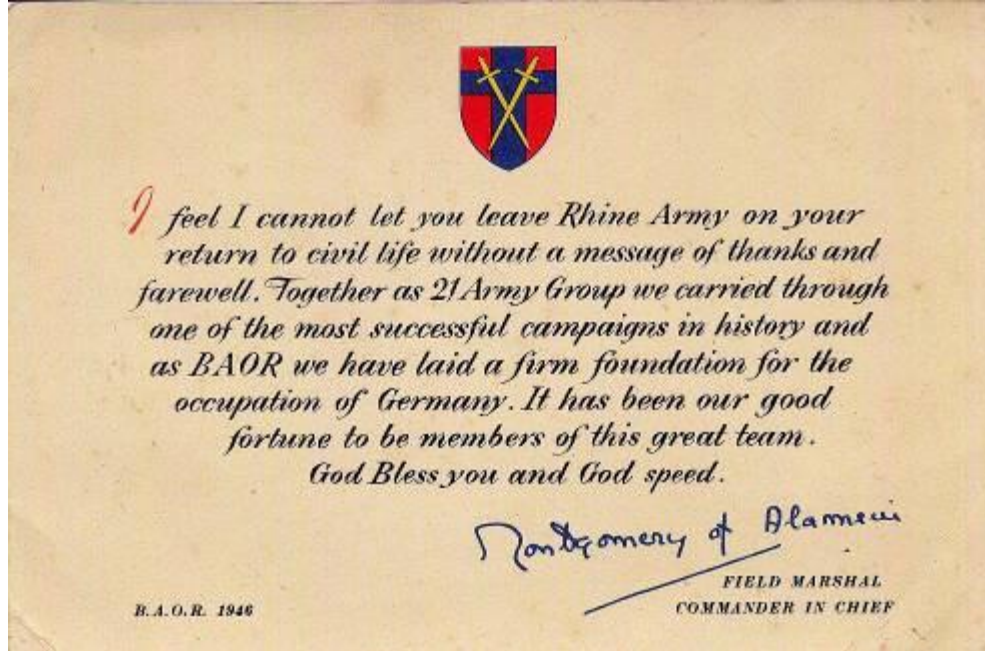


Field Marshall Montgomery had sent each demobbed soldier a beautifully printed card on which were written his grateful thanks for our helping him win the war. Such were our feelings for that show-off general, that we all stuck our cards on the inside of the lavatory door. Pa was indeed furious. He believed that the sun shone out of Monty's arse.

I finished my War as a War Substantive Private soldier but, someway along the line, I had acquired for myself the rank of Paid Acting Sergeant. I couldn't care less for military rank, medals or honours. I must have earned some medals – soldiers who went through the War were awarded them automatically. I was a pretty useless soldier so I never bothered to collect mine. Somewhere in the War Office a little clerk, whose job it is, might be worrying why I never did.

Despite all that, and having deserted the Pay Corps for ENSA, I somehow got myself elected (kicking and screaming) as Hon. Secretary of the Pay Corps "Schneller Orphans" Old Comrades Association. (I kept the ENSA bit mum.) The reason being, that I made such good friends in my Army service, that I cherished keeping up my acquaintance with them. And what better way to do so than by joining the Old Comrades Association – "The Schneller Orphans". We had annual Reunions, all well attended. These went on for years but gradually the numbers attending decreased. Old friends died or were incapacitated. Eventually there was only a handful. We met at Westminster Abbey, in the Memorial Garden, where a short ceremony of remembrance was held by the current Colonel in Chief of the Pay Corps. After the Last Post was sounded we all walked to Wellington Barracks for lunch. On the last occasion, I offered my resignation and asked for a volunteer to take over the Hon. Secretary's position. No one volunteered. The "Schneller Orphans" Old Comrades Association ceased to exist. Actually the Royal Army Pay Corps, itself, ceased to exist. It got swallowed up into the Royal Army Logistics Corps, along with the Military Police and the Medical Corps. And even the Intelligence Corps!

A strange thing happened. I was sitting in my parents' garden. Before the war, there were a lot of tennis courts below the gardens of that row of houses. These courts were dug up and made into allotments where dutiful civilians "dug for Victory". They were now going to be restored to tennis courts. As I sat there a surveyor appeared and called me over. "Do you own this house?" he asked. I told him that it belonged to my parents. "Well, you tell them," he said, "there must have been a mistake in the plans for that plot of land. The tennis courts have wrongly appropriated two yards of all the gardens in this row". The message I received from Ron Wells during the séance on the Nile boat must have been genuine. So much for my Humanism!



It is now over 60 years since the end of that terrible War. Many of the people I met and knew are now dead; and the rest are, like me, very old. The memory of them is still fresh in my mind and they all remain, to me, young and vital as they were then. Unbidden, catches of tunes drift into my brain and each brings with it a remembrance of shows or people that I knew.

My lovely wife, Marjorie, is as dear to me now as she was then. And we have recently celebrated our Diamond Wedding. I have the War to thank for all those wonderful years of happy married life.



I DID IT MY WAY.



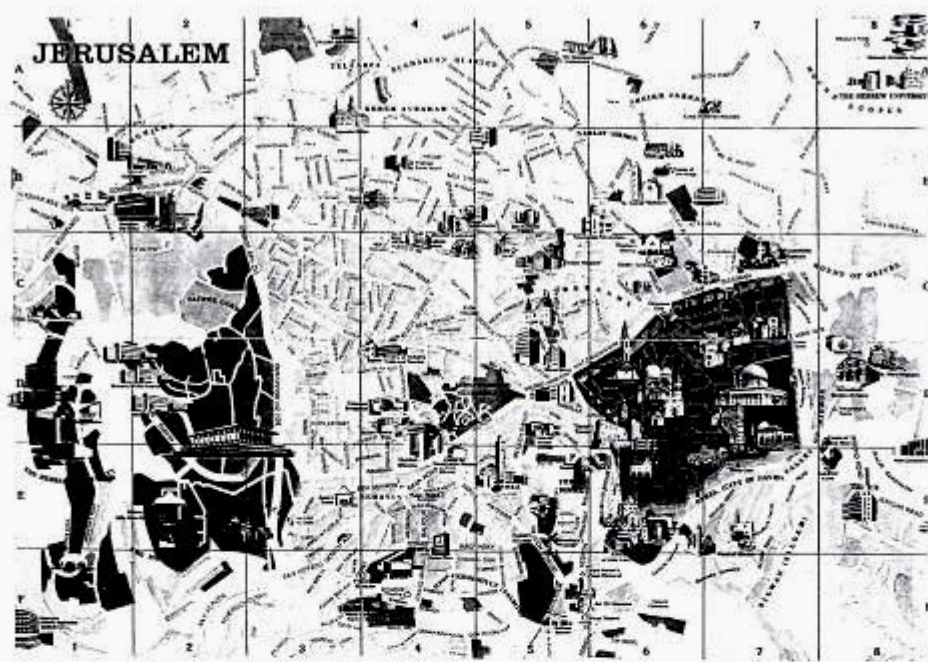
JERUSALEM

THE

GOLDEN

“The Holy City is one hellova place”

Soldiers’ motto



Panorama of the Old City of Jerusalem

Jerusalem was a simply wonderful fascinating place in which to live. I never tired of wandering through the streets, alleys and bazaars of the Old City. The New City was alive and bustling. A walk the length of the Jaffa Road through the City centre was to see all sorts of shops both Jewish and Arabic, to say nothing the occasional Greek and Armenian ones.

There was a wide variety of restaurants and cafés, the posher ones for officers only and the less salubrious ones for other ranks. We other ranks soon latched on to our favourites. I was particularly fond of an Arabic restaurant where we were allowed to go down into the kitchen, in the cellar, and choose what we wanted to eat. There was no way we could identify the food from the Menu as we couldn't understand Arabic. We just pointed to food that was cooking in the kitchen if we liked the look of it. Heaven knows what I ate but it was very tasty. We used to tell newly arrived soldiers that the meat was tortoise, but I suspect it was pigeon. The front door onto the street was set back between two windows. I was walking out one day and a woman wearing a full length fur coat stood there in front of me, barring my way out. She opened her fur coat and showed me that underneath she had nothing on. She was stark naked. I was so shocked that I retreated into the restaurant and slammed the door. It was obvious what she was. There's no business like sex business!

My favourite restaurant was in a side street, the Street of the Prophets. It was Mrs. Pat's Café. Mrs. Pat herself was a big formidable lady, a Russian Jewess, who did not allow any nonsense in her café. But she made cakes that were bewitching. I particularly adored her nut and honey strudels. She had three daughters, equally formidable, who acted as waitresses and also kept us soldiers in order. There was another waitress, an ugly harridan who disliked everyone and showed it. We laughingly called her "Shirley Temple". One of the daughters, Shulamit, told us off for saying that. "You must not call her Shirley Temple", she said. "She doesn't look like Shirley Temple at all!" And that made us laugh more than ever.

On another occasion, Shulamit came to me and told me that another customer, a man sitting nearby, was very interested in me. She said that he was a well known Polish painter, Tad Terlechski, who had been discharged from the Polish Army because of some serious stomach problems. He obviously could not be sent home to Poland so he had been put in a one room studio apartment near to Mrs. Pat's shop, where he could earn a living by painting. Somehow he knew that I was an organist and he wanted to paint me playing the organ. Would I agree to sit for him? With some trepidation I agreed and on the next Tuesday I went to his studio. It was reached by climbing up stone steps outside the house. Inside he had a very large airy and well-lit room. On the table he had built a wooden frame looking like the keyboards of a two manual organ. He spoke no English but gave me to understand that I should sit at the table with my hands on the pseudo organ as if I were playing. Then he started to paint on a large canvas. It was dreadfully boring to me; the afternoon was hot; and we sat both of us in silence. I kept on dozing off and waking with a start as my head fell forward. I must have visited the studio four or five times and the painting progressed very slowly. I saw that he had already got a very good semblance of me and an organ. Then my duties as a soldier suddenly became too demanding and I was not able to go to the studio again. I never knew what happened to Tad Terlechski or his painting. For all I know I might be hanging in some Polish art gallery, playing my organ for posterity.

Not far from Schneller was a small café where we could get a glass of Russian tea made from a samovar. We suspected that the tea leaves in the samovar were only occasionally changed but the tea, with a slice of lemon in it was delicious.

Next door to this café was a specialist shop. It was a laundry for sheitels. The sheitels are wigs worn by some orthodox Jewish women. These women are forbidden to appear in public with their hair uncovered for fear that their hair, their crowning glory, might attract men other than their husbands. (There's a Jewish legend that God prettified Eve's locks before Adam saw her.) The sheitels in a hot country like Palestine can get dirty and sweaty, to say nothing of being infested by nits, so they have to be laundered regularly. I was amused to see that many were highly realistic glamorous ones – probably more so than the real hair of the wearers. What would Adam have made of that? Or God, for that matter?

