

AN ARMY DOCTOR'S STORY



The memoirs of
BRIGADIER A. ROY ORAM
1891 - 1966
Edited by Judi Conner

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**Life and service in the British Empire
and through two World Wars**

**The memoirs of
Brigadier A. Roy Oram
OBE MC MB BCH BAO MSC**

1891-1966

Edited by Judi Conner

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Introduction

By Judi Conner

Life in the age of Empire

These tales of my grandfather, Roy Oram, take us right back into that "foreign country" of the past. There are enough familiarities here to engage us with connections to the present day. But the contrasts to life now, and the speed of change in one lifetime from the 1890s to the 1960s, are, at the same time, staggering.

This book gives a glimpse of life at the height of the British Empire, and during its demise, through the eyes of one of the millions of players who quietly took part in it.

Roy Oram was, for most of his adult career, a medical officer in the British Army, with brief spells in the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy. He must have been typical of his generation of young middle-class men growing up in the late Victorian/Edwardian era, confident that their lives could, and probably would, be lived out on a world stage, where a little adventure, action and derring-do might be expected. For him and his peers a career in the forces or colonial service appears to have been a readily available, challenging and purposeful option in life. And for doctors, engineers and others entering a profession, practising it as part of a military, naval or colonial career added new dimensions of worldwide experience and responsibilities that they wouldn't

have had staying at home.

No doubt the fact that Roy completed his medical studies during a World War was another influence in his choice of career. Having joined up as a new doctor to support the war effort, he continued with the Royal Army Medical Corps in peacetime, undeterred by his battlefield experiences, and being wounded himself.

Good news stories

Elegantly handwritten in a series of lined 'exercise books', these stories are presented simply and informally, because Roy addressed them to me, his granddaughter, aged about ten years old and living with him and my grandmother Dulcie at the time.

At that point, I was unaware of most of the background history, and failed to appreciate the extraordinary situations he had been a part of in Russia, India, China, Egypt and Palestine – and closer to home during the two World Wars. But returning to these memoirs 50 years on, I now find these experiences fascinating, and greatly regret I didn't (or maybe couldn't, at that age) ask more questions before Roy and Dulcie died.

I am also aware now of the omissions he made to spare a 10-year-old reader the scale of human suffering he witnessed, including the horrors of trench warfare and the concentrations camps.

He refers mysteriously, for instance, to "the E.13 episode – I won't tell you that story", when

describing his early career in World War I. And later, the painful struggles in Palestine are described in a surprisingly detached way, given his close friendship with a local Palestinian family. And his work treating the survivors of Bergen-Belsen is underplayed.

Being a demonstratively affectionate grandfather and a sociable person, Roy never came over to me as cool or detached. I can only think that he wanted to protect his young grandchildren (and perhaps himself) from the harsh realities, and his military professionalism probably made it easy for him to pull back in this way, and look for an upbeat angle in every situation. He was writing primarily for family in any case, and this is basically a personal account relishing his experiences around the world and the people he met on his travels.

If he had assumed that in later life I would go and find out about these stories for myself, then he would have been right! I recently looked up the "E.13 episode", and discovered it involved a British submarine destroyed by a German torpedo in 1915 while in neutral waters. Fifteen crew members were killed, and there was international outrage. Some background to this, and various other incidents and facts that he refers to in passing, can be found in notes I have added at the end of the chapters, together with some extra family information.

Personal observations

The book is full of colourful anecdotes and observations, just as Roy might have told them.

Collectively they reveal, chronologically, how one man's life unfolded as he went about his business, travelling relentlessly between postings abroad, with the occasional brief spell in Britain. As he saw it, he was simply doing his job as a doctor and a soldier.

This is not an analysis of contemporary events then, nor an exercise in soul-searching or philosophising. I remember hearing that Roy's difference of opinion with his son-in-law (my father) over the 1956 Suez Crisis was so severe that it was agreed they would never discuss the subject again. So Roy was clearly capable of holding strong political opinions. But this account of his life and times was not his place for airing them.

There is no attempt to examine the causes of situations he found himself in, less still to question the British policies that the army had to enforce. Roy comes over as a loyal army officer through and through, whose stoicism and self-restraint must have been an essential part of the disciplined world of duty and decorum he graphically conveys.

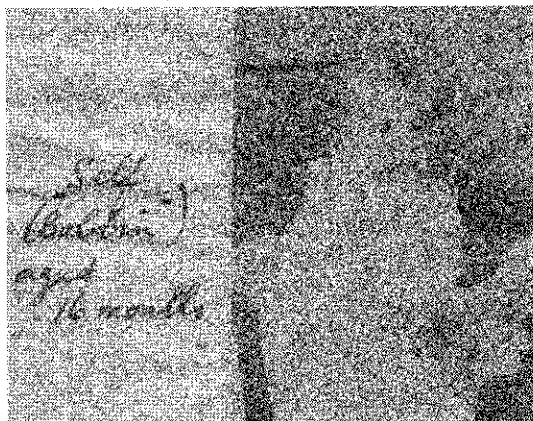
I can find it hard to understand that mind-set now, looking back from a world suffering the sometimes bloody repercussions of British imperial policies. But I have to remember that he was a man of his own time. I also appreciate that, despite the constraints and obligations of army life, his humanity and optimism shine through, even in some of the worst situations he encountered.

Above all, I still recognise my grandfather in these

pages as the man I remember and loved: a man with a big heart, a genuine interest in the people and cultures of the countries he lived in, and a great love of children. He was to me wise and warm, quick to share a reassuring hug, and to sort out practical problems. He was the doctor who diagnosed my brother Patrick's polio so quickly that it could be treated before causing any lasting damage. He was the man who built an 'army assault course' between the apple trees of the garden in Croydon, with swings, a seesaw and a wendy house, and then invited the neighbourhood children to play on them. Although smart and well groomed, he was never, as I recall him, the stereotypical, stuffy British brigadier!

I'm grateful to both my wonderful grandparents for their kindness, their huge sense of adventure and fun, and for being loving guardians to me and my brother when our parents were working abroad. And, of course, I am grateful for this book, for giving us an engaging flavour of life a hundred years ago, in that extraordinary bellicose, colonial age that produced our own complex world.

1891 I Am Born



My dear Judi

I was born in the house of my mother's parents in Monkstown, County Cork, Ireland.

It was a romantic house, called Hazledean, old in parts. There was a cannon in front of it, and a big flagstaff, and stuffed animals in the passages. The windows of the kitchen and day nursery had diamond panes of coloured glass, and the sun shining through them made patterns on the walls. My mother's bed was a four-poster, with curtains hanging at the corners.

I am sure that all my mother's sisters and brothers came to my christening. They were Aunt Alice, Aunt May (just married so now Mrs Belton), Aunt Winnie,

Aunt Millie, Aunt Clara and Uncles Earle and Edward.

Soon my mother took me to a cottage at Myrtleville, by the sea. My father was in India.

Endnote

"My father was in India."

Roy's father Alger Oram, was originally a tea taster in India, but he returned to London when his wife became unwell. Back home he started up London's first firm of window cleaners, according to Roy's sister Freda, commuting daily to his office in town from Gipsy Hill Station. Alger's own father was Richard Sprague Oram, HM Chief Inspector of Factories, from 1892 to 1896.

Roy's mother was Caroline ("Carrie") Penkivil Weekes Oram. She was a daughter of Sophia (née Stocker) and Thomas Earle Weekes, a Justice of the Peace who had gone to Ireland to help organise soup kitchens during the potato famine.

Roy was the third of seven siblings. He had an older brother and sister, Arthur and Enid. After Roy came Freda, Kathleen ("Kay"), Eric and Doreen.

2

I Live At Penton Lodge

When my father returned from India, we went to live at Penton Lodge, a tall thin house in Belvedere Road, Anerley, South London. It is still there.

My first memory is of a visit to the Crystal Palace for a bird show. I was pushed in a perambulator by my nurse, and because I had been ill I wore a veil, but I was allowed to lift this up inside the Palace to see the birds. I remember one bird with a very big beak. It must have been a toucan.

When I was a bit older, I walked beside the pram. There was a baby sister inside it.

In the mornings we used to walk in the Palace grounds, and often visited the ante-diluvian animals. The one which impressed me most had its jaws thrust right out of the water and opened wide, showing very big teeth. Did you see this one, Judi?

One day I saw some corks floating on the lake, and I exclaimed "Oh, corks!", and my nurse said "Never let me hear you say that again, Master Roy!" She was very anxious that I should be well brought up, and thought I was swearing!

In those days little boys were dressed as little girls, but the day came when I just had to be a boy. I remember being sat on the nursery table to have my curls cut off.

When I was four it was the year of the Great Frost of 1895. My mother took my brother Arthur and me to the Crystal Palace lake, which, like other stretches of water in London parks, had frozen over thickly. My mother and Arthur had skates, but I just slid about.

3

I Go To Kindergarten

My kindergarten was attached to Miss Judd's Academy for the Daughters of Gentlemen. My memory is of very cold mornings, and a great struggle to get my button-boots done up with a buttonhook. At school they were exchanged for slippers – another struggle.

I remember some of the boys and girls quite well. My special friend was called Elsie Martin.

Once there was a school concert, and the kindergarten contributed a sort of fan dance. I thought "How lucky these fathers and mothers are to get this show for nothing!"

At the time of the University Boat Race, we all wore favours, dark blue or light blue, but we had no idea what it was all about.

Then came the Boer War, and we bought buttons with pictures of the English generals – Roberts, Buller, White, Baden-Powell – to wear on our coats.

We also learnt to sing the soldiers' songs: *Goodbye Dolly I must leave you*, and *'Mid camp-fires gleaming, 'mid shot and shell, I will be dreaming of my own Bluebell*. One day flags were put out, and people shouted in the streets. I know now it was Mafeking Day.

I had a lively imagination, and I told friends that I had a private army under my command – cavalry, infantry and artillery. I thought of this so much that I began to believe it myself. I persuaded my parents to buy me a toy sword (they never knew about my army). I even considered having an elephant battery, but I gave up that idea, as I thought elephants too difficult to manage.

However, there came a time when I felt that I could not go on with this untrue story. I collected my special friends together and confessed, “There is no army”. There was an awful silence. “No army!” We walked around in a state of gloom.

Near the end of term we used to sing:

*This time next week, where shall we be?
Not in this a-cad-e-meee.*

There was another song, but I won't tell you that one, because you might think we were disrespectful to our elders and betters.

I Go To A Boys' Preparatory School

At nine years I went to Dulwich Prep. The new boys were lined up in the Hall. I said to the one next to me "What is your name?", and he replied, "Julius Caesar". This may sound funny, but this was really his name.

I had been told by my elder brother Arthur, "You must never tell your Christian name, and you must never say anything about your life at home", and I was careful to obey these instructions. (This was all very silly, of course, but it was the custom at school.)

If there were three boys of the same name, they were called Major (the greater), Minor (the lesser) and Tertius (the third).

We wore stiff white collars, Norfolk jackets, breeches that buttoned below the knee, black stockings and boots – no walking shoes in those days. 'Etons' on Sundays, and the boarders wore top hats.

Two other boys and I made a secret society called the Triple Alliance. Our sign was made out of the letters T and A, with the smaller letters T, D and O superimposed to represent our names. The small T stood for Tegetmeier, the D for Dobbin, and the O for Oram. Dobbin went into the Royal Navy before he was 13, along with another friend called Tomkinson.

If we talked in school, or misbehaved, we were given PD, or Punishment Drill. That meant we had to run round the playground carrying iron dumbbells. I used to say to myself "Never mind, this will make me strong."

In the summer we were marched, form by form, to the swimming bath. The water was not heated, and sometimes very cold. Boys who did not want to go in were called "water funks". After the bath we were given hot halfpenny buns, which were very good.

I started to learn Latin, reciting like this:

<i>Nominative</i>	<i>mensa</i>	<i>a table</i>
<i>Vocative</i>	<i>mensa</i>	<i>Oh table!</i>
<i>Accusative</i>	<i>mensam</i>	<i>a table</i>
<i>Genitive</i>	<i>mensae</i>	<i>of a table</i>
<i>Dative</i>	<i>mensae</i>	<i>to a table</i>
<i>Ablative</i>	<i>mensa</i>	<i>with, by or from a table</i>

I used to think the Vocative was unnecessary.

We had Latin ways of talking. Fathers became *paters*, and mothers *maters*. We had Latin jokes. For instance, *Caesar adsum iam forte* did not mean 'Caesar 'ad some jam for tea', but 'Caesar, I am present already by chance'.

I did well at games, and became the youngest member of the Rugby Football team. I used to sprain my thumbs, so the Games Master Mr Sholto Douglas got me leather mittens with thumbs and forefingers sewn together. He was very kind to me. One day he

took me to the Oval to see the famed cricketer Prince Ranjitsinhji playing cricket.

Another day he took me to the British Museum to meet his father. He pressed a button and a secret door in a wall of books opened. His father was a famous Professor of the Chinese language.

One year Buffalo Bill (Colonel Cody) arrived in London with a kind of circus of Cowboys and Indians. So we played Cowboys and Indians, and I think boys and girls have been playing that game ever since.

5

Local Scenes

My dear Judi, I want to try and tell you what London was like in the days of my boyhood – not so very long ago. And yet I suppose the biggest change ever has happened in this recent period.

First, there were no motorcars, or they were only just appearing in my young days. Provisions were delivered in carts drawn by horses. The smartest carts were the butchers', drawn by well-groomed ponies. The milk arrived in a kind of Roman chariot, and the milk came out of a polished brass tap, or was sometimes poured out of a 'dipper' container with a long handle.

It was a sad sight to see the great carthorses struggling up the Norwood hills pulling their loads of coal or merchandise. On the other hand, it was a wonderful joy to see the grey horses of the Fire Brigade dashing along the Crystal Palace Parade in daily practice.

The richer people had horses and carriages stabled in their gardens and invitations to parties had 'Carriages at 11pm' (or whatever the collection time for guests was to be) written in the corner.

On 1 May all the horses were decorated, and we children of course beribboned our rocking horse in the approved manner, and plaited the hair of the mane and tail in fancy ways.

One day I saw the four horses of the London-Brighton Coach rearing and jumping because they saw a motorcar. This coach was perhaps the only one in England to survive for years the building of the railways.

I just can't tell you about all the different carriages. Instead of taxis there were horse-drawn cabs and hansoms. Your granny as a girl has driven a tandem. This was drawn by two horses, one in front of the other. It was a rare kind of team, and considered very smart. It is quite likely that your granny is the only woman in Croydon who has driven a tandem.

In the summer some of the horses wore straw hats. Oh yes! They did! Enough about the horses.

Then there were the maids, hundreds and thousands of them. They cooked and cleaned, and washed and tidied, and were expected to look smart when they answered the doorbell, wearing a white uniform, cap and an elaborate apron.

I was staying in a house once, where five maids 'did' the round of the bedrooms after breakfast. Two made the bed, while two dusted and tidied the room. The fifth cleaned the washstand, which was a marble-topped table, with a washbowl and jug of water, where you'd now have a basin with taps.

Sometimes as a boy I was shown off to the ladies at a tea party (there were many tea parties!). I used to hear them talking, and very soon learned that most mistresses had 'maid trouble'. Some found the maids lazy, or untidy, late in coming back on their evening

off, or wasting time talking to the milkman. So you see, life wasn't perfect.

And then there was another big trouble everywhere. This was poverty with unemployment - the two went together. In the streets you saw so many people who looked hungry and poorly dressed. They did their best to get money by odd jobs such as sweeping away the snow in winter. The roads were dirty in those days, and there were men who swept the crossings. They lived on the pennies given to them by passers-by.

But the most common way of earning an 'honest penny' was by producing music in one way or another. In and around London you were never far from the sound of a mechanical piano, a barrel organ, which was pushed on wheels from street to street, and was played by someone turning a handle. Sometimes a monkey sat on the top with a cap in its hand to catch pennies.

There was the German Band, which performed at street corners. Often on summer evenings a harpist played near our home. We were very fond of him, but imagine having to carry that great instrument around with him!

And there was more life in the streets than there is today. When I had a cold and could not go out, I sat by the nursery window, and looked out on all the interesting happenings - a man leading a dancing bear by a chain, or a flower seller. The lavender-sellers sang:

*Won't you buy my sweet-smelling lavender?
It's only six branches a penny?
If you buy it once, you'll buy it twice
It'll make your clothes smell very nice!*

In summertime there were the frequent visits of water carts to draw water from the standpipe outside our garden fence. Then they went off to sprinkle water on the dusty roads.

Regularly at about 4pm came the muffin man, wearing a green apron. He carried the muffins and crumpets on a tray on his head, and rang a bell as he walked. As the light of day began to fail, there was the lamplighter, with his long pole pushing open a little window at the top of the lamp post and lighting the gas.

6

Holidays

I was very lucky with my holidays. My Aunt Millie and Uncle Jack lived on a big farm near Reigate in Surrey. It was called Wolvers, and was mentioned in the Domesday Book. I was first invited to stay with them when I was only six years old, and after that I went every winter. My memory is of being met at the railway station by a brougham, a cab with glass windows in the front, and its horses' hooves sounding *trot, trot, trot* so clearly on the frosty road.

The house dated from the time of Queen Elizabeth I. It had low ceilings, and there was a big entrance hall, like a room, with a log fire blazing in an iron grate. The house was built right up against the farm buildings, and at night I could hear the animals in their stalls.

One year there was sad news. The old Wolvers was to be pulled down and a new house built. I enjoyed climbing up the ladders and talking to the carpenters. One day two of them had a race in putting down floorboards across a room. I was made umpire. But in the excitement of the race, one drove a nail right through his finger, and I had to take him to my aunt to have the wound dressed.

Before I left to go home, I went into each room of the old Wolvers and said goodbye to it. I never told anyone about this. It was a very private ceremony.

In those days we had holiday tasks. One year it was to read a book about 'government' (parliament, county councils, and the police force). Every evening my uncle, aunt and I settled down to read a chapter of this book, and we used to talk about it. Back at school I won the first prize for knowledge of the subject.

I must write down here how kind my uncle and aunt were to me. When I was leaving, my uncle used to give me a shilling - worth a lot in those days - and say "Come back soon, Roy!" Wasn't that something?!

But the most wonderful holidays were in the summer. Mother and the nurse used to start packing the boxes weeks ahead. There was special food for the journey, too, especially alphabet biscuits (we'd make words with them before eating them) and there was Bovril for the steamer (the stewardess used to bring the hot water to the cabin).

At the railway station, awaiting the train to Victoria, we spent our pennies in the slot machines, and always bought bottles of eau-de-cologne, considered to be useful if the weather was rough in the channel.

At Victoria Station there was the one-horse Tilling's Bus, specially ordered, waiting for us. Boxes went on the roof, and in we climbed for the second stage of the journey across London to Paddington.

It was always the 11am Irish Boat Train from Platform 1 that we caught. I think it still runs at the same time from that platform. We would find the reserved compartment, labelled *Mr Oram and Family*

and would pack ourselves in with all the hand luggage. At last there were whistles and a waving of flags, and we were off! Even now, if I'm on a train and shut my eyes, I can imagine myself back in that state of bliss that came over me when I was in the BOAT TRAIN FOR IRELAND!

By the time a rail official shouted "Cardiff!" I felt we were well on the way, and most wonderful of all was the first view of the sea, as we reached the Welsh coast. The ship was the *SS Innisfallen* (there's a new *Innisfallen* now), and a kind Irish stewardess who knew my mother well helped us to find our cabins. One year there was some mistake, and we had to sleep on mattresses on the floor somewhere.

The next morning Mother hurried us up on deck in time to see Roche's Point Lighthouse, and Forts Camden and Carlisle as we steamed into Cork Harbour. Half an hour later we were passing Monkstown, and there up on the hillside at the front door of Hazledean was our granny waving a welcome to us, as we waved back excitedly from the deck of the ship.

Soon we were entering a new world in which everyone seemed to have a yacht and talk about yachting. To every yacht there was a yachtsman, who had the name of the boat embroidered on his jersey (called a guernsey in Ireland!). Our Grandpa's yacht was the *Colleen*, painted white.

But what we liked most was the pond at the bottom of our garden with a boat on it, which we could manage ourselves. We made 'ports' at the sides of

the pond, and went for 'voyages' from one to another.

One day, all in the same day, I fell into the sea from the yacht, and into the pond from the punt. Mother was quite annoyed!

But also there were picnics by land. Grandpa used to drive us in a waggonette. This took two grown-ups and a child in front, and four grown-ups and assorted children behind.

There was one picnic I must tell you about especially, Judi. It was to a place called Innishannon, and we went there because of the lovely river, beside which we camped for our dinner. Now this was the place, Judi, though we didn't know it at the time, where your other grandfather, Colonel William Daniel Conner, lived at a house called DOWNDANIEL, and here was to be born your father William, your aunt Erica and your uncles Richard and Arthur Conner. This was also the place they all had to leave in a hurry at the time of The Troubles (civil war), when it was feared that their home would be burned down on account of Colonel Conner's loyalty to the British government.

*

Before I go on to the next chapter, I want to tell you of an event, which made a great impression on my generation. It was the death of Queen Victoria in 1901.

I was 10 years old, walking home from school, when I heard the church bells tolling. I knew what the Queen looked like. I had been taken to London to see her being driven in a grand carriage to open the Houses of Parliament. She had reigned for 64 years, and in her lifetime the British Empire had been constituted.

How many kings rode in her funeral procession? I don't know, but you would be surprised! Since her reign I have lived under four kings (Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII and George VI), and now we have a Queen again, our blessed Queen Elizabeth II.

I Go To Dulwich College

At 13 years I entered Dulwich College, passing from the VIth Form of the Prep, into the Classical Upper IVth. I found the work easy, and the next term moved up to the Lower Vth under Mr Doulton.

Now he was not only a form master, but also the director of all the school musical societies. When I said I wished to be a bugler in the Rifle Corps (later called the OTC or Officers' Training Corps), he said that I had much better become a cornet player in the Brass Band. But at first I played the cymbals. This was easy, although sometimes my small arms got very tired. Just *bang bang bang* as I marched along beside the big drum, which was carried and beaten by Mr Smith, the Head Porter.

We were not always on the march, and at functions such as the Masters' Garden Party, and the Assault-at-Arms (a display of skills, at which the Corps formed a hollow square with fixed bayonets to resist all-comers), I was perched on a stool, banging one cymbal against the other with my left hand, while I beat the big drum, now on a stand, with my right.

My teacher had once played the cornet while riding on the shoulders of Charles Blondin, the famous tightrope artist, and sometimes I was allowed to play his silver instrument, on which was engraved a picture of this exciting performance.

At that time, khaki had not been taken into general military use, and I was very proud of my traditional regimental uniform of the East Surrey Rifles, to which we were attached. On field days there was a great display of different uniforms, as the schools met for training. I remember the red jackets of the Eton boys as being hopelessly conspicuous.

I joined the choir as an alto, and later played in the orchestra as deputy performer on the timpani, which were drums shaped like an orange cut in half, and tuned by handles around the top. I had my greatest moment when, at a school concert, I helped to produce the raging of the sea and the battle thunder in *The Revenge*.

I was very soon selected to the junior school XV, and played behind the scrum with C.N.Lowe as a partner. Because of his prowess in the Rugby Football world, the birthday of Group-Captain C.N.Lowe is still recorded in the newspapers.

One day we had an unusual match. We went by train to Portsmouth, where we were transported by torpedo boat to the Isle of Wight to play against the Royal Navy Cadets of Osborne. Before the match we were addressed by the Prefect-in-charge. "Remember", he said, "you may be a junior team, but you represent the school."

I am afraid I got a reputation for being a bit of a joker. I didn't try to get it. Things just happened. One day I called the form-master (Mr Stretton) "Mother" by mistake. Of course there was a burst of merriment. And one day, instead of the school tie of

sombre black and blue, I put on a bright red one. How I managed that error I just don't know. There were, say, 900 boys in the school. At the assembly for morning prayers, there were 899 boys wearing dark ties, and just one appearing to have a strong leftish attachment – except that he kept hiding his tie with a hymnbook.

One day we had to write an essay on the topic 'Your Best Day'. I wrote about Founders' Day at school. On that day we wore our best straw hats, and cornflowers in our buttonholes. There were cricket matches all day against the Old Boys. In the afternoon there would be a French play, a Latin play and a Greek play in Hall. The Greek play always had choruses, and I once played sound effects with drum, triangle and tambourine. Then there would be music for the Masters' Party, including *The Gondoliers* by the Band, and madrigals by selected choir members.

After this there would be strawberries and ice cream behind the bushes! And in the evening, a great supper for all who had taken part in the games and entertainments. Fresh salmon and mayonnaise was the special dish for this occasion. And then singing. For the first time I heard songs I have heard so many times since, including *Devon, glorious Devon*, and the *Cornish Floral Dance* (something about *the big trombone and euphonium...*). Then sentimentally *the boys I used to know ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years ago*, and lastly *Goodbye, goodbye, and now we must say goodbye!*

I had only two terms in the Classical VIth, which I entered as early as possible, at 16 years of age. It was decided that I should go to Ireland to be company for my grandparents, and at the same time to study to become a doctor, a six-year course.

So it was 'Goodbye' to the *pueri alleynienses*.



Roy with his family in London c.1908-9

Left to right: Doreen, Alger (Roy's father), Enid, Roy, Kay (in front), Carrie (Roy's mother), Eric, and Freda. Roy's older brother Arthur is missing from the group, so may already have emigrated to Australia

Endnote

It is noticeable that Roy barely mentions his father, nor the very strict environment of the family home in London.

*According to Roy's sister Freda, in **Freda's Story** by **Maureen Phillips**, their father Alger was "often rather a gruff disapproving figure", at his friendliest in the privacy of the cupboard he called his Prayer Room, where in later life he would read his small grandchildren Bible stories. There were family prayers every evening, and on Sundays only 'religious occupations' were allowed, which included playing hymns on the piano, sewing clothes for Chinese orphans, or stacking picture bricks decorated with Bible story images.*

There is also little mention of Roy's brother Arthur, who was two years older than Roy. Arthur left for Australia in 1908 at the tender age of 19, and the two brothers were not to meet again for more than thirty years (see Chapter 22). In Australia he became known as Pat. He must have already left home when the family photo above was taken of Roy, aged about 18, surrounded by his parents and siblings – with the exception of Arthur.

One family rumour has it that Arthur had formed a liaison with a maid who became pregnant, and Arthur was dispatched to Australia immediately this was discovered. There seems to be no evidence that this was the case, but the following anecdote described by Roy in a later memoir seems to confirm that Arthur

did indeed have a life he preferred his strict parents not to know about.

"The scene: Dulwich College. 1907

(It must be explained that my elder brother Arthur has left school and now occupies an office stool in Dalgety's of Leadenhall Street in the City! While I am still a 'day boy'.)

Sensation! I am summoned by Smith, the head-porter in his gold braided uniform, to attend the Headmaster, a very tall and imposing gentleman with a white beard: the famous Gilkes. But the latter was in a kindly mood. He made me sit down before he handed me a telegram in a sealed envelope.

"Let me know", said he, "if there is anything I can do. Shall I send for a cab?"

I opened the envelope and read "REMOVE LETTERS FROM POCKET OF JACKET GIVEN TO MOTHER FOR MENDING. ARTHUR."

I assured the Headmaster that there was no help required."

(Taken from a notebook of anecdotes by A. Roy Oram)

In her own memoirs, Roy's sister Freda writes that Arthur had left home of his own accord. She said he had been reprimanded for teaching songs to the local Boys' Brigade that were not deemed to be adequately religious - a great injustice, it seemed to Arthur, as he

had only been trying to help keep the boys occupied when their group leaders had failed to turn up.

But would that alone be sufficient reason for a teenager to emigrate to the other side of the world?

Whatever the truth of the matter, whether Arthur was pushed or he jumped, the sudden and permanent absence of his big brother must have had an impact on Roy. It may also have had some connection with Roy's own early removal at about the same time from his adored Dulwich College, and his departure to Ireland to study medicine.

Roy refers in the following chapter to the fact that, after excelling at classics in London, he found it very hard to switch to science. He gives the impression he struggled with his studies in Ireland, and in later life he often referred nostalgically to his old London school and his classical education. Yet he appears in these memoirs to accept without question his parents' decision that he should study medicine.

1908 I Become A Medical Student In Ireland

I much enjoyed the daily trip from Monkstown into Cork on the Cork, Blackrock and Passage Railway, along the bank of the River Lee. First the railway boat, bringing train passengers from around the harbour, came alongside. *Splish splash* went the great paddle wheels, *ting ting* sounded the Captain's message to the engine-room, and the wheels steadied. And once more *ting ting* and the wheels went into reverse to hold the ship as she was made fast to the quay.

At Passage, the train ran a short distance at the side of the main street, a great bell clanging all this time. My father once said to me "One day you'll tell your grandchildren how you saw this Passage to Crosshaven section of the railway being built!" Now I have to tell them sadly that it's all been unbuilt, and taken away! Such a lovely railway!

In Cork I entered the grounds of Queens College (a constituent college of the Royal University) through a grey stone arch. Over this was inscribed *WHERE FINBARR TAUGHT, LET MUNSTER LEARN*. Finbarr was, of course, an Irish saint, but you don't hear much about him in England. I escaped having to learn the Irish Celtic language, which became necessary when the University's name was later changed to the National University.

I found that being a student in a university was not so very different from school, except that you wore a loose black gown, and were called 'Mister'.

But one day before Christmas, a dramatic event occurred. I was looking at the noticeboard in a casual way, when a notice of the Rugby Football Club arrested my eyes. *The following are to play against Clontarf and Bective Rangers Rugby Football Clubs in Dublin* it read, and my name was on the list! I could not believe it. At school I had not been old enough for the top teams. And here was I about to play in first-class football at the time of my 17th birthday.

It was great fun going to Dublin, staying in a hotel, and driving to the matches on jaunting cars, horse drawn, with the passengers seated back to back on the cart. Because our team was chiefly composed of 'medics', we had skulls and crossbones embroidered on our football shirts.

We often travelled to Limerick to play against Garryowen or Lansdowne, changing our clothes in the train on the way up.

The winter soon passed, and then came the episode of *The Seagull*. I have always been fascinated by auctions, and one day, cycling home, I saw an auction being held near the river. I called in, and came away the proud owner of a small yacht called *The Seagull*. She was mostly decked, and had heavy iron ballast and a centreboard. I bought her complete with sails and rigging, a buoy and chain, and two heavy anchors for moorings, for £12.

I was able to do this, because I had scholarship money in my pocket, but not intended for the purchase of yachts! So on arriving home I sold a half-share to my Aunt Clara, who was in charge at home during the temporary absence of my grandparents.

I had a busy time painting *The Seagull* and preparing the moorings, while my aunt did some good work on the sails, and we did have a couple of exciting voyages. But then Grandpa returned, and there was 'blue murder'. What about my studies? I had to get rid of *The Seagull* at once. I sold her to Sidney Punch, our 13-stone rugby forward. He paid me the whole £12, and I only lost the cost of the paint and varnish!

With the summer came cricket, and I found that, as an ex-English schoolboy, I was automatically elected to the team, as cricket was played very little in Irish schools. We played chiefly against English regiments stationed in Cork and Kinsale. To me this was a wonderful experience because the regiments used to entertain us with tea in a tent set out with regimental plate. Often there would be a brass band to add to the entertainment.

One day we travelled to Clonakilty ("Clonakilty, God help us" the Irish say) to play against 'The Bennetts'. Now the Bennetts were very numerous in that place. Every member of the cricket team was called Bennett.

Now I must tell you about one other yacht. It was called the *Anaconda* and it had the head of a snake carved on the tiller. It was a 45-ton yawl. It belonged to Uncle Bob Belton, and he lived on board with his

family all the summer. There was a crew of four professional sailors. I used to be invited for the weekend, and we sailed from Cork Harbour (Crosshaven) to one of the harbours in the Southwest, Kinsale or Castletownsend. The *Anaconda* had high bulwarks, so she was very safe for a family. She had tremendous sails, and crashing through the sea in a stiff breeze was the most thrilling adventure (in the sporting line) of my life.

In port my young cousins and I played Red Nines, a card game, sitting on the sails in the sail locker.

On Sundays we went to church in style. The gig was scrubbed and polished, and we sat aft on cushions, while the four sailors of the crew, dressed in their best uniforms, manned the sweeps (big oars) and carried us to the shore in *man-o'-war* style.

I also had some very interesting coastal trips. It happened in this wise. Grandfather had been chairman of the Cork Harbour Tug Company. The tugs pulled the old square-rigged sailing ships into the harbour to their berths. (There were also the tenders *Flying Fox* and *Flying Fish* to attend the big liners.)

Now the tugs were no longer required, as steamers took the place of the sailing ships. So Grandpa sold the whole concern to the Clyde Steamship Company, and the day came when the director of that company said to me "Any time you want a trip in one of our steamers, let me know." And I did let him know, and he was as good as his word, and more so.

Once I had a trip from Cork to Glasgow, and from Glasgow to London via Belfast and Plymouth, and at the end of each trip the steward said "No bill for you, Sir".

I little thought in those days that the time would soon come when I would be going to sea in a bigger way.

But in the department of work and studies, things were not going well. I had often been top of the class at school in classics, but I found the change to science too difficult. I used to sit at the back of the first cinema to open in Cork (at the Assembly Rooms) and wonder what would become of me. (Incidentally, the cinema seats cost sixpence in the front and three pence in the back!)

Somehow I struggled through the first exams, and then I came to the 'Half'. One day I happened to meet Professor Barry of the Physiology Department in the College grounds. "All ready for the examination?" he asked cheerfully. "No", I said. "I'm sorry, Sir, but I'm not going to sit for the exam." I had given up all hope.

Professor Barry turned and faced me. "Promise me, Oram, that you will sit," he said. "Well Sir," said I, "If you feel like that, I promise."

And so I did sit, and passed. I have always felt grateful to the professor. But life is like that. You meet someone, a short conversation, and your life is changed.

After that period, most of the work was at the hospitals. At the Cork North Infirmary there was a high wall around the buildings, and all the sisters were nuns, who never went outside. They wore tall pointy hats, and in the operating theatre the surgeon would sometimes shout "WILL YOU TAKE THAT HAT OUT OF MY LIGHT!!!" But you must not think there was a gloomy atmosphere - far from it - it was a happy place.

In the evening the head nun used to combine her general supervision with the sprinkling of holy water on the wards, that is to say, on all the wards except the 'Protestant ward'. Sister Anne had been on night duty for 18 years, without a break, it was said. So you may be sure she knew her way around, and rules were strict.

Now sometimes a probationer-nurse would come in late, and to reach her quarters she had to make her way through the hospital. It was the privilege of the resident student on duty to scout and determine and report the exact position of Sister Anne, so that the probationer might make the passage to her room in safety.

At this time the thunderclouds were beginning to gather as rumours of impending war spread. My friend Nicholas Marshall Cummins and I had completed all our courses (fevers, mental diseases, vaccinations, midwifery etc.) and went camping on a cliff somewhere along the coast. It was the first week of August 1914.

Early one morning a coastguard put his head into our tent. "Would either of you gentlemen be a spy?" he asked, being Irish, and of an enquiring turn of mind. "No" we said, "We are both good men and true!"

And war it was. Very soon we were lining up before a recruiting officer. "What are you?" he asked our group. "Medical students", we said. "Seniors?" he asked.

"Yes", we said. "Then come back when you're qualified", he said, speaking more wisely than most. "This will be a long business, and in time we'll want all of you."

But getting qualified was not so easy. Military hospitals had not been organised. Wounded were shipped from France and Belgium straight to any port in the British Isles where there was a hospital. Wounded arrived in Cork who had received no attention since first-aid on the battlefield. Every hospital provided a ward for such people, and we medical students were soon hard at work, dressing, cleaning and bandaging, and helping at operations.

And there was plenty of excitement. Reserves joining up. Recruiting. Bands playing. But no reading and studying for this formidable final examination, and the months passed.

One day - I remember just where it was in The Mall of Cork - I met a man who said to me, "You don't have to pass your final. You can get a commission in the Royal Navy just as you are."

So very soon there was a letter telling me to have a physical examination before the Naval Agent, and if I passed, to swear before a magistrate an oath of allegiance to His Majesty. I looked up a book in the library, and found that one of our professors was a magistrate. So I waylaid him in the College corridor, and what is called an 'Irish conversation' followed:

"Sir, would you mind if I swore an oath before you?"

"I would not mind at all, if it will do you any good!" said he.

"It will that" said I, "because you are a magistrate."

"I'm not", said he.

"You are", said I, showing him the book.

"I'd disremembered", said he. "Go ahead then, and make a good oath."

In a few days an important-looking document arrived stating 'You are appointed a Surgeon-Probationer for Temporary Service with the rank of Sub-Lieutenant in His Majesty's Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve from the 12th March 1915. You will buy your uniform, and await orders.'

I bought the best uniform I could buy of the finest material (from Gieves) and then I embarked for England.

My heart was very touched by the sight of so many student friends waving goodbye to me, as the ship sailed away down the river. I really was a foreigner, an Englishman, but they had all been so kind to me during these six years of my student life.

I returned home to London, where at that time it was a very good thing to be in uniform! Then a telegram arrived, 'REPORT NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE TO ST GEORGE FOR TEST'. Now some thought the St George was to be tested, and some thought I was to be tested, but the true meaning of the telegram will be explained in the next chapter.

1915 I Join The Wavy Navy



*Roy and his mother Carrie after his appointment as
Surgeon-Probationer (Sub-Lieutenant rank) in
HM Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve 1915*

The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) had the name 'Wavy Navy' because of the wavy gold stripes

worn by its officers on their sleeves. The telegram I had received (REPORT NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE TO ST GEORGE FOR TEST) takes some explanation. The 'test' was not a trial, but *HMS Test*, a destroyer belonging to a class in which all were given the names of rivers (Tweed, Forth, Tay etc.). *St George* was the mother ship, but certainly was not lying at Newcastle at that time.