Just opposite is a café where I was introduced to the joy of eating yoghurt. Palestine yoghurt has quite a kick to it – the so-called tingle-tongue taste, far better than the insipid yoghurt we get here in England. Here it is advertised as having a 'mild' taste, as if that were a virtue. Palestinian yoghurt was made with *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* culture and that is the one that is said to contribute to the long-lived people in Bulgaria and surrounding countries. This yoghurt tastes even better with a spoonful of Demerara sugar in it. Street sellers offer it in little dishes with lemon flavoured syrup on it. I never bought any as it did not look altogether clean.

We soldiers suffered periodically from attacks of a mild form of dysentery. Our Medical Officer used to dole out a completely useless medicine called Kaolin. Occasionally our medical room received a bottle of Kaolin-Morph, a much more effective cure, due to the morphine in it. We soldiers never got a chance of treatment with this wonder medicine as our Medical Officer used to pinch the whole bottle and take it away to his billet to use for himself. Most of us, who were in the know, went down to the Tnuva dairy in Jaffa Road. The lady, a Jewess, who worked in the shop was, in fact, a qualified doctor but she had not been in Palestine long enough to be permitted to practice medicine. She was wizard at treating mild dysentery. Yoghurt, dry toast, and a piece of boiled laquerda fish from Lake Galilee did the trick and our dysentery cleared up in no time.

I have always had enthusiasm for photography. Until I went to Palestine my only camera was an Agfa *Box Tengor*, a very primitive affair much like the Kodak *Box Brownies*. It took good photos but in limited conditions. There had to be plenty of light – a dull day produced poor quality pictures. I began saving for a better camera. Eventually, when I thought I had enough money, I went to the best camera shop in Jerusalem – Photo Mirski – a most elegant shop on the corner of Ben Yehuda Street, right on Zion Square in the centre of the Jaffa Road. I asked the proprietor if he were interested in buying my Box Tengor. He jumped at it. Apparently in the bright light of most of the year in Jerusalem a simple camera like that was very popular for people who were not very advanced photographers. I then asked him what he had to sell in my price range. He produced a beautiful little camera, a Balda *Ikonta* with an excellent Schneider Kreutznach 2.8 lens and a Prontor II shutter. 35mm cameras had become by then the most desirable cameras for the more enthusiastic photographers and, although the Balda took photos of the same size, it did not use 35mm films. It used 127-size roll film. Thus the Balda, for all its excellent specification, did not command such a high price or popularity as the 35mm cameras. To my amazement and delight it was relatively cheap and well within my price range. And it took outstanding pictures in all sorts of light conditions. I used it throughout my RAPC service and well into my time with ENSA, until I won in a raffle, a fine Voigtlander

35mm Vito camera with an outstanding Skopar lens. I lent my Balda to Marjorie's brother, who in turn lent it to Marjorie's mother. She wasn't interested in photography so she passed it on to Marjorie's father. For some quite unexplained reason he stripped all its black leatherette cover off and painted it with a poor quality silver paint. Then he removed the view finder and glued on a different one instead. He totally ruined the camera. Since he died I have it back but it looks very sad and neglected.

In the Jaffa Road there was a large patch of waste land. On it was an Arab who sold orange juice. He had two great piles, one each side of him. One was oranges and the other was orange peels. On a table he had a juice extractor. For only one piastre (tuppence-halfpenny) he would squeeze anything up to twelve oranges into a large glass. Delicious on a hot day!



Further along the road was a tiny café. The owner also sold orange juice but it was not that I used to buy from him; it was cold liquorish juice or *tamar hindi* juice – both very tasty and refreshing. The Arab word, *tamar hindi* means Indian date.

There were people who daily paraded up and down Jaffa Road. I used to see them and derived a certain amount of amusement watching them.

There was "Old Overcoats". He was a very old beggar. No matter how hot the day he always wore several overcoats, making him appear to be quite fat, although I'm sure that underneath all that he was a skinny old man. He never walked – more a hop skip and a jump in a straggly way along the road.



The aged Jewish beggar. He spent his whole life walking to and fro along both sides of Jaffa Road begging from shop to shop. But only the Jewish shops. There is a strange custom in Jewish tradition. Many, many years ago, there was a



rumour that a large treasure was buried in a piece of waste land in the Old City. The beggars got to hear about it and started to dig there. They found no treasure but

unearthed a wall from antiquity. It was the remaining wall of Solomon's temple. In due course it became known as the Wailing Wall. Generations of devout Jews used to pray at and still do today. Because of this, beggars were considered to be holy and religious Jews should never refuse to give them money. Every Jewish shop keeper kept a pile of the smallest coins beside his till. Every time the old Jewish beggar entered he was given a small coin (one fil). Each shop would be visited two or three times a day. It was said that the old beggar was a very rich man. He actually owned a field and that was something special in that country. These beggars get to hear about weddings and always walk into the ceremonies and beg for money from the guests who, if they are religious Jews, will be forced to pay out. I was a guest at the wedding of a Jewish friend of mine and during the ceremony in came the filthiest old beggar I'd ever seen. He interrupted the service and started his begging. My friend wasn't a religious Jew so he sent the beggar packing. Violently!

The old Arab with his donkey. The poor beast seemed as old as its owner yet every time I saw it, it was heavily laden with all sorts of bundles. I suppose the old Arab ran a sort of delivery service. The medical staff of the 62nd Army Hospital put on a variety show for the patients. One of the items was a street scene modelled on the Jaffa Road (with a parody of the song *Old Father Thames*). The producer, one of the doctors, wanted the old Arab and his donkey to walk across the stage so he paid him to go all the way to the hospital to take part. The stage was a large platform with a small flight of steps either side for performers on which to mount on the stage. The donkey positively refused to go up these steps, so the old Arab lifted both its hoofs onto the stage and then hit the poor beast hard on its testicles. The donkey shot up onto the stage in one almighty leap and stood there braying hard – much to the amusement of the audience.

I loved going to the Old City whenever I could spare a little time to do so. I always entered at the Jaffa Gate and then wandered, just following my nose and drinking in the sights so different from what I experienced back home. Leaving the houses, streets and lives of the modern Jews in the New City and crossing the frontier into the alien world of Bazaarland and a totally different and sometimes primitive way of living, was always a great thrill to me.

As I entered the great Jaffa Gate, the first thing I always saw used to fill me with horror, an aspect of the Islamic Sharia Law carried out presumably when the country was in the hands of the Turks. An old man sat begging. Both his hands and both his feet had been cut off. He sat on a board with small wheels fixed to it, with which he could propel himself along by pushing the ground with the stumps of his arms. I asked how he had come to the awful situation. I was told that he was a persistent thief and was punished each time he was caught by Sharia amputation. I wondered what was truly his situation – was he perhaps a man with a wife and family, unable to feed and look after them, except by stealing?

Being a Humanist, I have no time for any organised religion. I have read the Koran and it did not inspire me at all. I was especially horrified by the treatment of women advised in its teaching. I could never treat my Marjorie in such a way. The punishments laid out for crimes struck me as being decidedly inhuman and utterly cruel, especially for adultery. The description of heaven seemed to be ridiculous.

Even if I could have belief in a God, I would never want to go to an Islamic heaven. Probably the only thing I did approve of was the Islamic forbiddance of drinking alcohol. I have seen the horrors of alcohol abuse. I still drink it, however. But wisely, I kid myself.

Within easy reach of the Jaffa Gate were two canteens for the Forces – the YMCA and Toc H. The latter acquired its strange name in the 1914/18 War when the canteens were named after their original place in England – Talbot House – but abbreviated by the use of the signalling code. If I required

refreshment I would aim for one or other of them.

Very near to Toc H was Christchurch where I played the organ. From then on, I was in Bazaarland proper. The streets certainly did have real names – David Street, Street of the Chain, St. Francis Road, Via Dolorosa, Jewish Souk, for example, but I used to name many of them by the trade that was

carried out in each of them. There were the Street of Goldsmiths,

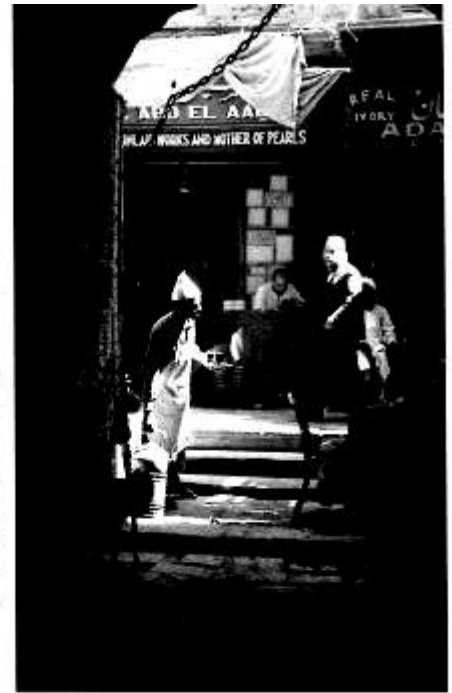
the Street of Silversmiths, the Street of Shoemakers, the Street of Coffee, the Street of Spices and so on. Several of them were covered and somewhat gloomy apart from occasional skylights in their roofs that let in brilliant rays of dust-laden light.

A Jewish friend of mine told me that his grandfather was a goldsmith who had his workshop at the beginning of the Street of Goldsmiths. The old man was the only Jew in a street populated by Arabs. Just before the War some Arabs came from outside the Old City intent on attacking and killing the old Jew. They got the surprise of their life when the Arab goldsmiths rose up and fought them out and away from the Street. The Arab goldsmiths held the old Jew highly in their esteem and were always friendly to him, resenting any other Arab who did not approve of there being a Jew in an Arab quarter.