I think that if I had met Little Evelyn of the BBC we might have had a conversation like this:

"Grandpa Oram, if the Admiralty does not know where the ships are, how can we win the war?" And I would have told Little Evelyn, "The Admiralty certainly makes mistakes, but we hope that the Germans will make even greater mistakes."

On arrival in Newcastle I stayed the night at the Station Hotel, and in the morning asked the help of a naval officer, who was also taking breakfast.

"Ask the Hall Porter" was his short, and surprising, advice.

I did this, and presently the Hall Porter gave me the instruction to wait on Jarrow Slacks Pier at 11am, and a pinnacle from *HMS Patrol* would collect me.

Now the only training in naval manners and customs I had received was that I should keep my jacket buttons fastened, and salute the quarterdeck on arrival.

So at the top of the gangway, I saluted the first deck I saw, and I was received very kindly.

I was conducted below to the wardroom, where a young officer, Dunlop by name, who said his father was Provost of Glasgow, asked me if I would help him look for spies along the River Tyne. The destroyer *HMS Test*, it seemed, was at sea.

So I spent the day with binoculars held to my eyes, moving slowly in a motorboat along the river, and watching the banks for the sight of any suspicious characters who might be lurking around the shipping.

In the evening I was shown to the cabin of the Navigating Officer, who was on leave, and I had the interesting experience of being 'valeted' (you will have to guess that word, Judi) expertly by a marine. A round tin bath was produced and filled with hot water. Then a bathmat and an electric fire were placed alongside, and, when the temperature of the water had been carefully tested, I was told, "Bath ready, Sir". Meanwhile my clothes were brushed and folded and laid out on a chair.

At dinner I noticed that the senior officer had a black hammer alongside his place at table. This was for saying grace. *Bang bang* went the hammer. "Thank God", said the Senior Officer. "Amen" said the second-in-command.

But if I was surprised at my gentle reception on *HMS Patrol*, I was even more astonished as I arrived in a dinghy alongside the *HMS Test*, which returned from

sea the next day. I looked up at a row of dark faces gazing down at me like a line of black minstrel singers. For this was a coal-burning destroyer, and the ship and the captain and the crew were all covered with black coal dust.

The skipper was wearing what looked like a very old dressing gown over his uniform, and he introduced himself as 'Lieutenant Blows-Big'. (Now this time, Judi, I feel I must disguise the real name.) He apologised for the lack of a cabin for me, but said I could sleep on the settee in the wardroom, and the carpenter would fit a board to keep me from rolling out.

I found that besides the captain, there were a first officer, a gunner, a chief artificer engineer, and about 70 ratings including gunners, torpedo-gunner, signallers, engine room hands, and last but not least, the stokers, because stoking the fires was the biggest job in this kind of fast-moving man-o-war ship. (In the Army you talked about 'officers and other ranks'. In the Navy it was 'ranks and ratings'.)

After re-coaling, we set out to sea again with three other destroyers, and I soon discovered a calamity. In spite of my training in yachts, I could not stand the dashing, plunging and twisting of the destroyer.

I was miserably sick for three weeks, and then sick occasionally for another three. But after that time I started to enjoy myself. I began to love the quick driving through the sea and the tossing of the waves.

There were no bulwarks in a destroyer and sometimes it was difficult to make your way along the deck. I once saw a wave crumple up a great cowl (ventilator) as if it was made of cardboard.

According to naval custom, there had to be some sort of a religious service on Sundays, even if it was only the reading of a prayer. One Sunday on a stormy day the captain was holding such a service. The congregation consisted of the first officer, a sailor, who was soon to be married, and myself.

After the prayer, the Banns were called for the forthcoming wedding. "I publish the Banns of Marriage between so-and-so, and so-and-so..." shouted the captain above the noise of the wind. Meanwhile the congregation were hanging on like grim death, and the sailor in question was looking very miserable.

But we had to make port very often to reload the coal, and everyone cheered up. The chief artificer engineer was a good cook, and sometimes produced a delicacy such as pigeon pie.

If there was a guest, and this often happened as destroyers tied alongside one another, a ciné projector was produced, and the great joke was to show the story backwards. But for some reason, if the film was put in backwards, the picture on the screen was upside down, so we all put our heads upside down to watch it.

The sailors were all as keen as mustard. There was no crime and no punishment that I ever saw. If there

was a practice such as gunnery drill, they threw their hearts into it, as if they were showing off at Olympia. Now and again one of them would pretend to be wounded, with gasps and groans and rolling of the eyes. I would then roll him up in a stretcher made of strips of bamboo, and drop him down with a rope through a hole in the deck.

On a very calm day – one in which a submarine could be spotted a long way off – we would have ‘abandon ship’ drill. In this exercise I was in command of a dinghy and eight men. On a given signal we had to lower the boat, row round the ship, haul up the boat on the davits, and stand to attention on the deck. This was done as a race, and caused great excitement. Finally the boats were checked to see that they were correctly fitted with water-keg, tin of biscuits and a compass.

Our tasks at sea were in general to chase enemy submarines and in particular to escort the big battleships. Once we accompanied a great floating dock moving south. It was an easy target for a submarine, so we chased around it madly. Another time we acted as escort to a Scandinavian ship in the E13 Episode – I won’t tell you that story.

It was calm weather, and the skipper decided we must paint ship for this ceremonial duty. So it was ‘all hands paint ship’, and I was included, using rags instead of brushes because the latter were few.

The sailors were so healthy that I had little work to do as a doctor, and found employment in odd jobs.

Once I helped to collect the pay from a bank, carrying a loaded revolver.

I learnt to correct the charts. This was because, in wartime, the timing of the flashes from lighthouses was frequently altered to confuse the enemy. But these changes had to be registered carefully in Indian ink on our own charts, by an officer.

Lieutenant-Commander Harris commanded our Division of destroyers and he was a great character. Sometimes he would clear the bridge of his destroyer, like the lady on TV in *The Rag Trade* programme who blows the whistle, and then he would carry out all the operations, steering, signalling and so on by himself.

If there were a Sunday in port he would conduct a service for all the off-duty sailors of his Division, a ship's bell being tolled to announce this event. He himself played a small harmonium (squeeze-box) for the hymns. First the sailors called for all the hymns which they knew they would not be allowed to sing because they did not sing them seriously. At last we got down to the real business. The favourite hymn began *Hark, hark my soul, angelic songs are swelling, o'er Earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore.*

There were many amusing incidents in our lives. In wartime, sailors were not allowed to wear the name of their ships on their cap-bands, but they could say in general terms where they came from. One day I watched a sailor embroidering in white on his cap *YES MISS, NO MISS, NORTH SEA MISS!*

There was a private signal between the destroyers, which meant *GOD PUNISH JIMMY!* 'Jimmy' was the Naval Officer commanding the 12th Destroyer Flotilla, who sometimes sent us back to sea very soon after we had arrived in harbour. The phrase was an imitation of a German saying, said to be popular in Germany at the time, *GOTT STRAFFE ENGLAND!*

I remember one dramatic incident. We were anchored near Hull, in the estuary, and Hull seemed all on fire after being bombed by a Zeppelin. The Zeppelin was flying right over our heads on its way back to Germany. We could do nothing, because the guns of those days could not be elevated. I remember that I came on deck to watch the Zeppelin pass with a poker in my hand – I had been poking the fire – and this seemed to amuse everybody.

But this story has now gone on for some time, Judi, without any mention of romance! And you know that all good stories must have romance in them. So I will make a new chapter, which is chiefly dealing with that subject, and call it *I Become Engaged and Pass My Final* because these two important events are really linked together.

Endnote

"we acted as escort to a Scandinavian ship in the E13 episode – I won't tell you that story"

The HMS E13 was a British submarine that left Hull in

August 1915 for service in the Baltic Sea. A few days later it ran aground, and despite being surfaced, and in neutral waters between Denmark and Sweden, it was attacked by German torpedo boats. A Danish ship intervened, but the E13 exploded while survivors were trying to reach safety, killing 15 men.

The breach of international law caused outrage, especially in Britain and Denmark. Given that Roy's ship was an escort in a "ceremonial duty" on this occasion, it's possible that the ship they were accompanying was the Danish one that carried the E13 victims back to Hull.

10

I Become Engaged, And Pass My Final

Now sometimes accidents at sea occurred, and that meant delays for repairs, and so we were allowed leave to go home.

For instance, one day I was sitting in the wardroom, when the sharp bow of a large pinnace came cutting through the wall of HMS Test, just opposite me. Destroyers had thin walls, so as to bend and not break. The damage meant new plates needed to be fitted.

Anyway, I was travelling to London on leave with my friend Carroll who was the Surgeon-Probationer in Commander Harris's destroyer. Carroll was an Irishman from Cork, and he was coming to London to stay with me.

Now, Judi, I must tell you that there are some bits in my story, which I can't explain. They just happened, and I tell them to you just as they occurred.

Carroll and I were in the railway carriage on our way, when I turned to him and said "Do you know, Carroll, on this leave I am going to meet the girl I'm going to marry?!"

"How can you possibly say that?" asked Carroll.

"I don't know", I said, "but I have a presentiment that this is the way it will be."

It is true I had the picture of a girl in my mind. She was called Dulcibella (Dulcie for short) Dennys, and she was a friend of one of my sisters. But I had not seen her since she was about 16.

Well, my sister gave a party, and we played badminton in the garden, and Dulcie was one of the guests. A day or two later, there was a picnic, and somehow Dulcie and I were riding home together on our bicycles. At some point we were walking, and I spoke to her about marriage. I can't remember the exact words I used, but I'm afraid they were very clumsy.

And Dulcie said, "You know, Roy, I have only one idea in my mind, and that is that I must do the right thing with my life." Or words to that effect.

At least we agreed to write to each other, and I wrote to Dulcie's parents. I believe there was quite an excitement in Dulcie's family when the seamaile letters arrived, for Dulcie was still at school!

Another leave came, and this time I sold my bicycle to buy an engagement ring, and Dulcie accepted it.

At the same time, I began to feel that I must pass that Final Examination to qualify as a doctor if ever that engagement was going to lead to marriage. So I began to study hard, and up on the bridge of my ship, which was a place free from vibration, I read my medical books, hour after hour, often holding on with one hand, while I held a book in the other.

I got leave to take the exam in Cork, and had to be rowed from my destroyer to join another, which was putting in to Grimsby Port.

As I looked back at my destroyer, I saw that she was running up the signal in flags that spelt *GOOD LUCK!* It was one of the great moments of my life.

I was the only one in uniform at the examination, and I felt no anxiety. At the practical in operative surgery, the examiner pointed to a tendon and said, "This tendon is attached to one of three facets (surfaces) on the bone. To which facet is it attached?"

Now I did not know the answer to this question, and I replied with a Latin tag, "*in medio tutissimu ibis*" ("in the middle you will be most safe").

I don't know if the examiner understood the Latin, or whether the answer was right, but anyway he just laughed, and did not ask me any more questions. Perhaps he didn't dare!

I must tell you a little more about this episode, because you will understand the kindness with which I was treated in Ireland. My grandparents had died by this time, and so I had spent the last year of my student life in lodgings. Now, once again, I was able to stay in my old digs for the exam. Bringing my breakfast, my landlady said, "The milk boy has called. I told him about your exam, and he says he'll be praying for you."

And when I later told her the good news of my success, she put on her bonnet. "I must go and tell them at the Post Office", she said. "They'll be so glad to know that you have passed!" She was such a good sort that I feel I must make a record of her name. She was Mrs Cahill of 35 Gillabbey Terrace. She made pyjamas for me from discarded flour bags, which she bought at the mill for four pence. I wore flour bag pyjamas for years.

I have told you that there was very little medical work to do in a destroyer. Well, I guessed that there was little medical work to do in any man-o-war in wartime. All the sailors were such fit men. So I thought that if I was to make any progress in medical practice, I just must transfer to the Army.

To do this, I had to make a personal application at the Admiralty in London.

Now crossing to England there was an incident, which I will call that of the Ghost Ship. At Cork I boarded a ship of the City of Cork Steam Packet Company, to travel to Fishguard (as I had done so often in my life), and the ship sailed off away down the River Lee. Then I went to the Head Steward, and asked him to book me a cabin.

He said in a sepulchral voice, "You can have any passenger cabin you like in the whole ship."

This seemed strange, so I went on deck. There was no one about. I entered the dining-saloon, and took a seat for dinner. I was the only one taking dinner. The atmosphere was like that of a Ghost Ship.

At last I learnt the truth. There had been a rumour in Cork of a submarine operating in the Irish Sea, and all other cross-channel passages had been cancelled.

But I had a comfortable journey, and was soon in London, stating my case to an admiral who, naturally, was surprised to learn that anyone who had experienced the joys of the ocean wave could possibly wish to transfer to a 'Junior Service' which fought its battles on the land.

However, my request was granted, and I was free to join the Royal Army Medical Corps (or RAMC).

**I Join The Royal Army Medical Corps
And Go To War**



Roy in naval and army uniform. After eight months serving in the Royal Navy, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in November 1915

I told you, Judi, how I transferred to the RAMC in November 1915 for the sake of real medical practice, but it was months before I saw any such. You will see what happened in this chapter.

Quite sadly I sold my blue naval uniform and then, arrayed in khaki, reported at Sling Camp, Bulford,

near Salisbury. I was asked if I had served in my school Officers' Training Corps (OTC). I said, "Yes", not mentioning I'd played in the band.

"We are very short of drill instructors", said the Adjutant of the RAMC Training Centre, "So for a few days I want you to help with the drill."

Being always anxious to please, I did not say that I had forgotten the little drill I had ever learnt in the band, and I took charge of a lot of unhappy-looking recruits. I taught them to mark time, easy but very dull!

However, the next day, qualified instructors arrived, and I was posted to the Officers' Class. Then followed a wonderful time, of drill, PT and horsemanship, with no responsibilities. I remember thinking to myself, "Enjoy this, for there'll never be another time like it!"

You had to learn to ride and care for horses, because the field ambulances of those days were all horsed. These were the units that had to collect and carry away the wounded from the battlefield.

My company was called 'Y', and I began to think of it as the centre of the British Army. It was commanded by Captain Tom Sheedy, an old friend from Cork.

We pitched tents, and had day and night manoeuvres, and sang the new army songs as we marched along: *It's a long way to Tipperary*, and *There's a long, long trail a-winding*.

One day, with a sore throat, I lost my 'word-of-command'. So I found myself taking the place of the quartermaster, who had been posted overseas. This was another new experience. I had to 'indent' for (order) food and clothing and coal, and keep accounts. I worked hours into the night, studying the different Army forms and vouchers, and became really interested when I discovered that we had been charged for 66 greatcoats, which we had never received.

Then came my marriage to Dulcie Dennys in 1916. The reception was at Ridgemount, Dulcie's parent's home in Anerley Park, South London, which had stables, tennis court and a small orchard. The two little bridesmaids were your great-aunts, Judi, 'the two Doreens', each a sister of the bride and groom!

For our first home, we rented a cottage near Codford, Salisbury Plain, to where my Training Centre had been moved. Returning by motorcycle and sidecar from our honeymoon, we were dismayed to find that the furniture, ordered from London, was all out in the garden. But there was a notice on the door from the owner of a big house in the vicinity saying "Come and stay with us till you get things settled - Mrs Vesey Fitzgerald".

This of course was a very kind invitation, and we were glad to accept it. The VFs lived in an old house, which was lit entirely by candles. Clusters of candles were everywhere, and they always seemed to be freshly lit. What happened to all the hundreds of old candles I can't imagine.

I don't know why I was kept in England so long, but of course the day came when I was off to the war, and a certain Captain Gillespie RAMC and I were saying goodbye to our young wives at Waterloo Station.

Now here comes a strange coincidence. On the very morning of a day in October 1962 when I am writing the above paragraph, there arrives a letter from your mother, Judi, from Sao Paulo in Brazil. The last sentence reads, "It is strange that I should be here with Sheena, whose father was Gillespie, you remember?"

I have a letter written to my mother, which describes the journey of Captain Gillespie and myself to join the 50th Division in France. I wrote, "We travelled till midday and then nobody in authority seemed to have a clear idea of the place to which we were to go." So joining the Army proved as difficult as joining the Navy.

Later I was posted to the 1st Northumberland Field Ambulance. I wrote, "I reached the ambulance just as they were preparing to move off. I was given some bully beef in a cottage, and within an hour I was on a horse with the Field Ambulance in column of route with waggons and ambulances."

A later letter read, "I am now in charge of a relay post, and have three four-horse waggons and two motor ditto. The former receive the wounded from Advanced Aid Posts and bring them here, where they are loaded on the motor ambulances for conveyance to our Advanced Dressing Stations."

But soon I am posted as Medical Officer to the 5th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers of the 149 Brigade, and to this unit I became attached, in mind, body and spirit, as never again to any other.



Monchy-lez-Doris, June '17.

My Tent in Reserve Area.

It was about the 2nd September 1917 when an incident occurred which will be of special interest to you, Judi.

Captain Easton, the Adjutant, handed me a telegram, which announced the birth of a baby daughter, destined one day to become your mother. She had been born at Ridgemount, Dulcie's parent's home.

Now the Commanding Officer Colonel Wright and a Major Irwin were also standing near, and when I told them the good news, they said they would name the baby if I would let them. I agreed, and they called her Chérisy, after the French village where the regiment had been fighting on the day she was born. Thirty-years later, the same three officers sent a silver box bearing the regimental crest to your mother as a wedding present.



Dulcie with daughter Chérisy, born 31 August 1917

I'm not going to try and tell you about the whole World War and the trenches and bombardments and gas attacks - that would need a book in itself - but I want to mention one or two of the pleasant times we had in rest areas.

Once we stayed in Les Marais, near St Omer, where there were no roads, only canals, and people moved about in boats and barges. The soldiers used all the canvas we had to try and make sails for small boats. We used to watch the big barges carrying loads of sugar beet on its way to the mills to be made into sugar.

Sometimes we travelled in trains, which went very slowly, and we never knew where they were going. Most of the trucks were labelled *40 Hommes - 8 Chevaux* (*40 Men, 8 Horses*), meaning they contained one or the other. Civilian trains had notices on them *Taisez-vous - méfiez-vous - les oreilles ennemies vous écoutent* (*Keep quiet - watch out - enemy ears are listening*).

Once we were in Reserve in Poperinghe in Belgium. The houses had been knocked down by shellfire above ground, but the cellars were unharmed, and these were made comfortable to live in. It was pleasant enough, but like living in a rabbit warren.

12

The Big Retreat

And now we come to March 1918, and a big adventure, because the 50th Division was part of Gough's 5th Army, which was attacked in force by the Germans, in a last effort to break through to the sea and win the war.

We, the 5th Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers, were playing football in Reserve behind St Quentin, when we heard the thunder of the guns, and knew that the expected day had come. For curiously we ordinary men of the regiments talked about the attack, even if some of the high-ups didn't expect it.

We were soon on our way forward, and taking up our positions on a prepared line. A heavy mist fell, and through the fog came odd men retreating, who said the front line had fallen.

I remember the feeling we had that here must be a stand without any surrender. Personally I had an idea that this was going to be my last day on earth!