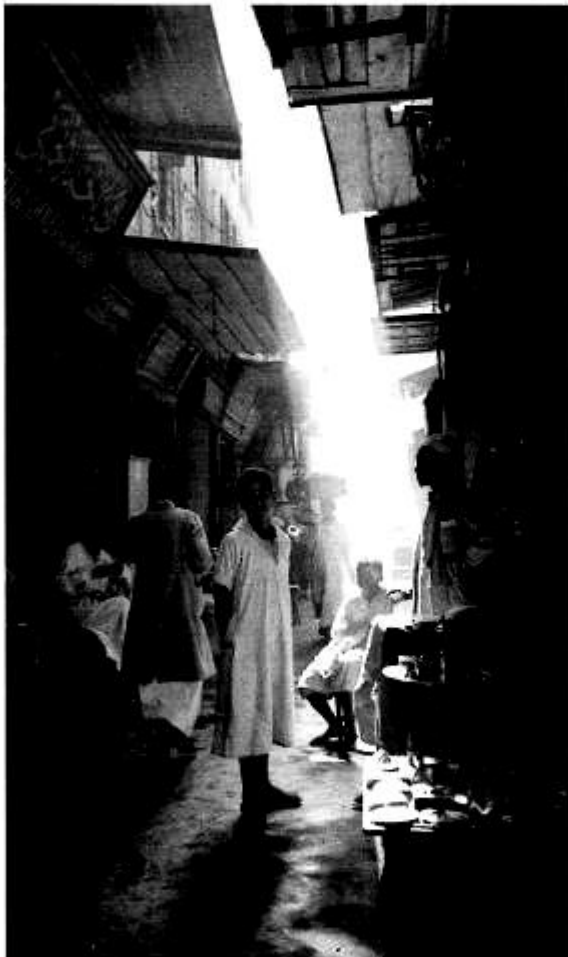


Comb maker

I bought a fine pair of shoes from an Arab merchant in the Street of shoemakers. I haggled with him to bring the price down. They fitted me well, were comfortable and looked good on me. Two days later it poured with rain. I walked through the streets and suddenly realised that my shoes were leaking. I went back to Schneller and took them off. Then I saw that the merchant had swindled me. The soles were made of cardboard which had almost dissolved away. I then went to a Jewish shoemaker in the Jaffa Road. There was no question of haggling. The Jew's price was the price he wanted and nothing less. The shoes I bought from him were superb and I wore them comfortably for a long while afterwards. In fact I wore them till I was transferred to ENSA. Then I bought myself a pair of the fashionable desert boots made of suede leather.



Tea Seller



I took Marjorie for a tour of exploration in the Old City. At the end of a long lane we entered the Street of Coffee. Outside each shop was a carpet on the ground. On the carpets were thousands of fresh coffee beans drying in the sun. From the shops came the most gorgeous and enticing scent of coffee beans being roasted. It was then that I discovered for the first time that Marjorie could not stand the smell of coffee. She would happily drink a cup of coffee but would hold her nose at the same time. Over the years I have managed to cure her of her dislike and now she drinks coffee happily, allowing its beautiful aroma to enter her (equally beautiful) nose.

Metalworkers

There were several streets where food was sold. Exotic fruits and vegetables were on display – commodities that we never saw in England. There were water melons that we were forbidden to eat. Arabs used to pump water into them as they grew, using a



bicycle pump with a hole in a sharp nozzle. The water came from ditches that were full of the deadly trichomoniasis worms,

← Women selling apricots

Another interesting scent (or collection of scents) could be experienced in the Street of Spices. But in addition to that, was the fascinating sight of thousands of trays outside each shop containing an enormous collection of spices of every colour and shape. We knew that we were entering one or other of these Streets long before we came to them. The air was redolent of their bouquet already in the streets leading up to them.

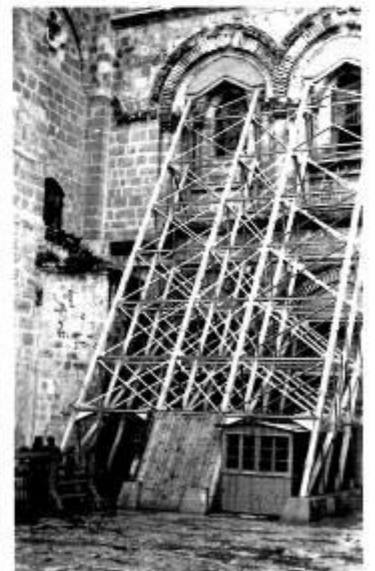
Strangely the street of perfumes was not so obvious in its aroma. The essence of each scent in its bottle was so concentrated that its smell was not immediately apparent. The merchant would put a glass rod into the bottle of essence and then wipe a small quantity of the scent on the back of the customer's hand. Then as it evaporated, its delightful (or otherwise) perfume would straightaway enter the client's nostrils.

Every year on Palm Sunday till Easter Sunday religious people re-enact the story of Christ's Passion. Here Marjorie carries the palm of an R.C. Arab friend, Malki. A man dressed as Christ rides a donkey through the streets and all the believers, each carrying a plaited palm frond, line the route. Then many of them go up to the Garden of Gethsemane, also to pay their devotions to that occasion when Christ prayed in the Garden. The final re-enactment was on Good Friday when the man drags a heavy cross through the Via Dolorosa, stopping at the various



places of the cross to perform the traditional story. This enactment attracts multitudes of devoted people - every one crowding in all the doorways, little nooks and crannies, and windows along the route, and many of them, particularly monks and nuns, climbing up to the tops of the walls each side of the Via

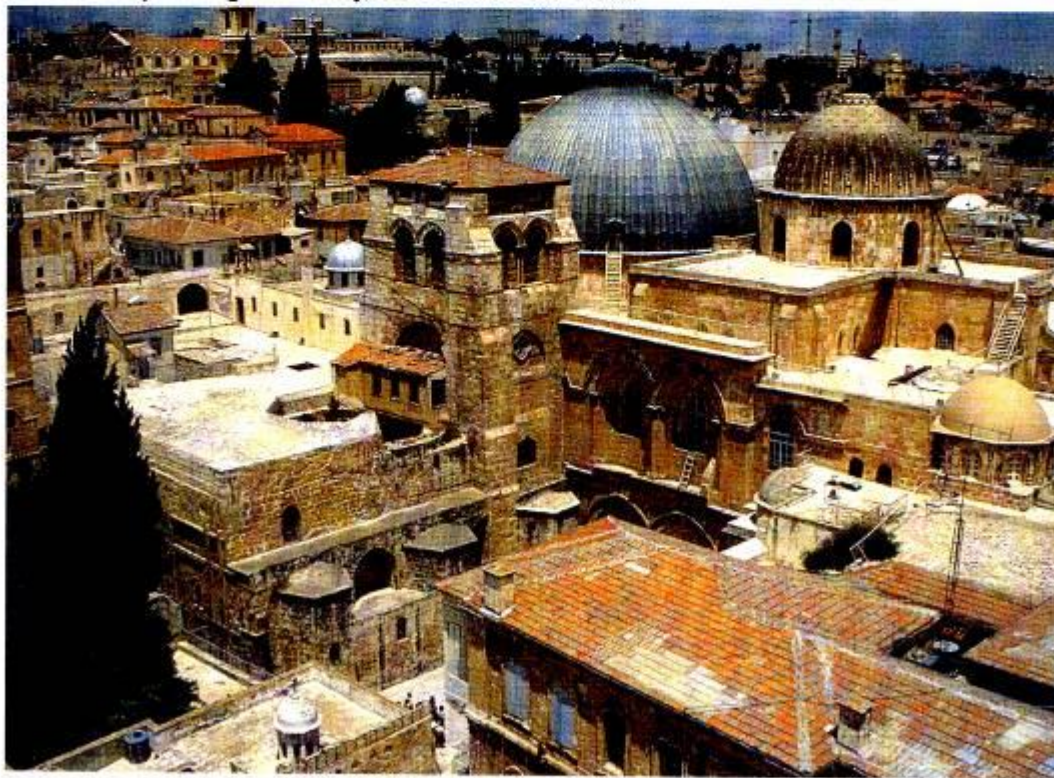
There's some dispute as to whether the crucifixion was sited at Golgotha where the Holy Sepulchre building actually is. The building called the Holy Sepulchre can be visited, in which you can see a hole where the cross was supposed to have stood and also the cave where Christ's body lay - if you want to believe such things. The front wall was showing signs of collapsing so it had to be shored up



with scaffolding. It was like that all the time I was in Jerusalem. A soldier friend of mine, an ardent Roman Catholic, got permission from the monks who were his friends to let me play the organ there. Along I went full of enthusiasm to have such a great privilege. The organ is a tiny French one with two manuals and only four ranks of pipes. Unlike more modern organs, each stop was actuated by holding its knob and pulling that down about six inches and then following its slot across, sideways, till it stopped. I played the famous *Trumpet Voluntary*, which starts with a loud passage. Then, as if to echo it, a quieter passage follows. This meant changing the loud stop for the quiet stop. I pushed the knob of the stop across and, instead of then guiding it back to the top of its slot, I just let it go. It had a very strong spring that caused it to shoot up to the top with an enormous BANG. It was followed by a sinister silence. The monks and the visiting tourists and stood still and looked at me. I was so embarrassed that I got off the seat and made a very undignified exit, stage left. I never went into the Holy Sepulchre again.

We were told that Jewish archaeologists had discovered yet another site of Golgotha, the place of the Skull and one that had every indication of being more genuine than the one that most Christian religious denominations recognise. Somehow it was all hushed up, however. If positive proof could be evinced, then there would be a tremendous scandal and embarrassment.

From modern photos it can be seen that the front of the building has now been totally restored and the scaffolding removed. I'm sure the authorities would have found no difficulty raising the money to do so after the War.



The Holy Sepulchre in more recent years



Allenby's Holy Sepulchre

In the 1914/18 War General Allenby was looking at the map of Jerusalem and noticed that the contours of a small row of hills looked like a skeleton (if you let your imagination stray that far, as he did.)

The outline of the largest hill looked to him on the map like a skull and, lo and behold, at the bottom of that hill was a cave. It all fitted in and Allenby declared

that he had found the Real Holy Sepulchre. Some devoted religionists take his word for it and have adopted the place as the one and only Place of the Skull and the Holy Sepulchre. Needless to say, never during my stay in Jerusalem did I witness, or even want to witness, that re-enactment of the ghastly and cruel murder of Christ.

I got a lot of pleasure visiting the beautiful old buildings throughout the Old City, not for any reasons of devotion but just for the interest in the various forms of architecture. The most spectacular and, to this day, the most disputed over, is the



The Mosque of Omar

Mosque of Omar (the Dome of the Rock).

It is holy to both the Moslems and the Jews. In it can be seen the rock on which Abraham was due to offer up Isaac (what a typically cruel legend that is!).

This rock is holy to Jews and Moslems alike, both reckon Abraham as their common ancestor. Somehow Islam has found its way onto the rock. An indentation on it can be imaginatively described as having been made by the hoof of a horse. Therefore it naturally followed that it was made by the horse on which Mohammed mounted up to Heaven. Or so the Islamists say. And it has become a place of pilgrimage for Moslems. To this day there are always mighty disputes between the Jews and Arabs over this place, especially now that the Jews claim it as part of their territory. Much blood is being spilt there.

It is very interesting to compare the Russian, Greek and Armenian churches, each with its type of ornate religious decoration and icons. They are very colourful, many very gaudy, and reeking of centuries of incense burning. We once went into a Russian Orthodox church where a high mass was being sung by monks and nuns. Although we crept in quietly so as not to disturb them, our presence was noted by one of the nuns who immediately left her devotions and came across to us, to sell us postcards. I suppose that these Russians were stripped of any financial support by communist Mother Russia and had to grasp any opportunity to earn a penny or two.

There were two favourite places of mine that I visited on very hot days. Periodically a hot wind comes from the desert bringing with it a fine dusting of sand. It is known as the "*Khamseen*". Tradition has it that it occurs on one day, or three days or at most five days. We were told that *khamseen* means "the number five" or it just means "hot wind". Whatever it is, it's most unpleasant. Surprisingly the place to visit during the *Khamseen* is a Turkish Bath. The one I favoured was the Bath of St. Mary - actually an old Roman bath. Inside the walls are lined with marble. There are three main rooms - the dressing room, the hot room and the cool room. We soldiers entered, paid our fee (35 piastres - about seven shillings and six pence), undressed and entered the hot room. There we sat on a marble bench and stewed. The atmosphere was almost unbearable, damp and very hot. When the Arab attendant felt we'd had enough (and we really did feel that way) he took us to the cool room and set about cleaning and massaging us. The cleaning process was done by rubbing his glove made of sharkskin all over our bodies. Sharkskin is very rough and in no time at all our outer layer of skin was peeled off and put in a little silver dish. The new skin beneath glowed with health. When he'd finished he wrapped us each in a large thick towel and guided us back to the dressing room and laid us down on benches, where we promptly dozed off. Finally he woke us with a glass of tea and we dressed. As we walked out into the *Khamseen* we felt surprisingly refreshed and cooler. One day Ron Fountain and I went there and knocked on the door. The owner came and told us that we could not come in as it was women's day. We walked away rather despondently. We had not been gone more than a few yards when he came running after us and called us back in. Apparently he had worked out that two soldiers at 35 piastres each was more profitable than ten ladies at 2 piastres each. He turned the women out of the hot room and as they passed Ron and me they cursed us and spat at us. I felt thoroughly embarrassed that I had been the cause of their loss of a bath on a *Khamseen* day.

The other favourite place was the Pool of Bethesda. Readers of the New Testament will know that this pool of water was periodically disturbed by angels. Around it lay the sick, crippled and dying believers. Those who were able to jump in while the

waters bubbled were cured on the spot. Anyone too disabled to get there in time was not cured and had to put up with it.

When I first saw the pool I was very disappointed. It was a dirty stagnant little underground pool. No bubbles; no disturbance; and certainly no sick people laying near it in the hope of a visit from the angels. However, outside was a beautiful garden, well shaded by a wide variety of colourful trees. I could sit there and sense healing from Mother Nature herself. I went there several times on very hot days and felt the benefit of the gardens coolness and quiet. The place was kept in its charmingly beautiful condition by Whitefriars, a Roman Catholic Order of monks. I became friendly with one of them. He was an archaeologist and was continually carrying out excavations in and around the pool. One day he gave me a virgin's lamp that he had just dug up. It was from Roman times, earthenware, with traces of the soot left by burning the oil it contained. I was so thrilled I asked him that, if he found another one, I would willingly pay for it as a financial gift to his Order. Some weeks later he did indeed find another lamp. I paid and took it back to the barracks.



Then I found old cigarette tin big enough to hold it, with cotton- wool packing. I posted it to my old History teacher (Mr. H.I. Brown) at the Westcliff High School. Months later I got an answer from him. He was thrilled to pieces to receive it, intact. After the War I called on the School to meet my old teachers and there he was, still as pleased and excited to have received such a precious antiquity. The funny thing was that, as a boy, I positively hated his History lessons. I loathed writing copious notes, copied from the blackboard, all about the Kings and Queens of England, the wars and battles and the convoluted politics. But I was always fascinated when he occasionally brought archaeological items, prehistoric flint spearheads, Roman glass bottles and the like, to his lessons. I remember so well, one of the boys brought the skull of a small monkey to school and solemnly presented it to Mr. Brown, telling him it was the skull of Julius Caesar at the age of three. We all, including Mr. Brown, had a good laugh together. He was a really nice man, despite his subject.

I really enjoyed wandering around the outside of the Old City or sometimes walking along the great Wall that surrounds the City. There are several gates in the wall, each with its individual attributes. One of them is called St. Stephen's Gate. It was where St. Stephen was stoned to death. It is horrible to think that that ghastly death is still being meted out in country under the influence of the vicious Islamic Sharia Law. When I first met Marjorie we strolled through the Kidron Valley, which is where she told me that she wanted two children, a girl called Gillian and a boy called Brian. She got 'em later – I saw to that! Almost the whole hillside is taken up by the Jewish cemetery. Jews have been burying their dead there for over 2000 years. We were told that those Jews would be first to enter Heaven when the day arrives. (That will

presumably include that old crook, Robert Maxwell, who somehow got himself buried there as well.)

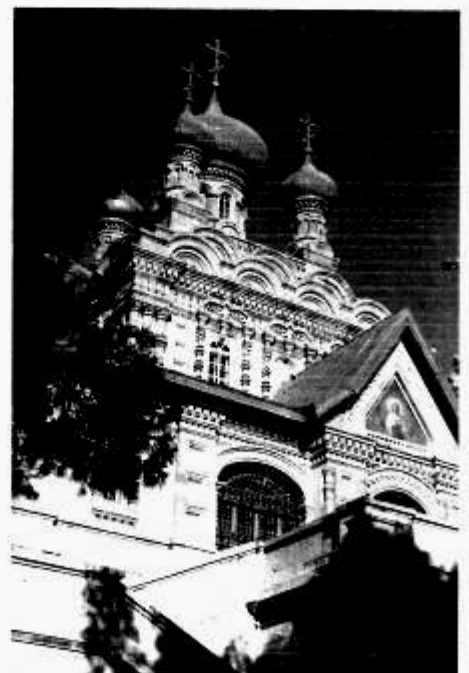
Lots of magnificent buildings stand around the perimeter of the Old City, many of which I visited, some more than once. The Mount of Olives is particularly attractive.



Here I specially liked the Roman Catholic Church of the Agony (also known as the Church of all Nations) in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.



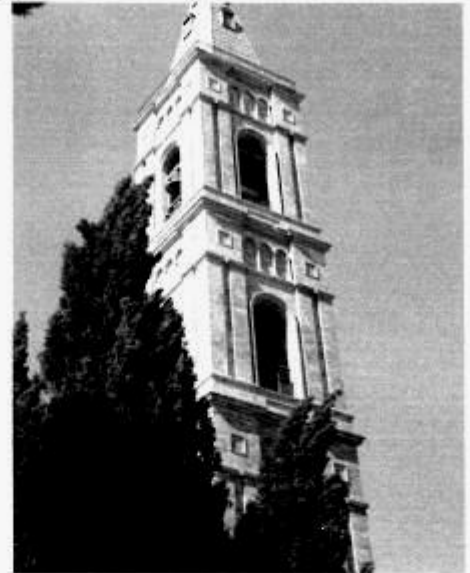
It was so named because money for its construction came from many countries. The insides of the twelve domes were painted by artists from the different countries. Higher up is the Russian Orthodox Church of Mary Magdalene with its



seven typical gold-covered onion domes and very ornate interior.



And on the prow of the mountain there is a small Russian Orthodox Church with a very high tower called the Tower of the Ascension. I climbed this Tower and wished I hadn't. The Tower is completely hollow with a terrifying spiral staircase. To make matters worse this



staircase is a virtual skeleton, made entirely of metal and it sways as you walk up it. You look through the open windows and gaze down at a graveyard as you progress up. By the time I reached the top I was shaking with fright and my knees were twitching with nervous anxiety. There's a balcony at the top with a splendid view of the Old City. Its walls were all covered with graffiti going back hundreds of years. I really don't know how I managed to get down, I was so terrified.

Up on the mountaintop, Christ was thought to have ascended into heaven. Of course, there's a rock with his footprint in it and a small shrine, the Church of Ascension, built over it.

Olive trees live for centuries and we were told that they were there when Christ knelt in the Garden to pray. They certainly look very old and gnarled. I entered the vestibule of the Church of all Nations and was greeted by an Irish RC monk. He sold me a card on which a prayer was printed and an olive leaf was stuck. He then assured me that if I were to read that prayer ten times in a state of holiness I would get 100 days remission of purgatory. I asked him how many days of purgatory I was likely to get, and then I would buy the appropriate number of cards and read their prayers, each ten times; and get off purgatory entirely. He wasn't having any. He was quite emphatic that it did not work that way. I then asked if the olive leaf came from a tree in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was quite positive that it did. I then pointed out that all the trees had their full consignment of leaves with no sign that they had been stripped enough to stick on all the cards in the pile on the table. He gave up. I don't know if he really believed himself all that guff he gave me, but it was obvious to him that I didn't. However, I am sure that many ardent RC visitors believed it and carried out the instructions. If then one day, despite my Humanist beliefs, I find myself in purgatory, having to serve out the whole sentence that my sins deserved, he could say to me, "I told you so".



Further round the walls of the City, nearly back to the Jaffa Gate, is the magnificent Roman Catholic Church of the Dormition (the "Falling Asleep" of the Virgin), a neo-Romanesque building designed by Heinrich Renard and consecrated in 1908. It is served by Benedictine monks. I

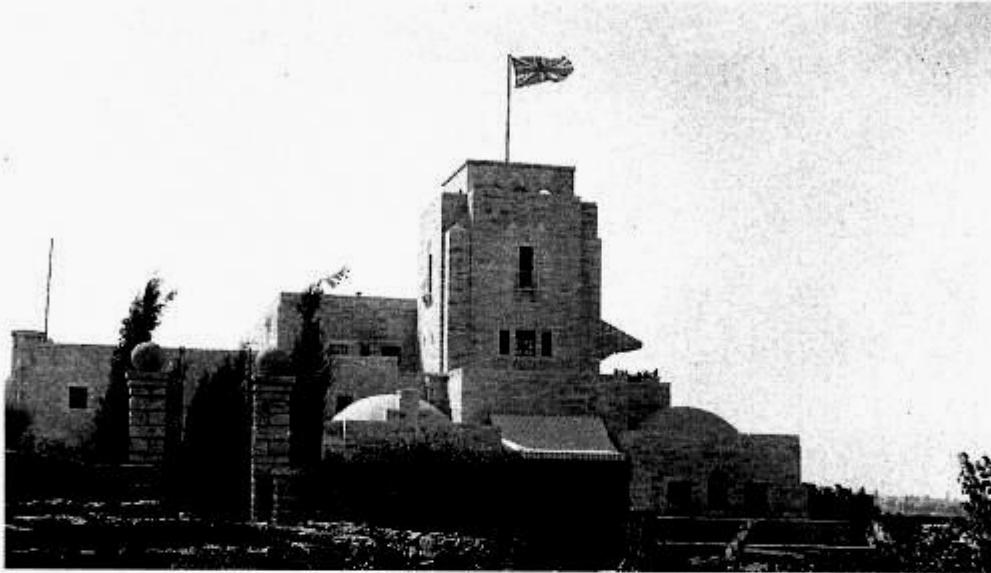


Its centralized ground-plan betrays the influence of the Rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It has a beautiful mosaic pavement, in the centre of which are three intersecting circles, symbolizing the Trinity; from this central point rays radiate outwards to the next two (concentric) circles, the first of which contains the names of the prophets Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the second, those of the twelve apostles. Round the outside are the signs of the Zodiac and an inscription (Proverbs 8,25-26). In the vaulting of the apse is a mosaic of the Virgin and Child. In the centre of the crypt, under a mosaic dome, is a sculpture of the Dormition (the Virgin on her deathbed.)