The cookers and water carts had been brought forward, by horses of course in those days. The idea was to give us a good hot meal before the battle. But it was not to be. The order came that the long thin line of the reserves was to resist but not break. Soon we were ordered to retire to another line behind a canal, and it was goodbye to our dinner and to our

cookers and water carts, for the horses had been taken off to water, and we could not collect them in time.

Then followed eleven days of retreating from behind St Quentin to Amiens. It became almost a routine of a rear-guard action, a retreat to a newly-prepared position, and a rest.

It was fine spring weather, and I felt very fit. But inside ourselves, we had a certain depression. Could it be that we were losing the war after all? We did not know that Marshal Foch, now Supreme Commander of the Allied Armies, had promised that the enemy would be held at Amiens.

Mostly, we picked up what food we could from deserted villages through which we passed. One day I was lucky. On a table was a whole chicken, and plucked! I wrapped it in a blue towel, which was hanging on a chair. (Years later I recognised that towel. Your mother and your Uncle Richard were wearing it, half each, as bibs!).

On one occasion we made contact with our remaining transport and had a good meal. It was reported to me that we had run out of dressings for the wounded. So I hung a dozen haversacks round my neck, mounted a horse, and rode back to a place where I had noticed the remains of a field medical unit. I filled the haversacks, and then stood awhile taking in the atmosphere. There were no guns firing at the time, and the scene was like a painting of 'After the Battle'. I was all alone between the two great armies.

We crossed the River Somme and tumbled into the old trenches of former battles. Ammunition was exhausted at the time, and we just watched through the long grass the German light horse artillery bringing up their field guns in front of their infantry. But they must have been spotted immediately, for our big guns in the rear got on to them, and they limbered up and drove away.

Night soon fell, and on this occasion, and only this once, we were relieved by a cyclist battalion. Every man had a bicycle. It was the only time I ever saw such a unit.

As the days passed, our numbers decreased. We lost our Colonel and Senior Officers, all wounded except for Major Irwin who left us for Brigade Headquarters.

One day a staff-officer suddenly appeared in a car. He wanted me, the medical officer, and he took me off to an isolated farmhouse. We entered the main room and there, seated at a table, was a general, surrounded by his staff.

The general had maps strewn over the table, and he seemed to be wanting to explain something, but he was not saying anything. He had lost the power of speech. I examined him, and soon announced that he was quite exhausted and must go to hospital, and I signed a paper to that effect.

I will tell you one more incident of the Retreat. It was near Montreuil, and we, the 50th Division, were

'holding' (or defending) a strip of woodland, which was stretched, across the open country.

Looking up, we saw that a line of British aeroplanes was driving back any German scouting planes that were hovering around. Shortly after, we saw a sight, which gave us the sort of thrill you get when you see the Trooping of the Colour on the Horse Guards Parade. A great line of cavalry in perfect order was riding across the plain towards us. They were polished and groomed as if on parade themselves, and we, in our torn and dirty uniforms, felt as if we were watching a heavenly host coming to our aid.

The cavalry tethered their horses in the woods, and went forward on foot to take their places as riflemen in the defence. That night I had a small fire in the wood, around which some wounded men were lying. An officer joined my party. He was commanding the 3rd Dragoon Guards, and he told me a story of hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy, and this is of interest in military history, because the days of cavalry as fighting troops were nearly over.

It was probably the next day that the very battered 50th Division was ordered to retire into Amiens. As we approached the city, we had to make our way through a great line of heavy guns, which, almost wheel to wheel, were firing over our heads in the direction of the enemy.

We were billeted on the French, and I can't say we were received with any great welcome: such dirty soldiers going into such clean houses! A Frenchman in the house I entered picked up an ornamental vase

and smashed it on the floor, and said, "____!" Well, just now I can't remember what he said.

The next day we were on our way in buses north to Merville, a quiet country town, which as yet had not been damaged by the war. We reorganised, but the reinforcements were such boys, I felt sorry for them.

But it was in this area that the Germans struck their second blow, and once again we were on the march forward to take up a line of defence on the River Lys. When all the dispositions of the troops were completed, and communications checked, four officers, including myself, were sitting round a table in a barn, which was serving both as Battalion HQ and R.A.P. (Regimental Aid Post). We were playing a game called solo whist, when suddenly there was *Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!* A German battery had hit us and carried away the roof of the barn, and we were still sitting on our chairs, dusty but unhurt. Needless to say, the game was never finished, and we moved to new positions.

I found a good cellar for my Aid Post, and became busy attending to the wounded. Night fell, and a runner brought me a message, "You are in front of our front line!"

So, warnings having been given to stop any firing from our own side, we made our way, with the wounded, to the rear of our position.

About two days later we were occupying a line of trenches across open country, with scattered bunches of trees. Far away on the skyline I had seen

some enemy troops, but I believed that none of them were near at hand. Somehow a mail from home had reached us, and after its distribution, all ranks were hard at work improving the trenches.

I was taking a stroll nearby, and looking to the rear to see if there was a well-protected piece of ground where I could set up a Regimental Aid Post, when...!

(See next chapter)

Back In England

Bang! Bang! went a machine gun, which had advanced through the trees, and I went down like a rabbit. It was as if one was hit by a big hammer. I found that my right arm was broken at the elbow, so I was of no more use to the Regiment.

As I retreated, bullets went *whee whee* past me. I saw a wall ahead, and I thought, "If only I could reach that wall!"

I did reach it, and in time came to an A.D.S (Advanced Dressing Station), where I was splinted and bandaged and put in the cab of an ambulance car. But on the road we came to a sentry, who cried out, "Go back! The enemy have broken through ahead!" So back we went, and made a long detour through Hazebrouck to Aire-sur-la-Lys in the Pas-de-Calais, where under a shelter three surgical teams were operating.

I awoke from the anaesthetic to feel the wind blowing, and I was being loaded into a barge on the river. For three days the ambulance barges moved quietly down the river to Calais, where I was received by a hospital, which, at this time of stress, was just packed with wounded. Beds in the wards were almost touching, and there were more of them along the corridors. An orderly said to me, "I'm so tired I wish I were dead."

"Cheer up!" I answered, "There are many worse off than you!"

At that time there had to be speedy evacuation of the wounded, and so the very next day I was across the Channel and in a marvellous ambulance train, on the way to London. We arrived in the middle of the night, but even so, there were volunteers bringing us cups of tea, and postcards and pencils were provided, so that we could write to wives and mothers.

In the 3rd London General Hospital, Chelsea – a girls' school made into a hospital – I was given a bed, by some mistake, in the New Zealand ward. The other patients gave me an imaginary New Zealand history to entertain visitors: home town Wagga Wagga etc.

My baby daughter Chérisy was brought to see me, but she was too alarmed by the rows of bandaged men in beds to stay for long.

Then came convalescence in the wonderful home of a family called Montague at Lyndford Hall, Mundford in Norfolk. The bedrooms were named after French kings (Louis XV etc.), and furnished in period style. The gardens were beautiful, and there was a lake with boats available.

While I lived in ducal grandeur, my family stayed in the village inn, but there were frequent visits, and everyone made much of the redheaded baby Chérie.

In these happy surroundings I soon recovered, but my elbow was stiff and my category was now C111

(Home Service), so I was sent for duty to a country hospital at Frensham in Surrey. We, the family, lived in the house of the village baker, and Chérie enjoyed sticking her fingers into the dough. She also learned to imitate all the farmyard animals.

While we were there, several important events occurred.

First in importance was the end of the First World War. I remember putting my head into the wards, and calling "War over!"

I was fortunate enough to be selected to march in the Victory March in front of 144 Other Ranks of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and behind Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Irvine, who rode on a horse and wore a monocle. This last point seemed of special interest to the girls in the crowds, and they gave him an extra cheer.

Another day Dulcie and I had to go to Buckingham Palace to receive a medal (the Military Cross) from King George V. I remember well the smart costume that Dulcie wore. A hat of bright feathers, a well-fitting costume of blue with blue leather shoes to match, furs of skunk, and a very long umbrella.

And around that time, we bought our first car, a two-seater Phoenix 1910 model, two cylinder and Coventry silent chain-drive.

But before that, a great tragedy had swept over the world. The plague of influenza. Thousands died. Hospitals were crammed. As I returned home to

Dulcie's family in London, people came to their doors, begging me to come in, but I couldn't, because at home all the women of the house were ill in bed, and the old father was doing all he could, going round with cups of tea. Fortunately little Chérie was taken away and cared for by my mother.

In 1919 I was posted to Deepcut in Surrey, where we stayed in a boarding house in rural surroundings. Chérie used to love playing "in 'a woods", and here Judi, in this paradise of a home, your Uncle Richard was to be born.

But none of my stories are simple and straightforward, because, you see, my next chapter is headed "I am sent to North Russia". I could hardly have been sent farther away!

Endnote

"I had to go to Buckingham Palace to receive a medal (the Military Cross) from King George V"

According to the London Gazette, this award was made to Roy "for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. In recent operations this officer under very heavy shell fire continued to attend to the wounded and evacuate cases under the most adverse circumstances. On several occasions, by his fine example and personal courage, he saved many wounded who otherwise would have fallen into the enemy's hands." London Gazette 23 July 1918



*Roy with Dulcie at Buckingham Palace to receive the
Military Cross from King George V*

1919 I Am Sent To Russia

Now the situation in North Russia was that a certain part of it was trying to set itself up as a democratic state, that is, as a separate country with a freely elected government. This part was being defended against the Bolshevik (communist) armies by a mixed force of Allies (French, British, American etc.).

I was ordered to join the 2nd Battalion Highland Light Infantry, who were about to embark for Archangel, the principal city in North Russia.

There was an idea abroad that only volunteers were going to Russia. So a general from the War Office was sent to give us a lecture. He said that there were so many communists actually in Archangel, that a strong force was necessary at the Base to make it safe for our brothers in the front line. We were promised special leave on our return.

Lt. Colonel Craigie-Halkett was an excellent Commanding Officer, and he was a very forceful man. On our way to 'take over' the troopship, he stopped the taxi at Hawkes in Savile Row. "I want to see some socks", he said. "Upstairs", said the salesman politely. "I'm not going upstairs!" said the Colonel. "Bring them here to me!" And to him they were brought. So you see, Judi, what you can do, if you have a strong enough character. But I don't advise *you* to try buying socks this way.

On the ship the Colonel turned to me and said, "You will see that none of my officers are seasick." I said "Yes, sir", because I had learned not to argue with a superior officer.

In Archangel there was much marching and blowing of bagpipes, and I'm sure we were considered to be, what we were, a very powerful force. The Russians were particularly impressed by the sight of our General Officer Commanding, General Ironside, striding down the middle of the road, wearing high Russian boots and a large Russian ORDER (medal) on his chest.

We lived in comfortable wooden huts, but there was a lot of preserved or tinned food in our diet. Because of this, to prevent a disease called scurvy, every man had to eat a few germinating peas every day. The peas, which arrived from Army Stores on a Monday were spread out on trays of wet flannel. They were given three days to germinate and were then eaten on the following Thursday. The peas arriving on other days were similarly treated. It was a big operation, but in this way the British soldiers were saved from the dread disease.

In Russia in those days women did most of the hard work. If ever they had any spare time they had to saw wood for the winter. They used to say, "We want a pile of logs twice the size of a house".

There was a refugee camp nearby, and from here came women to help clean up our camp. Very soon, it seemed to me, they were doing ALL the work. But

not on saints days, and these seemed to come very often.

I used to watch log cabins being made. Boys, with hooks and chains, riding on ponies, pulled ashore the fir trees, which floated down the River Dvina. Russian carpenters with adzes shaped the log ends, so that they could be dropped one on top of the other, and interlocked at four corners of a rectangle, to form rooms. To withstand the cold of the winter all houses were built with double walls, and I was told that a crack might mean death.

Some of us visited a Russian steam bathhouse. We paid a special price, and were given a private suite: dressing room, English-style bathroom, and Russian-style ditto. In a corner was a sort of oven full of hot stone boulders. There were wooden buckets and with these we threw water onto the stones. Of course the room soon filled with steam. There were shelves to lie on, and the higher you went, the thicker the steam.

In a restaurant there was excellent tea served in glasses, but without the lemon, which was customary in Russia. Each Russian customer who entered the tearoom bowed to everyone before taking his seat. This bowing business sometimes caused quite a hold-up at the door!

Travelling in a tram was quite an adventure. You entered at the back and got out at the front. There was always such a crowd of passengers; it was difficult to prevent them from pushing you out before your destination. Fares were paid for in

postage stamps, a most difficult procedure. I had a document with writing on it, which looked something like *Tramski Pass*.

Russian letters looked rather like the Greek. One letter represented SHCH as in 'FreSH Cheese', so you can imagine what a difficult language Russian is. I am afraid I only learnt one Russian word: 'dobra', meaning 'good'.

"Russki dancing dobra?" asked a Russian, who for some reason was dancing in the street. "Dobra", I said. That was the only conversation in Russian I ever had.

But curiously enough, the official language of our British Military Hospital in Archangel was French. The Sisters were Russian, and the orderlies were Russian medical students. These knew no English. The British Medical Officers knew no Russian. So we compromised with French. At an operation I heard such clear directions as "Passez le scalpel"!

I visited the market, but there was little to buy. The country was in such a poor state after years of war. However I secured a small sledge, made in true Laplander style, which later your mother, Judi, and her brother were able to use.

I never saw the winter in North Russia, but of course I heard all about it. The frost was colder than anything we know about in England. The trains only reached the main Archangel Railway Station in winter. They came across the frozen Dvina River. In summer they just stopped the far side of the river,

and the passengers travelled across by ferry steamer.

Smolensky was a thickly populated island near the city. In summer the trams rode over a great wooden bridge to and fro. On the approach of winter the bridge was dismantled, and the trams travelled on the ice.

In each house, a great stove was lit, the top reaching to the bedroom floor above. The master and his wife slept over the stove, and the rest of the family just got as close as they could!

For one month, in addition to my ordinary duties, I acted as Medical Officer to a special Russian Unit, which was officered by Englishmen. At the morning Sick Parade, each man presented a ticket, which had evidently been printed in a Russian printing press. It was like this:

NAME...

1. *PIT FOR FIGHTNING*

2. *PIT FOR SEDEENTARY LABOUT*

I had to fill in the name, and then cross out either Number 1 or Number 2. (These were of course meant to read FIT FOR FIGHTING, and FIT FOR SEDENTARY LABOUR.)

I must tell you one thing, Judi, about the Russian girls, and a game they had. Outside many of the houses was a large seesaw. But the girls never sat on it. They stood one at each end. Then as one end of

the plank came down, the girl at the other end jumped in the air. She came down with a thud, and shot the other girl into the air, and so they went, in turn, higher and higher. They were extremely clever at this game, and must have practised it since they were small children.

In the ill-repaired streets the churches were the only decorative buildings. They were often painted with biblical scenes on the outside. The walls inside were covered with 'ikons', sacred paintings encrusted with gold and jewels. But there were no statues and no organ.

I attended a service in the Cathedral. The singing of the choir, which was concealed above the sanctuary, was beyond conception. In the most solemn part of the service, the golden gates of the chancel were closed. The church was packed with people, all standing (there were no chairs). And they sang and prayed for deliverance, but no deliverance was coming.

For the people of Britain and the allied countries had decided that the Russians must decide their own destiny, and one morning we saw that the White Sea was full of ships. The 2nd Battalion Highland Light Infantry held a post on the shore through which came the Allied Force to embark on the transports.

I packed the medical equipment onto a lighter (a barge used to load a larger ship). I had difficulty keeping back the soldiers' pet dogs, which were not allowed to come to England with us. And so we sailed away, and left behind to their fate so many

kind people who had been good to us and entertained us, and I felt that I could never be really happy again.

This isn't quite the end of the Russian story. On the way back, we called at Lerwick, which you will find on the map in the Shetland Isles, right away north of Scotland. There I bought Fair Island gifts of soft wool to bring home.

We landed at Liverpool, and were at once detailed for duty in connection with a coal strike. What about the promised leave? The Battalion marched through Liverpool singing a dreadful dirge they had learned in Russia, and Colonel Craigie-Halkett dashed south to the War Office, to report this situation.

Well, the leave was granted and so I came home to the family in Deepcut, Surrey, and now there was a new baby, Richard, in the perambulator.

1920 India, The First Time



The family circa 1920: Roy and Dulcie, with daughter Chérissy, son Richard, and Roy's mother Carrie Oram

Yesterday I read in the newspaper "The Oxfordshire, 20,586 tons, sailed from Singapore – the last troopship. In future it will be air travel" ...and not so comfortable and not so much fun, I think.

In 1920, of course, sea travel was the only route imaginable, as the family set off for India. At the dock there was a great loading up of military and family baggage. I thought of a Latin tag which occurred so often in our school textbooks about Caesar's campaigns: *impedimentis uxoribusque* (meaning they set off *with their baggage and wives*). You won't know these words, Judi, but you can appreciate what a strong sound they had.

Most families in those days had nurses to look after the children, so at night on board the ship there was a colourful scene of all the officers in their different regimental evening dress sitting down to dinner with their wives, also in full evening dress, and the Nursing Sisters of the Queen Alexandra's Military Nursing Service for India in their silk uniforms with head-dresses of fine lawn.

I found myself posted to the Military Hospital in Colaba, Bombay, and there followed a very difficult time, because prices had risen with the war, but not pay.

Also, one day all the temporary medical officers had to return to England, and we were left without any specialists, without even a surgeon. I had to do my best with the operations, and used to work with a *Surgery* textbook open on a side table, so that I could refresh my memory from time to time.

Dulcie got appendicitis, and I called in Mr Sabawala FRCS, a Parsee, who was very kind and operated expertly. After that Dulcie went on a four-day journey to Ootacamund (or 'Ooty') in Southern India, to stay with my Uncle Will and Aunt Winnie, my mother's sister. Uncle Will was Deputy Director of Medical Services South India at the time.

Dulcie was followed by the children, and I must tell one story of Chérisy at that time. In the cool of the evening, after tea, the children were taken out for a walk. On her return one day, Chérisy came into the presence of her mother, and before her mother could open her mouth, she said, "DON'T say 'Has you had a nice tea? Has you had a nice walk...I HAS!!'" So you see Judi, your mother was developing quite a character at an early age.

Later I too was able to follow the family to Ooty. It was a wonderful journey up and up into the cool air in a small mountain railway. And on the top was a new country of woods and grassy downs and streams with trout from Scotland. (Yes, the trout had come, as small fry, all the way from Aunt May's fisheries in Scotland.) At times you might have thought yourself at home in Britain, if it were not for the scattered huts of the Toda people, a small tribe of locals, who lived with their herds of buffalo.

In Ooty Dulcie and I went to our first ball, given by Lord and Lady Willingdon, a very grand affair. But at it I was reproved by an Aide-de-Camp for wearing a cherry-coloured silk cummerbund round my middle. I was wearing it in all good faith, as it had been provided by my London (military) tailor. So out of

the yards of coloured silk Dulcie made a graceful evening frock, one of the best she ever had.

But the story of our financial difficulties had reached Headquarters, and we were moved to Deolali, one hundred miles from Bombay, but more salubrious, on higher ground.

Now somehow the news went ahead of us that we had five children, not two, and on our arrival at night we were guided to a bungalow in which there were seven beds arranged in a row, with seven chairs, and seven bedside tables. It looked like a scene from a fairy tale, and any moment the witch would appear – or perhaps Snow White.

This room was a very big one, and one day we gave a dance with the help of some officers of the 125th Napier Rifles. One of these was an Indian, K.S. Digvijaysinhji, who was the nephew of the Maharaja Ranjitsinhji, the famous sportsman whom I had seen playing cricket at the Oval during my school days.

The noise of the party woke up young Chérie and Richard, and they came into the dance in their dressing gowns. 'Digvi' looked after them, and they sat on his knees while he played the gramophone. (Later Digvi was to succeed his uncle as Maharajah Jam Sahib, and became President of the Chamber of Princes).

Opposite this big room, in the compound, was a big tree, which was a favourite of the flying foxes. Sometimes it was covered with these curious creatures, hanging upside down.

There was an idea that people who lived too long in Deolali became peculiar in their habits. This complaint was called 'Doolali Tap', and all old soldiers who served in India know about this.

Anyway in 1922 we moved to Dehra Dun, where I studied at the X-Ray Institute of India. While we were there we met a very old lady, called Lady Hume, a connection of Dulcie's. Her husband, a general, had retired in India. Now she was so old that her mind wasn't very clear. When she saw Chérie, she called her "Addy's little girl". Addy was Dulcie's mother, Adelaide.

From Dehra Dun we could see at night the hill station of Mussoorie, in the foothills of the Himalayas, with its roads lit up by lines of electricity. We were glad to go to this cool upland when holiday-time came, and we enjoyed staying in a boarding house in a place called Happy Valley.

Once we visited Braceley Cottage in Mussoorie, where Dulcie had been born on 14 October 1896. We also saw a big old house called Doonside, which had once been the home of Dulcie's grandmother. A watercolour of Braceley Cottage, painted in around 1890 by Dulcie's mother, hangs in the hall in our home now. (Adelaide had been married to Colonel W.A.B. Dennys, Commanding Officer of the Northern Frontier Force Volunteers and the 31st Punjab Regiment.)

While on this holiday I wrote a number of 'ruthless rhymes'. One went:

*Daddy, when he lost his stud
Threw the children down the khud:
Saying, as he tossed the second,
"Richard's heavier than I reckoned!"*

(A 'khud' was a steep bank, leading to a ditch.)

Our next station in India was called Ferozepore, near Lahore. Here at last, in 1923, we were able to settle down to what you might call a normal cantonment life. A cantonment was the part of a town where the British officials and soldiers lived in a permanent military station.

The Regiments here were the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI), Skinner's Horse (1st Duke of York's Own Lancers, a cavalry unit of the British Indian Army) and the 41st Dogras (an infantry regiment of the British Indian Army). We soon made many friends.

At a children's party there was an elephant for the young guests to ride on. But Richard wouldn't join the other children in the big basket fastened to the elephant's back. Then came tea, and I noticed that Richard was absent from the tea party. I looked around and found him riding round the garden all alone on the elephant.

At that time we had a fairly full complement of Indian servants. They were: a bearer (my personal servant), a cook, a khidmatgar (table waiter), a bhisti (who fetched water and filled baths), a mali (gardener), a syce (groom), a sweeper and a chokidar (night watchman).

One week a cricket team to represent Ferozepore was assembled, and we set off, together with a number of wives, to play against the Jullundur team. Dulcie's father Colonel Dennys had once raised the 41st Dogra Regiment and lived in Jallundur, and one morning some of his old servants arrived to pay their respects to his daughter.

Now there were several parties in connection with the cricket matches, but on one night there was a guest night for men only. From the bungalow where we were staying went the three men, including myself, to the Mess, leaving three women, including Dulcie, behind.

On our return, rather late, we found the three women sitting in chairs round the fire, each holding a pig-sticking spear in her hand pointed at a burglar, who was crouching on the floor between them. The youngest woman had managed to catch the Indian intruder and hold onto him, while the other two, hearing the noise, had caught the spears from the wall, and gone to the rescue.

I must tell you one more story of India. It was how Chérie, still quite a little girl, acquired such a good knowledge of Urdu that she used to act as interpreter if we had difficulty in understanding one of the servants.

1924 Back To England

In 1924 it was back to England, and a posting to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital in London. Even in those days it was hard to find economical lodgings in the capital, so we took a little cottage at Elstead in Surrey. One of my memories of Elstead was an encouraging song Richard used to sing at the time, both in the cottage, and around the countryside, called *Horsey, keep your tail up!*

I bought a Stoneleigh utility car. Curiously, the driver of this car sat in the middle with a bucket seat on each side of him, shamrock fashion. In the morning I drove to the local station, caught a slow train to Guildford, then an express to London, hopped into a train for Vauxhall, and there I was, at the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital!

Later from the hospital I was posted on temporary duty to the Tower of London. For two months I lived luxuriously in the mess of the Scots Guards. At dinner a piper played solemnly round the mess table, and at the end of his performance he and the Mess President toasted each other in Gaelic.

Sometimes after dinner I watched the Ceremony of the Keys, when the sentry challenged the Head Beefeater, who approached carrying the keys.

"Who goes there?"

"The Keys."

"Whose Keys?"

"The King's Keys."

"Pass, Keys. All's well."

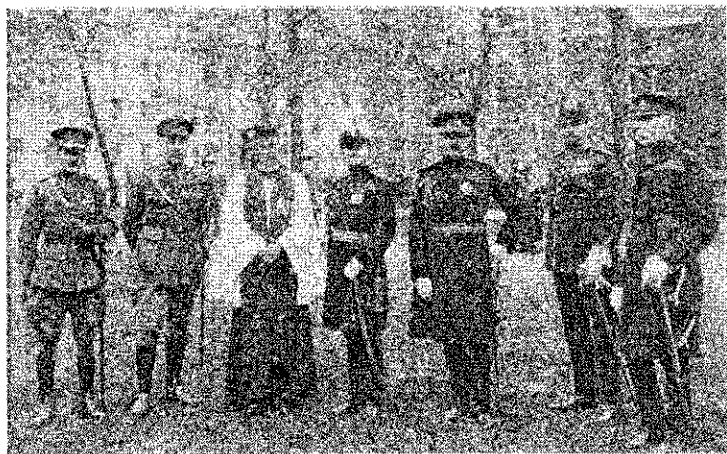
Then the guard presented arms, and the Beefeater took off his velvet hat, and said in an old-fashioned kind of voice, "Godde Preserve King George."

Once a junior officer came to me and asked if I would mind if he played the bagpipes in the billiard room. I remember the incident because this officer had, as is fairly common in Scotland, a threefold name. In the mess he was called "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday", because that was what his name sounded like.

One Saturday I played cricket in the Scots Guards team against a unit stationed in Chelsea Barracks. We played on a small ground near the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, and I hit a six for the only time in my life. I was never much of a cricketer, so this was quite an event.

During my time of duty at the Tower, a ceremony was staged which is carried out every three years, the Beating of the Bounds. A long procession marched slowly round the great walls of the Tower. Ahead, directed by the Chaplain, walked the choirboys beating the ground as they went with long wands. The Beefeaters followed, then the Headsman carrying the axe. Behind him marched the Medical Officer (myself) and the Coroner. Lastly came the High Officers of the Tower, including Sir Francis Younghusband, the Keeper of the Crown Jewels. I must mention him, because he comes into history as

the leader of a British Expedition into Tibet, and you will read more about him, Judi, in a book called *The Little Woman* which I am sure you will read one day.



The Tower of London 1924 or 1925. Roy (far left) with the High Officers of the Tower, including (centre in plumed helmet) Sir Francis Younghusband, Keeper of the Jewel House

There followed more work at the Queen Alexandra Hospital, and then I was posted as Medical Officer to Wellington Barracks, a position which also included duty as DADMS (Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services) London District, with an office at the Horse Guards in Whitehall.

We had a very pleasant flat looking over St James's Park. It was called S.O.2. It was furnished from Harrods as cheaply as possible by hire purchase. We

could only manage to have one room to serve as both day and night nursery, so I arranged one bed to slide under the other by day.

We had a batman, Guardsman Sadgrove, and he fetched the coal and the daily rations, and did the general cleaning. He was very soon a great friend of Chérie and Richard too. But to teach them we had French-speaking governesses from Switzerland, and by day the language of our home was French. I remember my last word in the nursery was "Dormez-bien mes enfants". This was because Dulcie and I were distressed at our inability to speak the language even after years of French lessons at school. So we hoped to give our children a better prospect.

Mademoiselle and her charges used to enjoy shopping at the big Army and Navy Stores. At Christmas time they used to go regularly to the free Punch-and-Judy or cinematograph show, which was given in the Toy Department.

Once they put a problem to the commissionaire. Where would they get sawdust? They wanted this for making Christmas presents. He directed them to the Furniture Department, but that was no good, for furniture was not actually constructed on the premises. You may wonder if they were successful in their search. Yes, they were. They got the sawdust in the Fish Shop!

At Wellington Barracks the children always had the interest of watching the drilling and marching, and of listening to the military bands. Once I saw a squad

marching across the Parade Ground, and ahead of them rode Richard on a fairy cycle. He seemed to be a very privileged person.

In those days soldiers were directed to pay respects to officers whom they recognised, under any circumstances. When we had visitors we used to take them for a walk past Buckingham Palace. On recognising me, the sentries used to take a pace forward, and smack their rifles in salute. This ceremony used to astonish our visitors, and always pleased the children!

Occasionally Dulcie and I visited the Tivoli Cinema, which was not far off in the Strand. One day the lights went on in an interval, and I was seen by a guardsman, who immediately sprang to attention. I had to pass word along the seats "Permission to sit down granted."

On Wednesday afternoons it was Mademoiselle's time off, and when Dulcie was studying physiotherapy at Guy's Hospital, I used to take Chérie and Richard with me to the office in the Horse Guards. There they had to amuse themselves writing imaginary letters and marking them *URGENT* and *SECRET* with the big rubber stamps.

On Sundays we were rather carelessly shown by the vergier, Mr Ward, into our pew in the Guards' Chapel (now being rebuilt after its destruction by a V-1 flying bomb during the Second World War). However, one Sunday, in the middle of the Service, he came to my side, and whispered loudly "You're wanted in Buckingham Palace!" Even the Prince of

Wales, who was in the front pew, turned his head. Outside the chapel I found the Serjeant in full-dress uniform.

"What is it?" I asked. "I don't know, Sir", he said, "I'm ordered to conduct you to Buckingham Palace."

So a little procession formed in Birdcage Walk. First the Serjeant, marching as only a guardsman can. Second, myself, in bowler hat and dark blue overcoat, fortunately well-cut from Harrods, and carrying an umbrella (rolled). There followed a little crowd of people, who always seemed to be around on Sundays to watch the church parade. Perhaps Christopher Robin and his nurse were there!

As we proceeded (in army language you often "proceed"), I turned over in my mind "This must be some mistake. There are so many surgeons and physicians to His Majesty. They can't all be out of town." And a mistake it was!

Two policemen threw open a gate, and the Serjeant and I made our way to a side entrance, where a lady-in-waiting received us. I soon discovered what had happened. She had rung the military phone, instead of the usual Royal Palace phone, to summon a doctor.

After that incident, we were shown into the Medical Officer's pew in the Chapel with more deference. I don't blame Mr Ward. It was quite natural and correct. I was now someone who might be "wanted at Buckingham Palace"!

We would have felt rather isolated in the middle of London if it had not been for the fact that Dulcie's Uncle Arthur and his family had a London house at 72 Cadogan Square. Now he (Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland) was a Cabinet Minister, and sometimes we were able at dinner parties to meet people in the political sphere. And sometimes Dulcie's cousin Mary (Arthur's daughter) used to take the children to the Zoo on a Sunday on Uncle Arthur's special Fellowship ticket.

In addition, special privileges came our way, such as tickets for the family to see the Trooping of the Colour, and an invitation, as a guest of the Officer of the Guard, to dine at St James's Palace. On the table on that occasion were trophies of all kinds. I noticed a saltcellar made from a horse's hoof. It was inscribed on a silver plate *Constructed from the hoof of a horse ridden by Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo.*

1926 must have been the year of The Flood, because I remember seeing Queen Alexandra Military Hospital looking like a scene from Venice. The River Thames had risen above the Embankment, and at Millbank the walls had given way.

1926 was also the year of The General Strike. Troops were camped in the Parks, armoured cars parked in Wellington Barracks. Mounted auxiliaries went riding by. I was taken off all normal duties to take charge of a 'pool' of motor ambulance cars.

At that time, cat's whiskers radios were available for about seven and sixpence. You had to adjust a cat's

whisker carefully onto a piece of stone (a quartz), and then with earphones you could hear the news and instructions being issued from London.

And then near the end of the year occurred what was, to us, a very important event. I said to Chérie and Richard "Which would you rather have: all your Christmas presents, or a baby brother?" They said without hesitation "a baby brother". So they got both the presents and the brother, Thomas Felix Dennys Oram.

I remember the first two lines of a poem I wrote about him:

*Born in the Barracks, so small and so pink!
What in the world will the soldiers think?"*

But they must have thought fairly well of him, for he received a Christmas present of a rattle from the Coldstream Guards, and another rattle from the Irish Guards. So that wasn't a bad start for any baby, and he was baptised and christened in the Guards' Chapel.

You will notice, Judi, that some of my chapters have a startling end. And there is certainly a dramatic finish to this one, because on a day soon after the birth of Thomas, our new batman, Guardsman Coup, burst in with the news "We (the 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards) are off to China in a few days, and Captain Oram is going with us!"

Endnote

"1926 must have been the year of The Flood, because I remember seeing Queen Alexandra Military Hospital looking like a scene from Venice."

In fact, Roy probably witnessed this in January 1928, when floodwaters poured over the Thames embankments, causing parts of the river walls to collapse and thousands of Londoners to be made homeless. This was the last great flood to affect central London, before flood prevention measures were installed in later years.

1927 Shanghai, China

To the batman's announcement that I was off to China, Dulcie replied, "Impossible! Captain Oram is working just now not only in the London District Office, but also in Eastern Command, and no orders for his departure have come through!"

Nevertheless, in a few days' time there I was, marching in the rear of the 2nd Battalion, and giving a wave to my family who were grouped in the doorway of S.O.2 Wellington Barracks. At the head of the column played the Band of the Coldstream Guards, and it was a good send off.

On the transport, lectures were given to explain the role to which we were committed: the defence of Shanghai. In the civil war between northern and southern warlords, Shanghai, an international settlement built up by British enterprise to become the sixth largest port in the world, was in danger.

I will tell you just one story of our journey to China. A young staff officer was writing 'Standing Orders for the SDF', and our Senior Medical Officer, Colonel Ryan, an Irishman, was standing by. "How do you spell 'vaseline'?" the young man asked. "Just write it down without spelling it, man" was the quick and wise reply of the Colonel.

Before I describe our arrival in China, you will surely be interested, Judi, in reading about a very special

event that happened at home at this time. Dulcie was 'presented at Court' by her Aunt May. She made her own dress, of the finest materials I'm sure, and she had to buy long white gloves, a head-dress which held three white ostrich feathers, and a bouquet of flowers. A long 'train' was lent to her, and a set of jewels was specially taken out of the bank for her to wear.

In the throne-room of Buckingham Palace, as the names were announced, she had to follow her Aunt to whom, Dulcie told me, the Queen gave a special smile. Her train was arranged for her, and then came the curtsy to the King, right down, bending the knees, and next the inclining of the head. Two side steps to the left, and the curtsy to the Queen. And then there was her uncle (Sir Arthur Steel Maitland) in court dress waiting to help her with her train, and look after her, by special permission, in the supper room of the Ministers and Ambassadors.

Meanwhile I also was in 'lordly surroundings'. Our ship called at Hong Kong, and I went ashore with Lord Marsham and Lord Bingham. It was teatime, so we walked into the Hong Kong Hotel. A number of people were entering a large room, and sitting down at tables laid for tea, and so we followed them and did likewise. I suppose the three of us looked rather different. We were not wearing party clothes, and certainly Lord Marsham, with a black patch over one eye, looked more like a pirate than heir to an earldom. Anyway, someone came up to us and asked us "Were you invited to this party?" "No", we replied. "Then will you please leave?!" And meekly we left.

But did we first get down some tea? I can't remember. I certainly hope so!

A few days later we disembarked at Shanghai, and marched in pouring rain to Jessica Park, to a temporary camp which had been made, Chinese fashion, with bamboo and oiled paper. It was so cold that the first thing we did was to block up all the gaps meant for ventilation.

By nightfall the strong hands of the guardsmen had wrenched off all the taps in the washhouses. However we soon moved to better accommodation at the waterworks.

Our duties were light: to man strongpoints on the circumference of Shanghai. I had to visit these to ensure their good sanitation. As a single officer, I had to be accompanied by two fully armed soldiers.

Sometimes we would go into quite a smart restaurant for coffee, and the escorts would become an embarrassment. I used to enjoy watching a Chinese family taking refreshment. The women had their faces enamelled, and the children were so polished up and well behaved that they seemed hardly human.

Customs in China seemed the opposite to ours. White not black was the colour of mourning. They wrote backwards not forwards. They shook hands with themselves not with each other. On a visit, when tea was served, this was the time to leave. And the women wore trousers.

There were many precautions to ward off evil spirits, who seemed to be very silly and easily deceived. I noticed bunches of twigs tied to the tops of scaffolding poles when a house was being built. This was to make the spirits believe it was a forest: a place to be avoided. Bridges were made in a zigzag shape, difficult for spirits to cross. And I was told that a Chinese man enjoyed narrowly being missed by a motorcar in the street. If a bad spirit was following him, the hope was that it might have been caught by the car. Boys were called by unimportant names, like 'saucepan', so that the spirits wouldn't notice them.

The coinage was a constant source of trouble to our soldiers. There was 'big' money, and there was 'small' money. The former was 100 cents to the dollar. The latter varied from day to day, around about 120 cents to the dollar. Sometimes there was a sort of trick about its use. If you bought a bar of chocolate in a hotel, you paid in 'big' money, but the change would be given in 'small' money. The difference in value was seen as a tip for the attendant.

There was a language used between English and Chinese, which was neither the one nor the other. It was made up of English words, and was called Pigeon English. When you called at a house, you asked "Master have got?" and if 'master' wasn't at home the servant would reply "Master no have got." A poached egg was "piece toast eggy topside".

The Chinese servants used to enjoy taking part in any kind of a joke. Once I called at a house and was

asked to stay to dinner. "But," I said, "I have no evening clothes." "Oh, we'll manage that for you", I was told.

Later I was shown into a bedroom where, laid out on the bed, was a well-cut black evening suit – but it was made of paper. I came down to dinner in my paper clothes, much to everyone's amusement, and had to sit very carefully.