My Roman Catholic friends invited me to go with them to the Midnight Mass in the Church. I can't remember what the religious occasion was – possibly the day when the Virgin Mary died, or maybe Good Friday. Knowing that I was a musician, they assured me that there would be wonderful music performed by the Benedictine monks. I had to get special permission to be out of barracks so late in the night. What a disappointment it was. I thought the music was dreadful, boring and monotonous, all sung in plainchant. And the voices were not all that good either. But the worst part of it all was that we were supposed to spend the whole time on our knees.

Two magnificent buildings are a further distance away from the walls of the Old City. One I have already mentioned.

It is Government House, the residence of Sir Harold MacMichael the High Commissioner; and seat of the Administration of the British Mandate of Palestine. Here it was that I first made full use of my pianistic skills when I arrived in Palestine, in accompanying Sir Harold's daughter, Araminta.



The other is the Augusta Victoria Hospice, built in a fit of megalomania by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. When I was there it was being used as a British military hospital. I was a not unwilling patient, with next to nothing wrong with me.



THE GATES OF THE OLD CITY

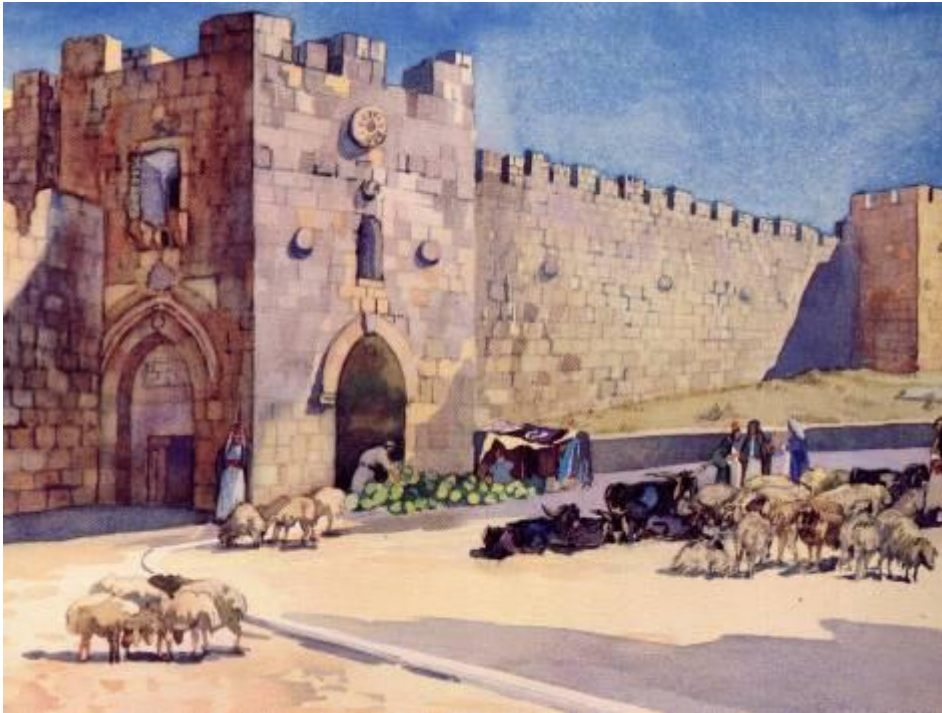
I visited all the Gates of the Old City but, for some inexplicable reason, did not take photos of them. Fortunately I have several water colours of them, which show their beauty and interesting structure.



The Damascus Gate, famous for its dealers in oranges and sales of camels



The Dung Gate, but I don't know why it is so called but I can guess



Herod's Gate has been associated from time immemorial for its sheep market



Golden gate. This Gate has been closed for centuries. You can only visit its elegant inside.



St. Stephen's Gate, infamous for its cruel murder of the Saint.



Zion Gate. As its name suggests, this Gate leads to Mount Zion. It is famous for its surface sculptures.



Jaffa Gate. The main entry point to the Old City

In 1898 this Gate suffered an act of vandalism when the Turkish Government removed a portion of the wall to its south, making a gap between the gate and the Citadel. The motive for this act of vandalism has been ascribed to the desire of the former Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany to make a state entry on horse back into the Old City. This is in striking contrast to General Allenby's entry into the Old City on foot by this same Gate in 1917. Roads from the west and to the south of Palestine lead to this Gate. It has been used by people and animals from time immemorial and, more recently, unhappily, by motor vehicles. Behind, immediately to the south of the Gate is a cluster of buildings known as the Citadel, a castle of the Crusader period, though not actually built by the Crusaders. They were built by Moslem rulers of Egypt early in the 14th Century, some years after they had taken Acre, the last of the Crusader cities. The Citadel was then known as the Tower of David, after the big tower that stands to the north of the entrance.



The Citadel has a fine large open space within it, big enough to use it for full-sized orchestra concerts.

Recently the European Song Concert was won by Israel. The following year, Israel hosted the next Song Contest in the Citadel, This photograph, taken recently , shows David's Tower and the Citadel and in fitting with modern times, there are Israeli banners on display.



Both Marjorie and I like to visit the Citadel and stroll around its well laid-out garden area. There is also a museum in it , where interesting archaeological relics are on display. I took several photos of her to take with me on my next ENSA concert tour.





And she dreamed of discarding her Army uniform and wearing civilian clothes again.



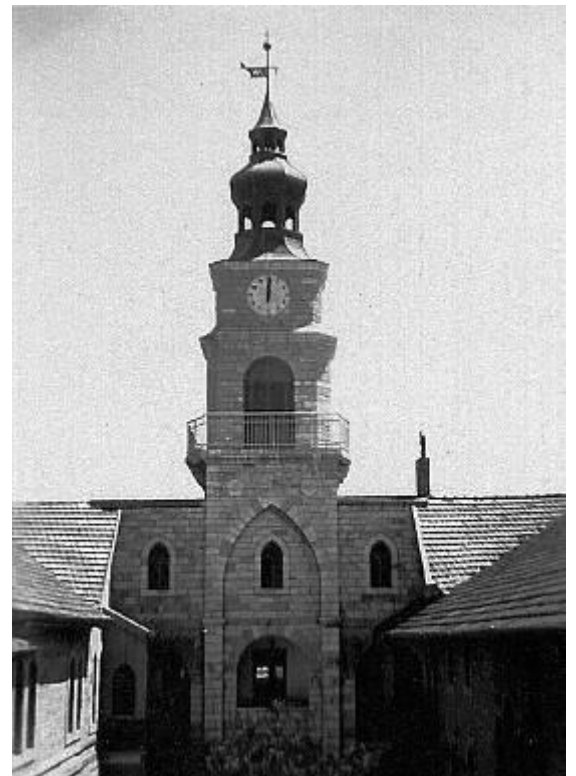
SCHNELLER SYRISCHES WAISENHAUS



The Syrian Orphanage was set up in 1860 in Jerusalem for Syrian orphan boys by Father Johannes Ludwig Schneller, a German protestant missionary. There were several well designed buildings, each designated for its own category of orphan.



My barrack room was in the main building, G Block, situated behind the front entrance. It was on the first floor. Standing on the balcony outside the door of our room we looked towards the tower.



Our room was very bleak with a stone-tiled floor. In Jerusalem's short winter it could be bitterly cold. The back door led onto a balcony where our wash-room and toilets were. We only had cold water there and, if we needed a shower, that too was

freezing cold. At first each of us was given wooden planks supported on two blocks of wood, one at each end. On these were laid three so-called “biscuits”, hard straw-filled mattresses. As the wounded from the Western Desert were brought in to the Jerusalem Army hospitals, our planks were taken away from us for additional hospital beds, so we slept on the “biscuits” on the cold stone floor. It was a very Spartan existence. In the springtime and summer, it wasn’t too bad.



The planks and the “biscuits” can be seen in this picture.

We were soon introduced to the live stock that infested our room – horrible bed bugs. If we caught one and try to kill it by squashing it, we found that it had outer shells that was very rubbery, so that after being squashed, it just sprang back to its original shape and lived on. So we were issued with blow lamps. In the day-time the bugs hid in the cracks in the floor and walls. A quick blast with the blow-lamp soon put paid to them but not their eggs. These later hatched out and we were re-infested. As the years went on we were given Indian basketry beds, springy boxes made of woven cane. They were luxury itself but did not last long. They were so weak that gradually they fell to pieces. And they were ideal hiding places for bed-bugs. So it was back to “biscuits” on the floor.

In G Block were the administration room (Orderly Room), the Medical Room and Sick Bay, the Cook House, and, out the back a court yard leading to the Other Ranks’ dining hall (the Mess). We were expected to keep our hair cut short (“short back and sides”) so, near the Mess, was the Barber Shop with its Arab barber. He stunk of garlic and breathed it all over us as he cut our hair. I once forgot and allowed my hair to grow a little longer than the official “short back and sides”. The Colonel stopped me and challenged me about it. I told him that I was a pianist and that I needed my hair to be longer, especially as I was due to play in a concert that evening in the NAAFI. To my surprise he believed me and gave permission for my hair to stay as it was. Till tomorrow morning!

The Chapel was just along the balcony from our room. It had a fine organ so naturally I got permission to play it. I wished I hadn’t started. The War had meant that regular tuning had to be stopped. It sounded like it ! In addition, the German method of controlling the stops, the ranks of pipes, is quite different from ours. It would have taken me some time to master the difference. I only played it once and then never again.

Early in the morning, any of us who so desired, could go down to the Cook House for a cup of tea, known traditionally as “Gunfire”. (I was told that the Army in India used to purchase tea from an Indian company, whose trade name was Gunfire. All Army tea was from then on labelled “Gunfire” no matter what its make.) We did not have cups – only mess tins. I soon got used to drinking my tea out of a mess tin. We also took our two mess tins into the Mess for lunch and evening meal. Our first course was slopped into the bigger mess tin and then we went back for our pudding in the smaller mess tin. The same thing happened for our breakfast (Porridge then bacon and eggs.) It was a very mucky procedure. The food, on the whole was pretty ghastly. Some of the worst was supplied by an Australian soldier of the First World War who stayed behind in Palestine, buying and selling food. Somehow he had got hold of large tins of First World War ex-Army food and he sold them to us. There was margarine – thick, greasy and rancid stuff, only fit for greasing the wheels of our tanks and lorries in the Western Desert; and equally horrible tins of jam – blackberry and apple. Thank goodness for the dear old YMCA, Toc H, St. Andrew’s, Salvation Army, and other voluntary canteens, where we could get decent meals.