My friend Ernest Hardman introduced me to an unusual club called the Zero Club. It assembled at 11 o'clock (in memory of the hour at which the Great War had ended) in a room that was decorated with the insignia of British Regiments. Marks were then given to each member for small achievements. For instance, so many marks were given for a mention in the newspaper, and very high marks for a birthday. Then the one with the highest number of marks had to stand refreshments to all the other members. That was the whole business of the club!

Hardman was nearly the death of me. One day he took me for a country drive in an open car. We went through a railway cutting. "What about the trains?!" I shouted, above the roar of the wind. "No trains running now", he shouted back.

Just then a train thundered past, and it was a narrow escape.

I did not see much of Chinese life, but a few incidents remain in my memory. One evening I saw a number of Chinese men and women circling round a farmhouse. They were singing, and carrying

lanterns. I asked our interpreter about this custom. He explained that there was a very sick person in the house, and his friends were trying to make the atmosphere round the home so pleasant that the spirit of the sick man would not wish to fly away.

Once I saw eight Chinese girls, all neatly dressed, being pushed, four-aside, in a large wheelbarrow by an old man. They were probably on their way to a factory.

The Chinese seemed to be as fond of birds as we are of other animals. In Shanghai I saw caged birds being taken for a walk to any piece of open ground where green grass could be seen.

I noticed that in one street every shop was designed for the manufacture and sale of paper models, models of everything: houses, boats, clothes, and above all of 'taels', which were silver currency, sometimes formed in the shape of shoes. All these models were destined to be burnt at funerals, in the hope that they would turn into the real thing in the next world, for the benefit of the deceased.

The funeral of a rich man made a great show. Besides the priests and mourners there marched a host of small boys, banging drums and cymbals, and looking thoroughly happy as they did so. There were also men carrying on cushions the objects of art which the rich man had enjoyed most in his life, fine pieces of jade and ivory or precious stones.

We had one post outside Shanghai, and one day I watched a Chinese Army going by. They carried all

their heavy weapons suspended on bamboo poles. They did not march. They all moved at a trot, and when they came to a narrow path, they closed in to a line.

As it turned out, there was very little fighting near Shanghai at the time. One day I played golf at Hang-Jao Golf Course, on the outskirts of the city. In the evening paper I read the headline: BATTLE OF HANG-JAO GOLF COURSE. So there must have been some sort of skirmish in the vicinity while I was actually playing.

Other mysterious things happened. One day I was invited out to dinner and the guest of the evening was the correspondent of *The Times*, the important English newspaper. I don't remember his name, but only that he was the son of a bishop. Naturally, we were all intent on hearing what he had to tell us about the situation in China, and, as he had to leave early by taxi, we all went to the door to see him off. But no one ever saw him again. He just disappeared.

As well as Chinese, we met Japanese. The Japanese were very polite. Over the wall we watched their schoolchildren greeting their teachers in the morning. They lined up, and then all together bowed low. Then the schoolmasters bowed in return. At a Japanese restaurant, you had to take off your shoes and sit on a matting floor. Your food was brought on a wooden platter, and you cooked it yourself on a charcoal brazier.

The day before I left Shanghai, I was introduced to the Japanese Admiral.

"Captain Oram is leaving tomorrow", explained Colonel Lawrence, the Commanding Officer of the Coldstream Guards. "I shall miss him very much," said the Admiral, which sounded remarkable, but very gracious.

How little could the British community of Shanghai, at that time so rich and so powerful, have imagined that not many years would pass by before they would be near starvation in Japanese concentration camps, and later helpless in the hands of the Chinese communists.

In the summer it became unpleasantly hot. In the hospital we had fans blowing on blocks of ice. In the cinema you were offered hot damp towels to wipe your face, and 'eskimo pies' (ice creams) to eat.

I had made friends with a man who had designed and built the first steamboats to make their way against the fast currents of the Yangtze Gorges up river to Chekiang.

In the troubled state of the country the river traffic here had ceased. But now it was to start again. I was offered a passage in the first steamer to leave Shanghai. I was told that we would be met by pirates, but that plenty of money would be carried to pay them off. This sounded like a great adventure. "The passage through the Gorges is the greatest thrill in the world", people said.

Leave having been granted, the taxi was at the door, when the telephone rang. "Captain Oram's leave

cancelled. He is to return to the UK" was the message.

I made my way to the Cable Office to send a message to Dulcie. I wrote the address in full: *Oram, Rose Cottage, Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight, England*, where the family was now based, in my absence.

"Are there many cottages?" asked the girl behind the cable clerk. "No" I said, and so she crossed out *Rose Cottage*. "*Freshwater Bay* can go as one word, and you don't want *England*", she added as she crossed it out. "And there may only be one Freshwater Bay Post Office in the world", she said, looking it up in a book.

Indeed, there was only one. So the telegram went off with the smallest (and cheapest) possible address: *Oram Freshwaterbay*. Which, considering the telegram went all the way from China and arrived safely, is not the least remarkable of my stories.

Endnote

"No one ever saw him again. He just disappeared."

Frank Basil Riley, The Times China correspondent who disappeared, was a 34 year-old Australian, son of the Archbishop of Perth, and a former Rhodes scholar. He vanished on 26 July 1927 while visiting a village near Chanchow, Manchuria. Witnesses said they saw him attacked and killed by Chinese soldiers on the day he disappeared, but it remains uncertain exactly what happened to him.

1928 College, And Again To India



London 1928. Dulcie, Thomas, Chérissy and Richard

I had been brought home from China to attend the Senior Course at the RAMC College, at the time of my promotion from Captain to Major.

Fortunately we were able to live at Ridgemount, Dulcie's London family home, in an upper floor that was now converted into a separate flat.

Just one amusing story about the Course. Colonel MacArthur was the Director of Tropical Medicine,

and one day he was giving a lecture about flies. "You can tell the female fly", he said, "because the eyes are set wide apart. Now examine the flies on your desk."

Each of us had a dead fly pinned to a cork. I looked at my fly with a lens, and then said to the lecturer, "I can't make out my fly, whether it is male or female." Colonel MacArthur came to my side, and studied my fly. "Your fly", he said, looking at me very suspiciously, "hasn't got a head!"

But he had a kind regard for me, because I had sent him a mosquito from China, which was hitherto unknown. Unfortunately it was discovered and described by a Japanese doctor just before its description in the RAMC Journal. Otherwise it might have had a very simple English name instead of a very difficult Japanese one.

The Course was followed by three months' attendance at Westminster Hospital, and then an examination. I just managed to qualify for the specialist class, and so after six more months' study I became a Specialist in Radiology (X-rays).

Then came the trooping season and postings. I was allotted to Egypt. In the Citadel of Cairo was a large British Military Hospital and an RAMC mess. We would have liked to go to Egypt, but there was a difficulty.

We decided that Richard must go to a boarding school in England. There is a song that goes: *You must have money in the bank, Frank*. Well, we hadn't. Not enough, anyway.

Now here comes a story which some would say is the most remarkable of all. WE SOLD OUR POSTING!

There was a Mr French of Charing Cross, who dealt in Exchange of Postings. We told him that if he could find an RAMC Major who very much wanted to go to Egypt, we were prepared to go somewhere else. Well, an exchange was arranged, and our credit balance was increased by over £80.

This made it possible to send Richard off to Hildersham House School at Broadstairs in a new suit of herringbone tweed, purchased from the department store Peter Robinson. Dulcie's sister Dorrie, unmarried at this point, agreed to take responsibility for him during the school holidays.

*

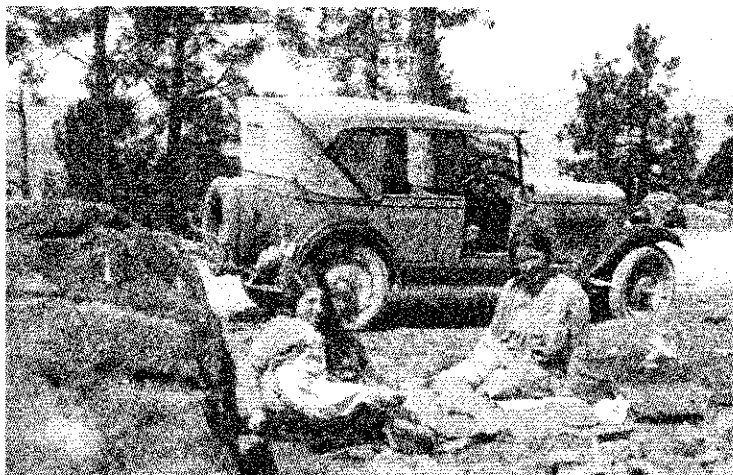
And soon the rest of us, Dulcie, Chérie, young Thomas and I, were off by troopship to our next posting, and this time we were heading back to India.

We were sent, this time, to Rawalpindi, the big military centre in the North. We soon settled down to the same kind of cantonment life that we had known in Ferozepore. Lots of tennis and dinner parties and mess entertainments. Fortunately our old friends the Dogras were now stationed in 'Pindi', so we had contact with an Indian Unit.

For Thomas we had, to his pride and joy, a donkey called Dumpling, and a donkey-boy. The first night after the purchase, he was awakened by the braying

of the donkey, stabled near the bungalow. "My donkey!" he called out in ecstasy.

One night there was to be a fancy dress dance at the Club, and on my way home from tennis I called at the barbers to have side-whiskers glued to my face. By the time I reached home I had forgotten all about this disguise, and when Chérie met me at the door and said "Please wait in the sitting room while I fetch Mama" I thought she had gone off her head.



*A picnic near Rawalpindi c. 1930. Chérisy, Tom, Dulcie
and a Chevrolet*

For two years Chérie had private lessons. She also worked hard at being a Girl Guide and became a patrol leader. In the third year, through the introduction of American friends on the staff of the Punjab University, she went as a boarder to

Woodstock School, at Landour, a hill station in the Himalayas.

Now on the way to the school, you were able to travel by car up to a certain point, on the hill road to neighbouring Mussourie. At that stage, porters were engaged to carry your baggage the rest of the journey. I had been instructed as to the orders I must give. "Company School ko jao. Go to the Company School." These words were necessary, because the school had originally been founded by the East India Company, and although about a hundred years had passed since this corporation had ceased to exist, the news hadn't yet filtered through to some of the local inhabitants of Mussourie and Landour.

In my work as a radiologist I had considerable dealings with the Indian population, as I did the x-ray work of several civil hospitals. One day the Indian orderly announced that there was a patient waiting outside.

"Bring him in", I said. Still nothing happened, and at last I went to investigate. I found that the 'patient' was a large water buffalo! "Not giving any milk", complained the owner. "Perhaps x-rays would be good." He thought of x-rays as a sort of magic.

In the hot summer the families were sent up to the Murree Hills, and one year I too had a hill posting. I think Tom especially enjoyed his excursions on his donkey through the pinewoods, and he had rabbits in a cage, and two 'generals'. The last-named were made of cardboard, but were treated as important.

One day I asked an old soldier who had retired in Murree if he knew any strange stories about the place. "Well", he said, "there's the mystery of the falling stones. I have seen them falling, and I don't know where they come from!"

It was only a few days later that Dulcie and I were dining in our hotel, when a message was brought to me from another friend who lived in a bungalow nearby.

"Can you lend me some cartridges of such-and-such a bore?" he wrote. "I want to fire off my gun, because stones are falling around the bungalow, and I don't know where they are coming from." I never learned the answer to this mystery.

But the great adventure of those days was to holiday in Kashmir. There was no air travel. You went by car. The popular American cars, Fords and Chevrolets, were open cars, lightly constructed but with powerful engines. They had to carry a full load of passengers, with a pile of luggage on the carrier and running boards, and bedding rolls in the gaps between the bonnet and the wings.

Dulcie's famous great-aunt, Flora Annie Steel, did the journey on horseback. The grand ladies of the Moghul Court, about whom this lady wrote in her historical novels, rode the same way on elephants.

We made a bad start. We found the bridge beyond Murree on the main road broken down by a storm. There was nothing for it but to return to the plains, and make a long detour with two halts at night in

'dak' bungalows. These were government hotels of a simple kind.

The weather was very hot, and our chief trouble was punctures. These had to be mended by 'vulcanisation'. The rubber surfaces had to be melted into one another by heat. Ordinary rubber solution was not strong enough.

And then came a perilous journey over the Banihal Pass. The road was narrow and rough, and sometimes the wheels of our car seemed just inches from a drop of thousands of feet. But at last the plain of Kashmir was before us, a land of lakes and rivers and luxuriant vegetation, a regular paradise. And soon, in Srinagar, we were embarking on the houseboat, which we had engaged through an agent.

For once in our lives we lived like princes. There was a dining room and sitting room all in carved wood, with Persian rugs on the floors. There were three bedrooms and three bathrooms, and a roof garden for taking tea and coffee. The price of our stay, which included meals and service, was well within our means. The only extra we had to provide was what are called 'stores' (marmalade, sauces etc.). The cookhouse and the servants' quarters were in another boat attached by a rope, and there were two small boats for expeditions and visiting.

At night we found hot water in the baths and our evening clothes laid out. For we always changed into formal evening wear for dinner. It was a pleasant custom, and expected almost as a duty if we were to be considered proper 'sahibs' by the servants.

As we moved down the river, propelled by men with long poles, and towing our 'fleet' of smaller boats, the scene might have been one of Cleopatra's barges on the Nile from a film. The only thing we lacked was music. There were no transistor radios in those days. But on occasions we had electric light. For a small fee we had purchased the right to use an electric fitting at several points around the Dal Lake.

Writing of film stories reminds me of an incident that happened one day when I was visiting the Srinagar Post Office to collect our mail. I was handed a telegram that read *Happy Holidays, love Moira Shearer*. I said to the clerk "This telegram is not for me." "There is only one sahib of your name in Kashmir", he said. And then I realised, it was a joke telegram from the Rawalpindi Mess. I had, perhaps too often, expressed my admiration for Moira Shearer as a film actress.

There was much to see. We watched the woodcarving in the shop of 'Suffering Moses'. We saw a regatta by the boys of the school of the Reverend Tyndale-Biscoe.

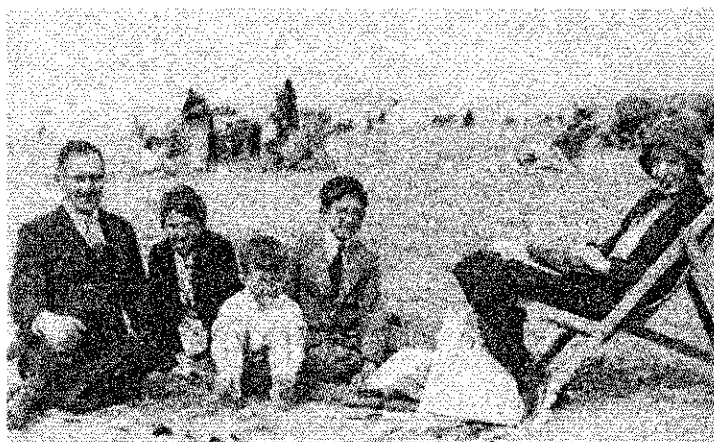
We also visited the gardens which had been maintained since the days of the Moghul Emperors, and one day the Maharajah passed by in his royal barge with fifty paddlers in white and gold uniforms and a drummer beating time.

*

After three years in India, Dulcie, Chérie and Thomas returned home by troopship, principally to end the

long separation from Richard, who meanwhile had spent his holidays from boarding school with Dulcie's father, Colonel Dennys, and sister Dorrie. I soon followed by P & O on six months' leave from India.

Back in the England we bought a caravan to live in. It seemed wonderful, all complete with beds, cooking stove, and crockery. There was still a 'slump' back home, and I was able to get a good strong Essex motorcar with six-cylinder engine to pull the caravan - for £25!



England 1932. The family together again after Roy's second posting to India

When the summer holidays came, we picked up Richard in Broadstairs, and made our way along the South Coast. Thomas was a wonderful fetcher of milk for breakfast. As soon as he was dressed, he

would be off with money and a can. When he came to a farm he would say, "Have you any pigs?" because he was always keen on small pigs.

We saw that there was a place in Cornwall called St Anthony-in-Roseland. This sounded romantic, so we made for it. There we found just what we wanted, a field, right along by the sea.

*

The holidays over, and all three children now attending English boarding schools, Dulcie and I returned to India alone.

It was by now 1933, and our new station was Jhansi, the historic city in northern India. From here we visited the neighbouring city of Gwalior, and were allowed to enter the tomb of the Rajah's mother. At first we had to wait until the afternoon siesta was over, and a *charpoy* (bed) had been carried out. We found the statue clothed in a simple sari, but were told that this would be changed for an elaborate dress in the evening. In fact, the statue was treated as if it were the Rani herself, still alive.

We also visited Datia State, and were entertained by the Rajah with a wonderful dinner and firework display.

In the summer came a posting to Jutogh, a small hill station near Simla, where the British Military Hospital included an Indian Wing for the care of any of the Viceroy's Bodyguard who might be sick. I also became responsible for the hygiene standards of the

Government Dairy. Once I went on manoeuvres with a Mountain Battery. All the bits and pieces of the guns were carried on the backs of mules, just as I had seen them as a boy in toyshop models.

Too late for Dulcie, who had returned to England, came an invitation to a Viceregal Garden Party. We were a rather strange-looking group, setting out from Jutogh in our best civilian suits, but riding on horses. At that time only two motor cars were allowed in the area – one for the Viceroy, and one for the GOC (General Officer Commanding).

At the party I was introduced to a lady who I remember was looking very smart in a frock of gold lace. As I looked at her I remembered her face. "Is it possible", I asked her, "that as a little girl you used to run forward in the interval and give your father a kiss when he was conducting the Crystal Palace Band? And if so was your maiden name Godfrey?" "Yes" she said, "I was once that little girl." I had never seen her in the years between, but her father's name was well known in musical circles.

And then it was goodbye to India. There was a party at the Hospital, and a garland was placed round my neck.

The next day at Jutogh Railway Station, which was on the small one-track line from Simla to Ambala, there was a hitch. The stationmaster said to me "Sorry, Sahib, but there's no room for your luggage on this train." Now I was greatly upset, because I was very afraid that if my trunks did not accompany me, they would never reach England.

And then an unexpected thing happened. The Indian staff of the Hospital, who had come to see me off, sat down on the railway line in front of the railway engine. And as I like to end my chapters on an exciting note, I will end this one at this peculiar situation.

Endnotes

"the school had originally been founded by the East India Company"

Woodstock School, attended by Chérie, is still flourishing, and is, according to Wikipedia, "among the more well-known boarding schools in the Indian subcontinent and south Asia". The school website has photos of its extraordinary mountaintop location, and suggests a slightly different story to Roy's about why Woodstock was known as 'the Company School'.

According to the website, a company was formed in 1854 by British officers and two American missionaries to open a Protestant girls' school in Mussourie. By 1862 the school had moved to its current location in Landour and was named Woodstock School. Ten years later it was bought by the American Presbyterian Church, and re-opened primarily for children with missionary parents. By the time Chérie arrived in the late 1920s, it was co-educational, multi-national and multi-racial, and still had a strongly American character.

"Dulcie's famous great-aunt Flora Annie Steel did the journey on horseback."