It was a short walk from G Block to our own canteen – the NAAFI. We could get quite good food there – but we had to pay for it. Every morning at 10.30, we had a tea break and went to the NAAFI. There a good cup of Army tea awaited us – the time-honoured Cha; and a great slab of NAAFI cake, spongy and full of raisins. This was known to us as “Cha and a wad”. Other soldiers purchased their British cigarettes there. In addition they could collect their official ration of cigarettes, free of charge, awful things that any self-respecting soldier wouldn’t smoke. They were made in India. Fortunately for my future health, I have never smoked, so I was quite independent of British and Indian fags.

Two other main buildings used as barracks were the Blind Home and E Block.



It was in the Blind Home that Jewish terrorists hurled a bomb that killed poor gentle Private France, who would never hurt anybody.

Once a week we all had to parade in front of the Blind Home to get our pay. Each soldier had to march smartly up to the pay officer, salute, sign an acquittance roll and be handed the weekly wages. We used to collect only part of our pay, leaving a small amount each week to accumulate to pay for our occasional leaves.



Accommodation in E Block was as primitive as mine in G Block, but by the time this photo was taken; proper trestle beds had been supplied. (After I had left I might add!) I suppose that the War being over, the soldiers were able to receive more comforts and that includes better bedding.



Near G Block was the GHQ, where the Colonel had his offices. Opposite that was the Dhobi. The word "Dhobi" was a hangover from the Army in India. A Dhobi is a washer man. We used to take him our clothes to be washed. I must admit he and his team were very efficient. The clothes were always washed well and nothing was lost or damaged. He did have an unpleasant procedure, however. To starch our summer uniforms (khaki drill) he'd fill his mouth with starch solution and then spit- spray it all over the garment.



There were two small fields – one held a large flock of turkeys being fattened for Christmas and other occasions; and the other held pigs and sheep. This was organised by a splendid new Camp Commandant, Major Gunter of the Scottish Black Watch Regiment, who set up all sorts of improvements in our diet. He used to strut about the camp wearing his kilt and sporran. This is our old sow, soon to become a mummy.



After I had left the Pay Corps to join ENSA, Marjorie was devastated. I had asked some of my friends to look after her and make sure that she had a pleasant social life to ease her loneliness. As the ATS billet in the centre of Jerusalem had been bombed by the Jewish Stern Gang, our girls had all moved into Schneller and were billeted in the bungalows. Our officers who used to live there were now billeted in the Allenby Barracks. They were none too pleased to go as they had been so comfortable in the bungalows. And Allenby Barracks were right at the other side of the City. Needless to say, the bungalows were totally Out of Bounds to all the men. We used to say that there were black eunuchs, with sharp scimitars, stationed there permanently on guard against marauding Pay Corps soldiers.

There were lots of activities set up in the camp to make up for the difficulties posed by the dangers from terrorists in the City. To my amazement Marjorie joined the Pay Corps Choir. And she'd always told me that she was tone-deaf.



That's her, second from the right in the front.

She also was invited to join the Concert Party in the Show "Krazy Kapers".



There she is, second from the left in the back. The man with the moustache in the back row was the producer and also wrote a lot of the comic material. And he was also was a brilliant comedian. The one with the side-drum is my old school friend, Gerald Buckley, with whom I first went to Palestine in 1941.

The Pay Corps was always noted for its excellent Concert Party. I took part in several concerts before leaving to go to ENSA as a comic pianist, half of a double act with Cpl. Ron Fountain and performing in various sketches, mostly as a comedian. It is something I missed. In ENSA I was always the pianist and almost never appeared doing any comic stuff on the stage.

However, the Concert Party as I knew it had one big disadvantage. It did not have these lovely dancing ATS girls that arrived after I had left.



All we had was Fidelia Fiducia, a “girl” who was really Private Harold Gooding (later to be known as Lieutenant Harold Gooding.)



If you look carefully you’ll see me – the Arab with the moustache; standing with Ron Fountain and Fidelia Fiducia (“her” stage name was a corruption of the Regimental motto.)

Standing next to Fidelia Fiducia is Ted Barnard, our Cockney Comic, Producer, and Script Writer. After the War, Ron Fountain came and lived with us for a while, but we had to ask him to find other digs, as Marjorie was expecting a baby and needed the bed for my mother, who was coming to look after us. As far as I know, Ron then joined the Australian Army. I hope they had a good concert party there for him to join.

And... Marjorie joined the Dramatic Society



The play she was in was “Escape” by John Galsworthy

The War with the Germans drew to its inevitable end. The evil that Adolf Hitler and his insane cronies had begun was finally at an end. An enormous number of fine young soldiers, both British and German had perished, thanks to Hitler's megalomania. In addition our Allies had lost a vast number. Millions of civilians too had perished but, in Palestine, it was the cruel and wicked treatment of the Jews that was most thought of. The local newspaper gave its front page to rejoicing over the end of the War and of the Nazi menace.

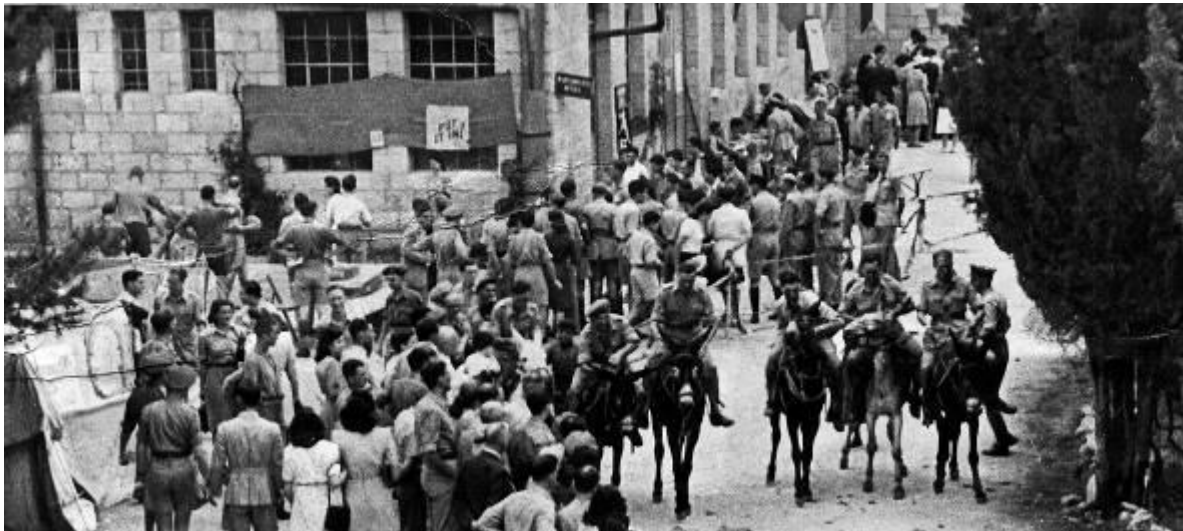
In 1934 Schneller had become a centre for Nazi activity in Jerusalem. The Nazis had established a branch in the Templar Quarter of Jerusalem and made full use of German sympathisers in the Schneller Orphanage. On Hitler's 34th birthday the leader in the Templar Quarter, a Herr Buchhalter, invited the Boys' Choir from the Orphanage to sing suitable Nazi songs on that occasion. Nazi propaganda pamphlets and stationery were printed in the printing house of the Orphanage. At one time Herr Schneller attempted to import weapons and ammunition from Germany with which to train Arabs. Apparently the British Secret Service knew all about what was going on as they had eavesdropped on the Orphanage phones.



Naturally on VE Day there was great rejoicing in the Schneller Pay Office. All work stopped and preparations were made to have a Fête to celebrate. I should have liked to have been there but I was in the desert near Alexandria attempting to put on a show for a small camp, where the soldiers were so drunk that it was impossible to do so.

My old friend Jas. Rawlings spent the whole day taking photos. He was a sergeant in the Micro Department where all documents were photographed on micro film. After the War, Jas became our solicitor and also achieved considerable fame as a photographer.

Here are some of his pictures taken of the Fête and the fun and games.



The Donkey Derby. This seems to be a ragged start – perhaps the donkeys aren't used to this sort of thing.



Here come the men but the ATS girls seem to have difficulty in starting. Marjorie is the accomplished equestrienne on the right – her donkey appears to be laughing (or complaining bitterly.)



The Pay Corps had a visit from one of the Scottish Regimental Bands. Possibly Major Gunter managed to arrange that – perhaps they were Black Watch too.

These Scottish soldiers gave a masterful performance of marching; playing their bagpipes; and traditional Scottish drumming. It was not the first time that the sound of the pipes had been heard in Schneller. ENSA brought us the Dagenham Girl Pipers while I was there.

Then, of course there had to be a Beauty Contest. Our ATS girls and some civilian girls lined up to be judged.

My beautiful Marjorie (third from right) did not win but she is still my Beauty Queen.



My old comrade, Private Angel, who was Master of Ceremonies, announced the winner, "The Beauty Queen of Schneller,"

(Just take a look at that primitive and clumsy old microphone.)

Lieutenant Colonel Hands crowned the Winner "Beauty Queen of Schneller".

His adoring glance says it all!



Not to be outdone, Marjorie entered for the “Beautiful Ankles” competition and lined up with the others, behind a screen, so that only the ankles could be seen.

This time Marjorie did win!



A tent was set up in which a mysterious Arab fortune-teller sat, steeped in the magic and occultism of the Orient.

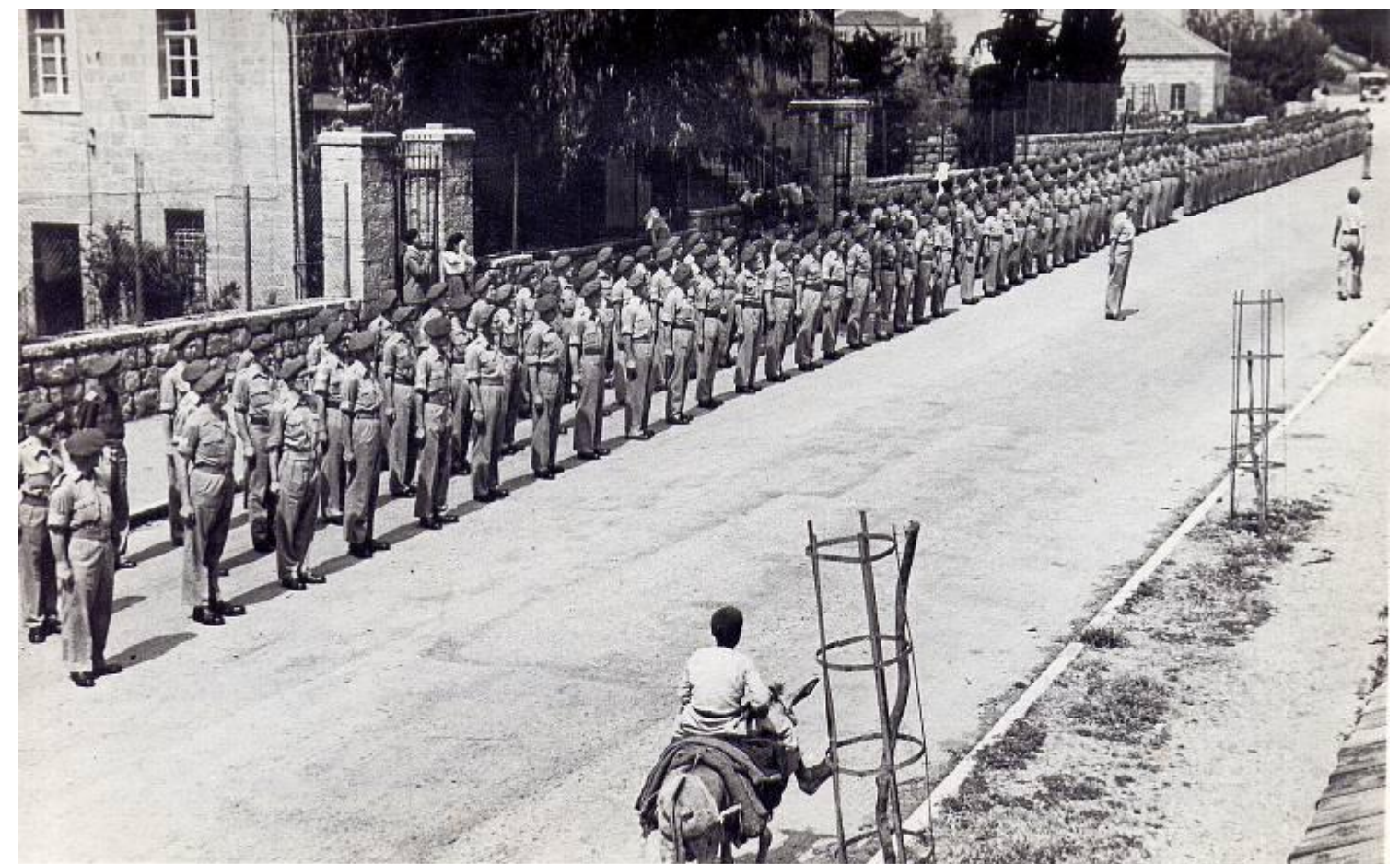


The lady would be wise not to take too much notice of his advice as to her future, as he was none other than one of our Staff Sergeants dressed in borrowed plumage.



VE Day had to be celebrated in the proper Military way with a Grand Church Parade and, as the soldiers would say, "With loads of bullshit." And the more educated would say, "omnia taurus excreta" The whole RAPC Regiment lined up smartly in the street outside Schneller, where they were

inspected by Lieutenant Colonel Rowlands, a pompous man whom we all thoroughly disliked. He adored having parades through the streets which he led himself. In previous parades like the one in this picture he would stand, alongside the Sergeant Major, on the platform to take the salute. He would stick out his chest, throw his head back, and the men would then march past. We swore that he would periodically mutter to the Sergeant Major, "Have the men gone past yet, Sarn't Major?" But on this previous occasion, he got some senior Officer to take the salute and, he very pompously he led the whole march past.



The mounted Arab boy somehow reduces the dignity of the occasion.



Something had to be done about that soldier with the wrong shirt and the one marching out of step. The wrongly dressed man had disappeared before the men got to the Parade ground.

On VE Day the whole of the City was decorated with flags for the occasion. This is the Barclays Bank, the Bank that held all the officers' finances.

finances.

Crowds had gathered in the main road leading to the YMCA awaiting the main Parade to pass.



First of all there was a fly-past of the RAF Bombers and Spitfires; and then through the street came staff cars bringing all the top brass.

The parade wove its way through the main streets, eventually to end up in the Sports Ground of the YMCA, the only area big enough to hold such a large affair. The tower in the background of these photos is that of the YMCA.



Our ATS girls joined in the march. Not to be outdone! It was said that on that day they marched more



smartly than the men. You can see Marjorie third from left.



A touch of the exotic Orient came in sight. It was Transjordan's Pipe Band and their Arab Legion, desert warriors led by Glubb Pasha (Captain John Bagot Glubb, affectionately known as Abu Hassan).



The top clergymen of the Army, and civilian churches led the new High Commissioner of Palestine, Field Marshal Lord Gort VC, onto the sports field of the YMCA.

Lord Gort was a hero of the First World War. He gained the Victoria Cross for outstanding bravery. I think he was wearing his First World War riding breeches and boots.



The Thanksgiving Parade on the Sports Field of the YMCA



A few months later, after Marjorie and I had returned to England, the final end of the War came with the defeat of the Japanese. The dreadful Atom Bomb put paid to any further fighting on the part of the Japanese.

Palestine had already become a battle ground, with Jewish terrorists (the Stern Gang) committing acts of unbelievable horror. Although many of my Jewish friends deplored these acts of terror, they nevertheless hastened the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the creation of the Israeli State.

My old Comrades in Schneller put a big notice up in the camp announcing the War's final end.



Although I was glad to have left the Royal Army Pay Corps and to have joined ENSA, I still had a deep affection for the comradeship I had experienced whilst serving in Palestine.

Coda

The Schneller Orphans

Old Comrades Association



In 1954 a few ex-members of the 90th Batallion RAPC decided to meet regularly, and it seemed only proper that they should call themselves “The Schneller Orphans”. They were first drawn together by the erstwhile Camp Admin. Office Sergeant, Ambrose Pilbeam. Now back in “Civvie Street”, Ambrose was re-installed in his pre-War business as a printer – in fact he owned the Company.

A convivial meeting place had to be found – in London, so as to be easily reached by train from all over the country. Eventually the place chosen, after one abortive attempt, was a small pub in an alley just off the Strand. It was called “The Ship and Shovel”. The roads and one alley in that part of London had all been named after one man – George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. They were George Street, Villiers Street, Duke Street, Of Alley and Buckingham Street. Our little Ship and Shovel was in Of Alley. It was obvious that if the Association were to grow any larger, a commensurate meeting place would have to be found.

The news spread by word of mouth and ex-Orphans, as they say, crept out of the woodwork.

Here is the first group that met in the Ship and Shovel:-



And here's the second time, after the word had got around.



Membership of the Orphans was open to anyone who served or worked in the Orphanage at any time.

The numbers swelled, partly by word of mouth and partly from advertisements we put in the newspapers, till we were able to fill the hall of the Union Jack Club for our Annual Reunion.

Our President was Colonel Robert Nott until eventually he became blind and unable to attend.





We occasionally invited honoured guests, one of whom was Fred Beavitt, a Pay Corps Chelsea Pensioner. Although he had not been at Schneller, we elected him an honorary Orphan. He was a grand old man, proud to wear his Chelsea Pensioner uniform. Here he is in 1991 with Gerald Buckley and me.

In the last few years we had members representing all the types of personnel

engaged in the Schneller, coming from all parts of the UK and abroad. For many years it was 'men only'. I complained – after all, Marjorie was an Orphan in her own right. Eventually all the other men agreed with me and then, of course, many of their wives wanted to be member too. As numbers were falling due to old age, infirmity or even death, the extra ladies kept up our numbers.

But inevitably the numbers attending grew considerably smaller and we could not fill the Union Jack Club Hall any more. We were able to find a church hall where the ladies of the church could put on a very good dinner for us. I was persuaded to take over the position of Secretary and President combined. Our last independent Reunion was so badly attended we despaired of ever holding a Reunion again. By then the Pay Corps itself no longer existed. It had been combined with several other units such as the Military Police, the Intelligence Corps, and the Medical Corps to form one big unit called the Logistics Corps. The current Officer in Chief (ex Pay Corps), Lt. Col. Mike Rawlinson, invited us to join the annual Reunion of the Pay Corps Association in the Sergeants' Mess in Wellington Barracks. He was able to combine the Armistice Day Celebrations with this Reunion.

On Armistice Day there is a Grand Ceremony in the Field of Remembrance by Westminster Abbey. Each Regiment has a plot of land on which people can stick little memorial Field Crosses in memory of their friends or relatives. The members of Pay Corps Old Comrades Association stand by our plot for a short ceremony of remembrance, led by Mike, which finishes with the traditional bugle call.



In this picture (2005) are two American friends standing with me, who were vastly impressed by the dignity and emotion of the ceremony. Marjorie needed to sit on a 'walking stick seat'.



Mike finished the short ceremony by quoting this deeply moving little poem:-

**When you go home,
Tell them of us and say,
“For your tomorrow
We gave our today.”**

John Maxwell Edmunds

I can never hear Mike reading this poem without tears coming to my eyes as I think of my dear friend Lieutenant Ron Wells. He gave his today. For my tomorrow...

Gradually our numbers decreased until the last reunion, (2007) there were only three Orphans there – Donald Inkster (Treasurer), John Hoskins and me. John Hoskins died soon afterwards.

The Schneller Orphans Old Comrades Association had finally come to an end.

Sic Transit Gloria the Schneller Orphans

The Schneller Orphanage was, on the whole, a cushy posting - or at least from the distance of over 60 years, it seems to have been. As I look back I can only remember enjoyable and amusing experiences. All that was unpleasant has faded into obscurity. Here are some of the stories which we Orphans used to mull over when we met together:

THE GREAT PAY CORPS MUTINY

At one time, the food in the other ranks' mess speedily deteriorated. Admittedly, it had never been all that wonderful but we used to top it up in the NAAFI, the YMCA and other voluntary organisations' canteens or the restaurants in the town. But on this occasion the food reached rock bottom. The meal that we were served consisted of a grey swill with ghastly bits of gristly horror floating in it. As one man we all stormed out into the courtyard banging our mess tins. Such a thing as A MUTINY had never occurred, I'm sure, in all the history of the normally well behaved Pay Corps. What was even funnier was that no-one, other ranks, NCO's or officers seemed to know what to do next. We just stood around looking angry and stupid. Then suddenly our Colonel Taylor appeared on the balcony above us. He was a wily old bird and very popular. He spoke to us in much the same genial way that Wellington spoke to Sam Small when he asked him to "pick oop tha musket". He told us that he had seen the food and that he agreed that it was uneatable; and would we kindly disperse quietly like the good lads we were; and he would see that we got something better to eat. Immediately very simple, but edible, basic rations were produced and all was well. The next day we heard that the cook sergeant had been working a racket with local merchants whereby he put the good food from the suppliers into sealed tin-cans which he tossed to the bottom of the swill tank. Then local civilians would come and collect the swill and later rescue the tins, clean them up and sell the contents. We also heard that the cook sergeant had shot himself. A new cook sergeant was promptly appointed and suddenly our meals became miracles of culinary excellence.