Flora Annie Steel, married to Dulcie's great-uncle Henry William Steel of the Indian Civil Service, was a prolific writer of more than just her five historical novels about India. She co-wrote **The Complete Indian Housekeeper**, which gave detailed directions to European women on all aspects of household management in the Indian Raj, and she also published a rewriting of traditional **English Fairy Tales** illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Apart from being a school inspector and sometimes deputising for her husband in India, she got to know members of all the Indian castes and classes, learnt local languages, and collected numerous local folk tales, an unusual achievement for an Englishwoman in the 1880s. She also published a pamphlet on women's rights, and a history of India.

"...with two halts at night in 'dak' bungalows"

Dating back to the Moghul Empire and developed by the British, dak bungalows were government rest houses sited along the major high roads of India to accommodate travellers - generally government officials, but also tourists and civilians if rooms were available. They are currently being redeveloped so that modern tourists can relive 'the Raj experience'. Not the full experience though - most were far from luxurious, and modern facilities are being added unobtrusively.

"We saw a regatta by the boys of the school of the Reverend Tyndale-Biscoe"

Cecil Tyndale-Biscoe was a well-known British missionary and educationalist working in Kashmir until Indian Independence. He went on to found six schools in the region, aiming to address the poverty and caste divisions of Kashmir through spreading Christian and western civic ideals.

1934 Woolwich And Egypt

Well, I'm glad to say this sit-down strike at Jutogh Railway Station was successful. The stationmaster gave way. The biggest trunk was packed with the coal in the tender and the rest of the baggage was put in odd corners of the train, and so eventually I reached England complete.

I was posted to the Royal Herbert Hospital Woolwich as radiologist, and we occupied a very good flat in an old house called Elmhurst, at Bickley in South London. In the rent in those days was included the caretaker, who looked after the garden and provided hot water.

At one time Chérie was at Inval St Hilary's School in Hazlemere, Richard at Eastbourne College, and Thomas a weekly boarder at St Hugh's School nearby. Later Chérie went to learn German by staying with a German family in Wupperthal, Osnabruck (the summer home) and Berlin. The same family's son, Alfred Schneider-Paas, came to stay with us. (Incidentally, this German boy never went back home to fight for the Nazi regime, which he learned to abhor. He made his way to America, and later became an American citizen.)

As I write the above, it is 5 November, and I remember one Guy Fawkes Day on Chislehurst Common, near Bickley, when hundreds of people

were letting off fireworks around a bonfire at the same time.

Our greatest adventure of those days was our Scottish Tour. Our small Ford car was exchanged for a second-hand Chrysler, which accommodated us all including Alfred, plus a tent. We camped by Loch Katrine, and we stayed with Dulcie's relatives the Steel-Maitlands at their Scottish home Sauchieburn, and with Mr Cuthbert at Killearn.

But never did we finish right out a period of home service. Apart from the Great Wars, the troubled places had mainly been in Russia and China. Later it was to be Palestine. But this time Egypt comes into the story.

In 1935 Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, was invading Abyssinia in East Africa, and in case of war with Italy, a British Force was sent to Egypt to be in readiness. A British Military Hospital was to go with this body of troops. It assembled at Netley, near Southampton, and I joined it as radiologist.

In Egypt we had an interesting time changing the big casino at San Stefano in Alexandria into a military hospital, Number Three General. But it was like a wonderful holiday. The crisis did not develop. There were very few sick, and we had tennis courts and a bathing beach.

I visited the local hospitals, and in the Italian Hospital was introduced to Miss Universe, "the most beautiful girl in the world". She was surrounded by a bank of flowers. She had renounced all the prizes of

stardom in Europe and had returned to her family in Alexandria, but had met with an accident.

Now in the shops there were models of Queen Nefertiti, the most beautiful of the ancient rulers of Egypt. I once asked you, Judi, how many daughters this Queen had, and you answered without hesitation "six". How did you know? Plato had an idea that we are all born with a certain amount of knowledge. The baby turtle just knows that when it gets out of the egg, it's got to make for the sea. Education to Plato meant what the word sounds like from the Latin: a drawing out. This is all by the way!

I found the study of Ancient Egypt quite absorbing, and I was able to visit the Museum, and many old monuments. I saw the ruins of Canopus, which had been the coastal holiday-centre of the ancient Alexandrians, and was called *extra mundum* or 'out of this world' by the Romans, a phrase which, curiously, has come into use again in recent years in English. Canopus was near Aboukir Bay, where Nelson destroyed the fleet of Napoleon in the Battle of the Nile. Nelson's ships sailed between the French ships and the shore, and so caught them with their guns pointing the wrong way.

After a few months, wives were allowed to come out to Egypt, and 'living out' was sanctioned. Dulcie arrived, and we found that, contrary to expectations, living was cheap. We obtained a small house at a low rent, but it was sparsely furnished. When it was arranged that Chérie should join us from Germany, another bed was required.

We had no idea of second-hand prices when we saw in the market an iron bed, neatly painted, and we were prepared to be asked double the real value.

"How much for the bed?" I asked. "25 piastres" said the salesman. (That's about five shillings in our money.) "Much too much!" burst out Dulcie in the vernacular, not realising what a very cheap price the poor man had quoted. "I'll deliver it for nothing", said he. And we were followed home by a donkey and cart bearing the five-shilling bed.

We both went to meet Chérie at Port Said, and as soon as possible were seated with her in the train for Alexandria. I knew there was one change on the rail journey, I think at a place with the strange name of Zagazig, but it may have been at Benha. We arrived at a station, which I, awakening from a doze, thought was the right one for the change. I helped Dulcie and Chérie out of the train, but when we were out, we were out! It happened to be the day of a busy national holiday, and by the time I discovered that we had got out at the wrong station, a swarm of Egyptians had taken our places in the train.

We just did not know what to do next, until I noticed that one coach was reserved for the Dublin Gate Theatre Company, travelling to Alexandria. At one of the windows was one of the players – his name may have been Keiron Moore – and he invited us into the coach.

Chérie had proved quite adept at learning languages. On her way across Europe someone had said to her, "Where did you learn your English?" So she must

have spoken German very well. Now she wanted to learn Italian. In spite of the strained relations between Britain and Italy, it was arranged that she and Daisy Jays, the daughter of the Chief of Police in Alexandria, should attend the Italian High School.

Dulcie and I had one very special holiday. To visit Luxor and the tombs of the ancient Egyptian kings was for tourists an expensive pastime. But we found that occasionally one could join the Antiquities Train for students. For about £2 each we had a three-day excursion, including food and lectures and all expenses. We slept on the train. We saw the mummified body of King Tutankhamen lying quietly in his alabaster tomb. All the furniture and gold trappings had been taken to the Cairo Museum.

Incidentally, on the subject of grand buildings, it was while we were in Egypt that we heard the bad news that the Crystal Palace, so associated with the events of Dulcie's and my own childhoods in London, was burning down.

As the summer approached, we decided that Richard and Thomas could join us for their holidays. In those days a special ship used to travel round the Mediterranean Sea, taking British schoolchildren to visit their parents, and later returning them to their schools in England.

We asked Richard and Tom about their voyage. "At first we were sick" they said, "and then we ate everything on the menu." "And at what time did you go to bed?" They didn't seem to know.

They landed at Port Said and flew the last stage of the journey in a De Havilland Dragon biplane aircraft with the brother of Daisy Jays, by courtesy of his father. I remember seeing the plane far away in the distance like a speck in the sky.

We were fortunate – how many times we were fortunate! – in being lent a seaside quarter for the holidays at Sidi Bishr, at the end of the wonderful tramway service from Alex. The rooms were right at the top of a block of flats, and, as was possible at the time, one Egyptian or Sudanese servant did all the domestic work, including the cooking.



at SIDI BISHR 1936

Dulcie with Tom, a staff member, Chérie and Richard

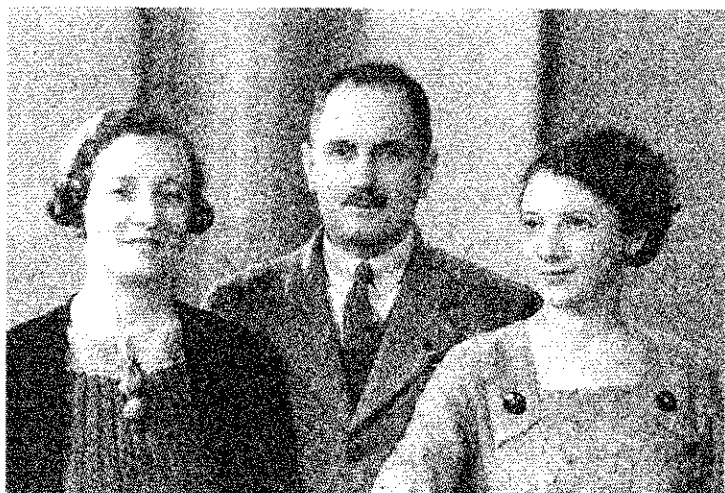
We joined the big sporting club for the sake of the swimming pool and tennis, and we made various expeditions. We visited the plantation of Dr Yaloussis, the Greek radiologist, and through him Dulcie and I were invited to a baptism in a Greek church.

There was no question of sprinkling at this ceremony. The baby was undressed, totally immersed in a bathtub, and then handed to the Godfather, who was waiting to receive it into a large bath towel. Afterwards the baby was redressed in brand new clothes in token of a 'new life'. The visitors were given small china boxes, which contained sugared almonds.

There was a visit to Cairo to see the Pyramids. Richard and Thomas, with the help of a guide, climbed to the top of the Great Pyramid of Cheops.

In the Cairo Museum we saw the Tutankhamen relics, surely the most wonderful of museum exhibits. There were the cases of pure gold, which had enclosed the mummy, and all the treasured objects from the whole of his short life: his first bow and arrows, his first chair, his game of chess, and engraved pictures such as a hunting scene, where his young wife was handing him an arrow.

Chérie meanwhile had learned enough languages to be able to hold her own with the 'jeunesse' of Alexandria, and she went off with some of them on an expedition to Syria and Baalbec. But one day, Judi, you must get her to tell you about this adventure herself.



Egypt c.1936 Dulcie, Roy and Chérie

But the most important thing that happened to us in Egypt was the meeting with people of different nationalities, who had the idea that wars could cease. They were part of the Oxford Group, and believed there could be peace between nations, but it had to start with peace in families and ordinary relationships. What you had to do was to stop struggling for your own way, and try to find what was the right way for yourself, your family and then your nation.

This changed our ideas, and later bore fruit when I was posted with a hospital in Palestine, as you will read. Chérie joined us in trying to find this new way of life, and now, as I write this story 26 years later, she is with your father, Judi, taking the same message to Brazil.

Endnote

"They were part of the Oxford Group, and believed there could be peace between nations..."

The Oxford Group was started by an American Lutheran minister, Frank Buchman, who believed that moral compromise damages human character and relationships, and that change in individuals is the only effective way to start 'remaking the world'.

When Europe was rearming for war in the 1930s, Buchman called for an alternative type of re-armament that would be moral and spiritual, and the work later became known as Moral Re-Armament (MRA). In more recent decades, confusion was caused by the name appearing to be associated with the Moral Majority and other right-wing groups. A new name was adopted, and the wording of its mission reviewed. It is now called Initiatives of Change, defined on its website as "a diverse network committed to building relationships of trust across the world's divides."

1936 - 38 Dover And Aldershot

We sailed home from Egypt by different routes and in different ships. Richard and Thomas, of course, in the school ship. Dulcie in an Orient Liner, which called at Naples, so she was able to visit Pompeii, for which good fortune I have always envied her. Chérie came much later in a tramp ship, which she helped to paint en route as a pastime!

My own ship had been altered to provide accommodation for the sick and wounded. I was appointed SMO (Senior Medical Officer) and had a small staff of Medical Officers and Sisters of the QAIMNS (Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service). We called at Haifa in Palestine to take on board the casualties, which were the result of a conflict that had broken out between the Jews and the Arabs, involving the British troops.

Now I have to describe a number of remarkable events in my story, and one of them occurred on this voyage home from Haifa. I read the medical notes about the patients, and found that one of them was in such pain that he was receiving very big doses of morphia to induce sleep.

I remembered hearing a remark that Major Beatty, who was one of the Medical Officers on board, was a hypnotist. I found him and asked "Is it true that you can put a man to sleep who is in great pain?" "Yes" he said.

So down we went to the ward, and I watched Major Beatty performing his miracle. All he did was to place his hand on the patient's head and say, "Go to sleep for the whole night", and off to sleep he went.

One day some time later, in The Strand, London, a man in civilian clothes greeted me. "I was that patient", he said "on the ship from Haifa. What a wonderful journey that was!"

I was posted to Dover as Senior Medical Officer, to await a radiological vacancy. The last time I had been there was as a Surgeon Probationer in *HMS Test* in 1915.

I was anxious to get some sort of team spirit into our small RAMC detachment, so I paid the subscription that enabled us to use a cricket field up on the heights of the Fortress. But even with two officers we could only field a team of nine. So two civilians were co-opted. Then we challenged our parent Company at Shorncliffe, Folkestone. It was a great day. What family members we could muster came to watch and had tea on the grass alongside. And we, the detachment, won the match.

One more story about Dover. I had been told by one authority "Don't dig yourself in." But I never had this instruction in writing. The local HQ wanted to move me from a very pleasant sea front furnished hired flat to a bungalow-quarter up in the fields alongside the Castle - to be furnished, of course, at my expense.

I explained the situation to a friend in the Royal Engineers, and he advised me to find some fault with the quarter. On studying the plans, we found it had only two lavatories, and, in those days, a Major was entitled to three. I thought the whole affair would now rest, but it didn't. Bricklayers and carpenters and plumbers and plasterers got to work and a third lavatory was added.

Now there was no excuse left. We had to move. So I went to interview a dealer in second-hand furniture in the main street. And here again follows a story which is hard to believe.

"Can you sell me second-hand furniture to fit up a quarter?" I asked. "Sell it?" the man said. "I've so much of it that I'll give it to you."

Now he didn't quite mean that, but the sale was something of a give-away. The cause of this situation was that after the bombing of Dover in the First World War, so many people had left and got rid of their old-fashioned mahogany furniture that the dealers did not know what to do with it all.

We visited the warehouses.

"One pound", said he "for the set of dining room chairs, a good-looking lot." "Make it 25 shillings," said I, feeling desperate that he should be so casual.

In the end we had furniture for the whole four-bedroomed quarter, including carpets, for just about £60. I paid half the amount down in cash. "Pay me

the rest any time you like" he said. There was no written agreement.

The quarter, which was in Broadlees, proved to be a delightful residence. In the morning the scent of the fields drifted in through the open windows. But of course, the inevitable happened. After a very few weeks the order came to move, this time to Aldershot, and in those days (it was now 1937) there was no disturbance allowance! I was posted as radiologist to the Cambridge Hospital.

We rented a house in Ash Vale, and the old furniture fitted into it very well. It was called Cecil House. It was painted white, and a row of scarlet salvias were planted in a bed across the front. Kingfishers nested in the banks of a canal at the back of the garden. Dorothy, who had been our maid in Dover, came with us to Aldershot as a resident maid, so we were very well looked after.

While we were there, changes took place. Richard became a cadet at Sandhurst. Chérie began a secretarial course in London. Thomas was meanwhile still at St Hugh's. One day I inspected his school 'Corps'. I had to present the prize for the Best Cadet to Thomas. (No! I was not the judge of this!)

As the time passed, we made friends along the road, but the house opposite, Minden House, was empty. It had large outhouses, which according to the local rumour, had last been used for the making of illicit whiskey.

Then the house was taken over, and a lot of alterations were made. Someone called to say it was to be a laundry, and invited our custom. We agreed, as we thought we ought to support any local industry.

One bright day I was passing by, and through the open windows I saw laundry maids at work. But there was something else I noticed. From the house came some wonderful pianoforte music. I thought they must have a super-quality radio.

Next time the laundryman came, I made enquiries, and he explained the whole situation. "I am B..... M....." he said, naming a well-known pianist. "But I don't make enough for our expenses, unless I travel. As I want to stay at home, my wife is running the laundry, and between my sessions of piano playing I take round the baskets". I found that he used the laundry van to run up to town to play for the BBC.

Then one day I found him leaning on his garden gate and looking very unhappy. "It's my daughter", he said. (He had a daughter about your age, Judi.) "She's upstairs lying on her bed sobbing her heart out."

He explained that it had all happened because he had agreed with the headmistress of her rather snobbish school that he should be known to his daughter's friends as a musician and not a laundryman. That day, when he had seen her coming along the road with a school friend, he had hidden behind a tree because he had a laundry basket in his hand.

His daughter had seen him, and in a burst of indignation at something supposedly shameful in her family, she had fled home in tears. To understand this story, Judi, you must realise that in those days there was still abroad the idea that a 'gentleman' couldn't soil his hands with menial tasks.

Anyway BM and I had a long talk together about real values, and he took steps to clear things up both with his daughter and the school.

It was while we were at Aldershot that occurred the Big Alarm of possible German aerial attack, in 1938. I was made 'Operational Command Blackouts' for the Cambridge Hospital, and I had a busy day getting wood and blankets from Army Stores, and hammers and nails from Woolworths, to make frames to cover all the windows of the buildings.

This danger passed, but as you know, it is impossible in my story that I should linger very long in England. So you will not be surprised to learn that very soon orders arrived for me to join a hospital being formed to go to...Palestine.

1938 To Palestine



Roy in 1930s Middle East uniform

Because of the disturbances and fighting in Palestine, we had to set up a General Hospital in Haifa. A few days ago I met a Senior Officer in the Royal Army Medical Corp who had been with me, and I asked, "What was the best time in your service?" And he said, without hesitation, "Haifa 1938-39".

There was a sparkle in the air of Palestine. In springtime there were great carpets of flowers on

the hills. There was the excitement of the situation. Eight times I saw the oil pipeline blown up and the flames bursting up into the air. Our hospital was surrounded by barbed wire and at night a searchlight probed around into the darkness. But with guards we could have bathing parties, and there was a yacht club in the harbour.

The time came when the hospital was ready to accept patients, and Colonel Wilson and I wanted to have a grand opening ceremony to liven up the whole medical unit who had little to do, cooped up as they were within a circle of barbed wire. As no prominent official or VIP was available, we decided to manufacture one. So between us we arranged 'the Grand Hoax', described by Colonel J.C. Watts of the RAMC in his book *Surgeon at War*.

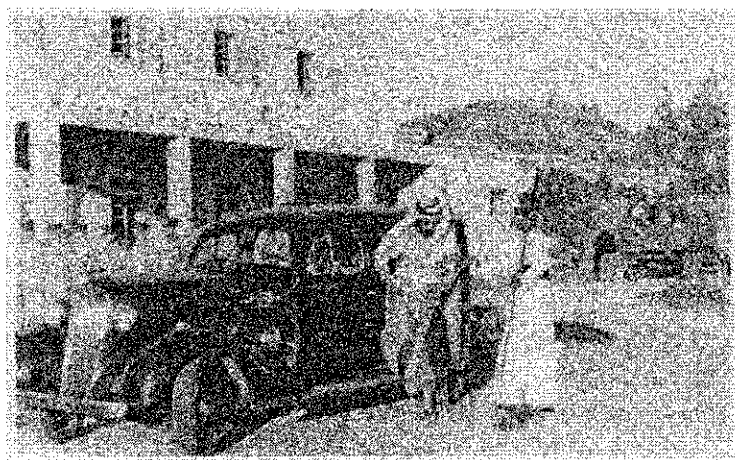
First there was the rehearsal. The quartermaster took the role of the chieftain who was to be the principal guest. Again and again he was sent back to the hospital entrance, so that the Guard of Honour might practise their salute. All this careful preparation removed any doubt as to the importance of the coming ceremony.