This man could make a cordon bleu meal even out of Spinney's sausages and that's saying something! Fruits and vegetables used to appear in season and only in season, so that we had weeks of dates; then weeks of apricots (mish mish); then weeks of sweet potatoes. He gave us date puddings each day which varied in style and preparation. His apricot tarts were succulent and mouth watering. Sweet potatoes appeared chipped, roasted, mashed, Duchesse, au gratin, each day different. It turned out that this paragon was the butler in a stately home, the husband of the cook from whom he had learnt all his skills. Of course we did not keep him - he disappeared overnight, probably to exercise his prowess in GHQ or even higher. His successor reverted to Spinney's sausages 'au naturel'...

One of our private soldiers was so incensed by the awful quality of the Spinney's sausages that he wrote to GHQ in Cairo. To our amazement he was awarded an addition to his medals – Mentioned in Despatches. But Spinney's sausages were finally replaced. With Soya Links. I quite liked them. Many didn't.

THE GREAT TOMATO SCAM

One of the other foods which appeared only in season was the tomato. For only a relatively short season you could get tomatoes. One year all the tomatoes disappeared from the markets. Apparently some local racketeer had gone around buying up all the tomatoes everywhere on the Friday and intended to keep them hidden till Monday when he'd sell them and would make a killing. The Police searched everywhere. (It was wartime and to treat food like that was very infradig.) The tomatoes remained obstinately hidden. My friend, Corporal Fountain, (remember, he and I were a double act in the Concert party - the Middle Eastern Brothers), was inclined to go out on pay-day evening to distribute his pay amongst the local hostelrys. These were Solly's, Izzy's and Abie's. In these taverns you could get a tumbler of any drink you'd care to name for a piastre (tuppence ha'penny). By the end of the evening, Fountain was feeling decidedly frail and certainly incapable of making the long trek back to Schneller. He found a building with an open window, crawled inside and discovered a box with something soft in it which made a comfortable bed for the night. Next morning he crept into Schneller when no-one was looking and tried to give an impression of having been there all night - except that all down the back of his khaki drill uniform there were squashed tomatoes. The police were called, and then the CID, but Fountain was quite incapable of telling them where he had been last night. They never found the tomatoes, but they all appeared on the market stalls, at a higher price, on the Monday. Strangely, Fountain was never put on a charge.

THE GREAT OVERTIME IMPOSITION

When the Desert warfare really hotted up, a huge force of soldiers was brought in to fight it. This meant more work for the Pay Corps, but not more people to do it. The Brigadier in charge - a man called Brigadier Todd - gave out an order that everyone in Schneller should work from 08.00 hours to 20.00 hours. And on Sundays as well! We were dumbfounded. Normally we could even get Saturdays free as well as Sundays. As we walked back to our rooms we passed the camp notice board. Some wit had written in large letters:-

SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR.GOD

SEVEN DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR.....TODD

THE GREAT BLOOD DONOR DIDDLE

With the push in the Western Desert came enormous numbers of casualties. Every hospital in Jerusalem was filled to bursting. All those plank beds in Schneller were collected and taken to the hospitals to be put in corridors and we Orphans had to sleep on the floor. We were harangued by our SSM who told us that we were expected to go to a blood donation centre to give our blood for the wounded soldiers. He added that, in his experience, after a blood donation the volunteer was always given a glass of beer and the rest of the day off. This immediately brought about a rush of volunteers, of whom I was one. We reported to the Italian Hospital in the town and gave our blood. As we lay on the recovery beds (biscuits!) we were all given a CUP OF TEA. There was nearly the second Great Pay Corps Mutiny. Corporal Fountain started investigating a cupboard on the wall and found a bottle full of surgical spirit - neat alcohol. He went round to all of us and copiously laced our coppers with the alcohol. I don't think the MO in charge ever understood how a blood donation and a cup of tea could produce such hilarity. Fountain then said that he had heard that blood could be rapidly replaced by drinking red wine so we all trekked around the corner to Izzy's bar. We all had several tumblers of an Israeli version of a red wine called Alicanti and rapidly replaced all the blood we had lost. When we staggered into Schneller we were threatened with being put on the fizzer. We all swore that it was the glass of beer and the loss of blood that had caused the intoxication. And we were actually believed by the guard on the gate. It was said on another occasion that Fountain was turned down as a donor when tested, because there was not enough blood in his alcohol.....

THE GREAT PAY CORPS MANOEUVRES

With the wisdom which sometimes emanates from GHQ, it was decided that the Pay Corps men should become real soldiers and learn how to fight. This required rifle practice and then manoeuvres to try it out. We had a crash course in rifle firing - crash in more senses than one. The rifles they gave us were Italian ones captured in the desert. I think they were left over from the Italians' Abyssinian campaigns or even earlier. Their one attribute, if they fired at all, was to send the bolt crashing backwards out of the rifle. So if you managed to fire the bloody thing you had to make sure that no part of you was behind the butt - which made for considerable difficulty in aiming. In addition we had to lie on our stomachs in the sand, propped up on our elbows. Each of us had one shot and all of us lost the skin off of our elbows. Then we were qualified riflemen. Next came the manoeuvres. Behind Schneller is a hilly bit of the Wilderness of Judea up and down which the Pay Corps riflemen were expected to gallop in all that heat. I and a few others had volunteered to be paramedics (?). We were easily accepted as we were the ones who hadn't even hit the target. So when the riflemen charged off up the Hills of Judea, we charged into the shade of a nearby wood. There we bandaged each other up in slings and splints and lay down on the stretchers to simulate casualties. Many of us simulated injury so convincingly that we went unconscious. Later we heard the approach of the CO (Lt.Col. Rowlands), who had come to inspect us. We quickly recovered and woke up. We were able to convince him of the value of practising our First Aid on each other. Or so we thought. The next week we were ordered to accompany the riflemen into action up and down the Hills of Judea lugging our stretchers and First Aid kits.

THE GREAT CHRISTMAS BROADCAST DECEPTION

One Christmas the Pay Corps Choir was asked to take part in the Christmas Broadcast to the Empire. We were to sing "*The Holy City*". As far as the Empire were concerned this was all to happen on Christmas Day but due to matters nearly always beyond the control of the Jerusalem Broadcasting Station, it was too risky to leave it till Christmas Day. Apparently the Jerusalem Broadcasting Studios were not powerful enough to reach anywhere outside Palestine, so normally the broadcasts would have been sent down the telephone wire to Cairo, there to be re-transmitted to the world. However, there was big risk in this, as passing Bedouins were liable to shin up the telephone poles, and steal the telephone wires to use for stitching up their tents or sell as copper - or so we were told. It was decided to record the broadcast the week before Christmas and then send the recording (on shellac disc) by staff car to Cairo for re-transmission. A flagstone was placed on the floor of the recording studio and one of us walked up and down on it while the announcer told the Empire that this soldier was on sentry-go outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The soldier was then heard to philosophise on being on duty on Christmas night in Bethlehem where it all began. Then we all sang "*The Holy City*" - but we were in the YMCA in Jerusalem, not in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I had the privilege of playing the YMCA organ for it. All our Mums and Dads heard us on Christmas Day and fondly imagined us in Bethlehem. This subterfuge had to be very hush-hush as there was a famous newspaper reporter of very high moral standing (especially when he thought he could get a scoop) in Jerusalem at the time and he would have spilled the beans. My Mum and Dad believed it and were thrilled to pieces...

THE GHASTLY HAUNTING

It was during the Khamseen hot wind season. That night it was even more hot and unpleasant than ever before. Someone in our barrack room suggested that it might be cooler up in the attic above us. We picked up our biscuits and bedding and climbed the stairs to get to the attic. We came to a long corridor with only one door leading from it - right at the very end. That door led into the attic. We went in, set down our bedding and tried to get to sleep. Jack Smith, who was lying near to me, opened the door wide so as to get a draught of, possibly, cooler air. Then he lay down. Suddenly the door shut with a loud slam. Jack got up again and opened the door. This procedure happened two more times. The next time we watched the door. An arm, with a long brown sleeve hanging from it, came out of the corridor, took the handle and slammed the door shut. Immediately Jack and I jumped to our feet to catch the perpetrator. That long corridor was completely empty. No one could have possibly run that quickly to prevent us from catching whoever it was. That scared us all. We picked up our bedding and rapidly retreated, back once more to our hot and clammy barrack room. Later we heard that in the Arab/Jew troubles before the War, six monks had been murdered in that attic.....

THE GREAT TERRORIST BOMB

When the ATS girls came to Schneller, those of us who were lucky got themselves girlfriends from their ranks. I was one of the lucky ones. Very lucky as I can confidently say over 60 years later! We used to walk our ladies back to their billets in the centre of Jerusalem, where, until it was time for them to go to their beds, we used to disappear into the dark of the cycle sheds behind the billets to do the sort of things that young people like us do in cycle sheds. One night the Stern Gang terrorists decided to blow up the Police Station next door. There was an almighty BANG and Marjorie and I were blown apart in the shock wave. Marjorie said, "Wow, that was some kiss!" We rushed into the arms of a Military Policeman who ordered us each to our respective barracks. I ran to Schneller where I was given an Italian rifle and piled with several other men onto an open lorry under the command of a very young lieutenant. We drove off down the road and there we spotted several men suspiciously crawling along in the shadow of a wall. Our lieutenant ordered us to aim our rifles and shouted, "Halt, who goes there". One of the men turned and said, "Aw. Shut up sonny, we're the police ". We had completely given the game away to some terrorists whom the police were hoping to surround in a nearby house. I don't know to this day if those terrorists escaped. That was my only contribution to the Palestine troubles; my only experience of armed action and my last activity as a Pay Corps soldier. .

I was eventually, after a long wait, transferred to ENSA.....

It is ironical that, although I left the RAPC to join ENSA, I ended up as the Secretary of the Schneller Orphans Association. I must have had a deep affection for the comradeship of those Schneller days.



I now sit at home all alone. My darling Marjorie lives in a beautiful Care Home as she suffers from Alzheimer's disease (it sounds better than Dementia). She's very happy there. I visit her every day and she seems to be pleased to see me. We still kiss affectionately.

I amuse myself writing my memoirs. I'm up to chapter 18 and I've still got 25 years of memories to dredge up from my memory and type out.

If my grandchildren or great-grandchildren ask me the traditional question, "What did you do in the War, Grandpa?" and I'm still around, I can tell them. If not they can find it in the collection of CDs of my memoirs. In the unlikely event of any one of them being computer illiterate, he or she can read all about it on hard copies that I have neatly bound, and can be found on a shelf in my office.

Sadly I no longer perform as a professional musician. The last time I did was three years ago. Arthritis is very unkind to organist's fingers...

Norman Dannatt