On the day all was in readiness. The hospital had been scrubbed and polished and be-flagged. There was a red tape across the main doors. Lieutenant Watts, as he then was, had been sent away on some special duty.

Actually he had not gone further than Haifa town, where, in a barber's shop, he had been carefully adorned with a beard and side-whiskers. There also

he changed into the flowing robes and white *keffiyeh* or headdress of an Arab dignitary. He wore a double roll of horsehair, and dark glasses, and he carried my umbrella on his arm.

He was joined by an RAF officer in mufti who was to be his ADC (aide de camp) and interpreter. He was attended by an Arab boy, who endeavoured to hold over him a beach umbrella borrowed from the Lido. The name of our 'guest' was the Karim of Hox – and even that didn't give him away!



*Haifa, Palestine, 1938.
The Karim of Hox arrives at the General Hospital*

The Guard was inspected in orthodox fashion, and their drill was perfect. Then came the blessing of the hospital. You must understand, Judi, that the success of the operation depended on the fact that nobody

present knew any real Arabic – certainly not the Sheikh nor his interpreter. Anyway, the hospital was blessed in no mean style for about five minutes, in what sounded like excellent Arabic, with plenty of throaty sounds.

Next, the Matron, Miss Pike, approached with a pair of gilded scissors on a cushion. The Medical Officers were assembled on one side of the hospital entrance – the Sisters in white on the other. The Karim took the scissors and cut the tape – and the Hospital was open.

After the Inspection, came tea in the Sisters' Mess. At the advice of the ADC, there was a pile of cushions for the Sheikh. "He never sits on a chair", said the ADC, "And no tea for the Karim, it's a fast day" he added. And by this time the poor Karim was probably dying for a cup of tea!

Of course, after a while, some guessed it was all a hoax. At one point I noticed a press photographer present. I warned him of the dire penalties if any pictures got into the newspaper, and for once the press was controlled!

Years later, Miss Pike, who became Principal Matron in Egypt, said to me "When I feel downhearted, I think of that day in Palestine, and have a smile."

In 1939, army wives were allowed into Palestine, but as no troopship passages were offered, we had to find the cheapest line of transport. Palestine is a land of oranges, and there is a special fleet of small ships that carries them to Europe. We also wanted

the car - our precious Austin 12 - so we negotiated for both Dulcie and the car to be brought to Haifa for £20 on a small Danish ship called the *Auslug*.

Dulcie was the only passenger, and had an adventurous journey. I met her and the ship at Alexandria, and signed on as a member of the crew for the rest of the trip.

We went ashore at Tel Aviv, but had to rush back because a storm was brewing. We managed to get on board before the anchor chain was unbolted and cast away. There was no harbour at Tel Aviv, and we had to ride the storm cruising up and down the coast.

At first we lived in a hotel in Haifa, but we thought it would be a happier plan to have our own home, particularly if Thomas arrived for his holidays. On the noticeboard in the Club we saw an advertisement for a very good furnished flat up on Mount Carmel, but it was expensive.

Anyway, I rang up the telephone number and said my say. "Would you pay half?" I was asked, astonishingly. "Oh yes", said I. And so we achieved for six months the most comfortable accommodation imaginable, together with the services of two Syrian maids who did everything for us.

Around us was open rocky country, and away down below was the blue sea of the Mediterranean. And here in this majestic and lovely situation occurred something that related to all the trouble in this

unhappy part of the world: our meeting with the Asfour family.

I am sure you understand, Judi, that the world contains many nations, who speak different languages and often have different skin colours. Many groups of people consider themselves superior and want to be dominant, controlling others. That is why your history books are so full of stories of wars and battles.

At this time in Palestine there was a tragic struggle between the Jews and the Arabs, at war with one another, and the British troops often got into trouble intervening between the two people. Yet all three parties in this situation claimed to believe in the same loving God.

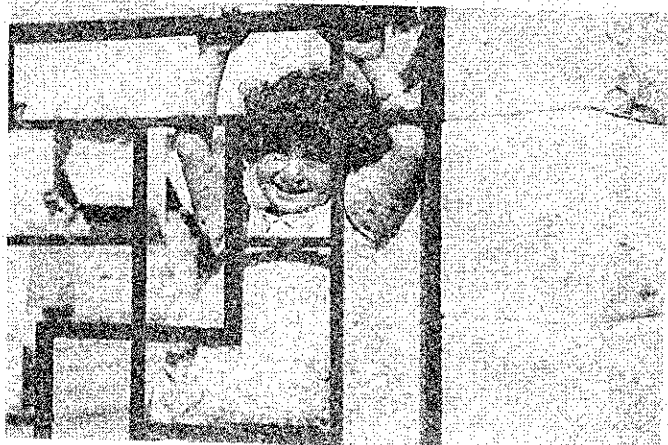
Next door to us on Mount Carmel was the home of a well-known Arab lawyer called Hanna Asfour. (Hanna is the Arabic form of Johanna. In English we take the first part of the name: John.)

British troops had twice surrounded Hanna's house and carried him off. They believed him to be a leader of the Arab Revolt against the British rulers, who were encouraging increased Jewish immigration into Palestine. So you can imagine that he and his wife were not feeling very friendly to English families.

But one day when I was at breakfast, there came a knock at the door. A little girl, aged three years, had called wishing "to see the officer". She spoke only Arabic. "He'll probably shoot you," said our Syrian

maid, not giving her any encouragement. "Never mind", said the little girl, and in she came.

I showed her the 'spring-up' electric toaster, which in that year was a novelty to me as well as to her. Her name was Houda Asfour.



HOUDA ASFOUR

Haifa, Palestine, 1938. Houda Asfour, Roy and Dulcie's young neighbour on Mount Carmel

That afternoon I saw her father Hanna at his garden gate, and we had a laugh together over his daughter's adventure. I said that my wife was sick. So his wife Emily called to see her. The Arabs were always very courteous.

At last Dulcie and I were able to put into practice the Oxford Group ideas we had been learning about in Egypt. For the first time we tried to put ourselves on

a real level with people of another race. The Asfours were Christians – there were many Christian Arabs in Haifa – and we called each other by our ‘Christian names’. Dulcie became Godmother to the new Asfour baby, Dalal, and at the christening – all carried out in the Arabic tongue of course – she was the only Englishwoman in the church. I reported to General Montgomery to get his blessing to these events.



Haifa, Palestine 1930s. Hanna Asfour, the prominent nationalist lawyer



Acre Prison, Palestine. Hanna Asfour (far left) imprisoned by the British, and wearing traditional Arab dress as a gesture of defiance

*Photo: from **Before the Diaspora** by Walid Khalidi, published by the Institute of Palestinian Studies, 1991*

When Thomas arrived by sea for his summer holidays, our friendship was strengthened further when he got to know the Asfour children, who were now beginning to learn English.

Taking coffee with the Asfours on the verandah, we often discussed the affairs of the country. "These ideas of brotherhood under God in Palestine are good" Hanna used to say, "but you can't have any Jews in it."

However, there came a day when he said very quietly and under no pressure from us, "There must be Jews in it."

Dulcie and I arranged a picnic to which we invited the Asfours and the Jewish family of our dentist. It was a difficult party. When later Hannah Asfour invited Jews into his house, he did so at the risk of his life, because some of his Arab friends must have been incensed at this conduct.

When the Second World War started soon after this, the Asfours gave hospitality to many British soldiers, before the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 forced the family, along with hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians, into exile. The Asfours relocated to Lebanon. Hanna's son, who had been to St George's, the English school in Jerusalem, was able to meet up with Thomas in Beirut in 1956, when Tom was travelling back with his family by ship to England, after doing National Service in Malaysia. Our friendship has lasted to this day.

I have told you this story at length, Judi, because it is the most important thing I have to tell you. Seemingly impossible things can happen, and ordinary people can help to engage with the troubles of the world.

But when I think back to that summer of 1939, despite the terrible conflict, I think of the beauty of Palestine. I remember in particular the bathing picnics. The water was warm and clear, and Thomas used to enjoy diving down to pick up shells from the sand.

Then in September came the terrible news of the outbreak of what was to be another World War. Our first family problem was what to do with Tom, who was now 12 years old. The three of us sat down together, and our thought was to try to find him an air passage home.

It seemed a fantastic idea, because so many people would be trying to get back to England. However, we went to Cook's and were told that there was just one passenger seat vacant on a plane due to leave very shortly. "But you would have to have Greek, Italian and French visas on the passport - very difficult now", the man said.

Nevertheless, Dulcie and Tom rushed off to Jerusalem, and in a miraculous kind of way obtained all the visas. Then we were off to the Sea of Galilee, where we saw a silvery seaplane resting on the water. Tom wasn't allowed to take his camera, so his last excellent colour photos never reached England.

We saw him into his place in the plane, but the seat next to him remained empty to the last. "It's for a very special person" was the rumour. But this time, Judi, you will not be surprised by any turn of events. This seat was reserved for Prince Philip, who joined the seaplane in Greece on his way to join the war

effort in the Navy. Yes, this was the very prince who was to become HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, husband of the Queen, a few years later. He let Tom have his own seat next to the window, and was very kind to him all the way home.

At first the big war made life easier for us in Palestine, because a truce was declared between the Jews and the Arabs. Both sides wanted to help us win the war against Hitler.

There remained the problem of Italy. Which way would Mussolini lead his nation? If it was to be against us, there might come the bombing of Haifa and its oil installations. I had passed an Instructors' Course in Passive Defence, so I was lent to the Haifa Corporation to advise on air-raid shelters.

Then there was the vulnerable situation of our military hospital. A plan was made, actually devised in part by Dulcie (although it would be hard to write that in a military manual) that in the event of war with Italy, at four hours' notice we should move to Nazareth, and occupy the Italian Terra Sancta Convent, and its neighbouring hostel the Casa Nova.

One day I was listening to the radio, when I heard Mussolini making a speech in Rome. I did not understand Italian, but I knew he was bringing Italy into the war alongside Hitler. I gave the alarm, and soon we were bundling patients, cupboards and medicine chests into a long line of lorries and on our way to Nazareth. But this time I was Officer in Command of the Surgical Division, a Lieutenant-

Colonel, and I took over the Casa Nova hostel for the surgical half of the hospital.

At first we were terribly short of water. Until the Royal Engineers brought in a pipeline, we depended on donkeys that brought tins of water on their backs. One Sister used to complain "It was never like this in the Royal Infirmary", until this saying became a byword.

Dulcie, with the help of Arab friends, found a small house for us to live in. It had a garden full of fruit trees – apples, lemons, apricots, pomegranates and mulberries. We were having a very happy time in an atmosphere of New Testament history, when a new posting order arrived.

I was to proceed to Cairo to join the Medical Advisory Staff at General Headquarters. I was to become Adviser in Radiology to the Middle East Forces.

The day came when Dulcie and I were on our way by car, across the desert plain which lies between Egypt and Palestine. At that time the sand-asphalt track was far from complete, and we travelled very slowly, taking turns at the steering wheel. Needless to say, our Austin 12 was packed with luggage, but we arrived at last to enjoy the comfort of the Carlton Hotel in Cairo.

Endnotes

The opening of the General Hospital in Haifa

It wasn't long before the hospital was busy, looking after the casualties of fighting in the region, as well as other patients. In another book of informal memoirs, Roy writes about treating General Bernard Montgomery when he contracted a chest infection:

My X-ray report, right or wrong, sent him home. He was GOC (General Officer Commanding), and he said, "I won't go" – but he went. And so I was a pawn in the events that led to the winning of the War. It was this way. By going home, General Montgomery left an area where, as it turned out, the Germans did not attack. (It might have been their plan to come south through Syria.) Montgomery went on to serve in Europe, and was then available to the Western Desert, where he infused a new spirit into the troops by which we conquered. [In hospitals one learned the 'temper' of the troops: how they felt.] And victory over Rommel's African Corps was the first to be won, essential to the final winning of the War. **Roy Oram, One Hundred Strange Stories (unpublished)**

"At this time in Palestine there was a tragic struggle between the Jews and the Arabs, at war with one another, and the British troops often got into trouble intervening between the two people."

I presume Roy was keeping this ultra-simple for a young reader. But reading this chapter 70 years after

the events in question, and knowing how the Palestinian situation has impacted millions of lives and never been resolved, it seems strange that Roy doesn't plainly acknowledge the role of Britain in creating this terrible mess.

The British-Israeli historian Avi Shlaim sums up the British position in Palestine at this time as follows:

British imperialism in the Middle East in World War I was intricate, to use a British understatement. In 1915 Britain promised Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, that they would support an independent Arab kingdom under his rule in return for his mounting an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, Germany's ally in the war..... In 1917 Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, promising to support the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

Thus, by a stroke of the imperial pen, the Promised Land became twice promised. Even by the standards of Perfidious Albion, this was an extraordinary tale of double-dealing and betrayal, a tale that continued to haunt Britain throughout the thirty years of its rule in Palestine.... Most curious, and certainly the most controversial [of the wartime pledges] was the Balfour Declaration. Here, wrote Arthur Koestler, was one nation promising another nation the land of a third nation.

Avi Shlaim, The Balfour Declaration And its Consequences in Yet More Adventures with Britannia, edited by Wm. Roger Louis, I. B. Tauris, 2005

"a well-known Arab lawyer called Hanna Asfour"

Hanna Asfour was an Arab nationalist barrister, a Christian and a landowner, who acted as the Palestine Arab Workers' Society's (PAWS) legal counselor for much of the 1930s and 1940s, and defended many Arabs charged during the troubles of 1929 and 1936-39 in Palestine. He had a keen interest in developing labour organisations in Palestine, and was a member of the Palestinian Delegation to the World Trade Union Congress.

"British troops had twice surrounded Hanna's house and carried him off"

Hansard, 23 November 1938, records that, in the House of Commons that day, Mr. John Parker MP "asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he is aware that Hanna Asfour, legal adviser of the Palestine Arab Workers' Society, was arrested in Haifa at the beginning of this month; whether he is still interned in a concentration camp at Acre; what was the reason for his arrest; and whether, in view of his important services to the Arab labour movement, he may be set at liberty?" The Secretary of State Mr. Malcolm Macdonald replied "I have no information on the matter, but have asked the High Commissioner for a report."

1940-43 War In The Middle East

(Egypt, with visits to Palestine, Syria, the Western Desert, Cyprus, Crete, Soudan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran)

As a matter of record, here are the names of the doctors who were on the Medical Advisory Staff at General Headquarters (GHQ) for the Middle East in Cairo. They were Small, Graham and Lees from Edinburgh, D. McAlpine, St John Buxton and H. Taylor from London, Hamilton Fairley from Australia, J.S.K.Boyd, Sidney Smith and myself from the Royal Army Medical Corps, and later our famous surgeon Jock Monro, who (as they say on the television) added a lot of Brightness.

Our task was to supervise the professional work of the hospitals, which were being established all over Egypt, Palestine and Syria, and medical units from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India were included. The main warfare was carried out in the Western Desert, and we visited the medical stations as far forward as possible. Once I accompanied St John Buxton to Tobruk. Five days later it was in German hands.

Occasionally we travelled further afield. There was a period in which GHQ Cairo took over control of Iraq and Iran, and at that time I visited Baghdad, Basra and Ahvaz. Up in the north of Iraq, I think at Mosul, I saw an emergency hospital in the alabaster mines.

All the wards and offices had walls of pure alabaster. It was like a fairy palace.

Once I visited Cyprus, and once, on the way to Khartoum, I was a passenger in a Nile steamboat, which had a great paddle wheel at the stern, like the old American Mississippi ships. At night we tied up to the riverbank, and a host of small boys from a village swarmed around us in tin-can boats. They moved about so quickly that it looked as if each boy and his boat belonged to each other, like a mermaid with a fish tail.

In the Soudan I saw, hanging to the trees, thousands of wonderful nests made by varieties of the weaverbird.

The Italian Army had surrendered in this part of the world, and so I was able to fly to Asmara in Eritrea. While there, I visited the Italian Opera House, and as I was the only British Official present, I was seated all alone in the Royal Box. A small Italian girl, seeing that there was so much room in my box, and so little in the one assigned to her family, climbed over the barrier and came and sat beside me, in spite of angry looks and beckonings from her parents.

I was often in Jerusalem. Once I saw it covered in snow, a rare event I believe. It was in Jerusalem that I met my older brother Arthur, your great-uncle Judi, from Australia. He had migrated there at the age of 19, and I had not seen him for well over thirty years. In spite of his age he had managed to enlist in the Australian Army as a Gunner.

As the war went on, many ships carrying equipment were lost at sea. To maintain the efficiency of the x-ray departments, it became necessary to purchase spare parts through the Red Cross, to set up an x-ray repair shop, and to make use of all captured Italian apparatus that could be discovered. To supply a need for more radiographers (x-ray technicians) a school was started in Cairo and another in Palestine for well-educated Arab and Jewish girls.

Because of my Regular Army training, I was sometimes used for duties other than radiological. At the time of a great advance, I was sent forward to act as Medical Member of a Committee to take over Benghazi. For me this was a big adventure, as the time was short. My instructions read: *Meeting Point the Cathedral Mole 1800 hours* etc. My driver and I were met by a desert storm soon after we left Cairo. We took turns at the wheel, seeing nothing of the road.

Approaching our destination we found the bridges down, and seas of mud to be crossed. En route we passed Cyrene, the ancient capital of Cyrenaica, so old and yet looking so new with all its streets and houses and temples, and a swimming bath still full of water. We reached the Benghazi Mole second in the race from Cairo.

Another adventure was a journey to Crete to represent the Medical Staff in planning its defence. In Crete I found that even a knowledge of classical Greek was useful. When I enquired for a river, using the ancient Greek word, I was understood. I spent a night at Knossos, where once lived the Minotaur.

One day I entered a Greek church. I was looking at a picture, when a man approached, put a lighted candle in my hand, and whispered "Tuesday". I think I must have been mistaken for a German spy. I'm afraid the end of the Cretan story is a sad one, because there was no expectation of the aerial attack that was to come.

Meanwhile in Egypt, Dulcie and I were by now established in a flat near the Gezira Club, overlooking the Nile. All wives worked on official duties. Dulcie was manager for Lady Wavell of the military canteen in the Ezbekiah Gardens.

Now there came a time in the latter half of 1942, when the German commander Rommel was threatening to over-run Egypt. There were high-up generals who were confident of our ultimate victory, but in Cairo there was certainly alarm and despondency.

On a certain Wednesday - Ash Wednesday! - at GHQ we burnt all our papers, in preparation for an invasion. I was instructed to send two lorry loads of spare equipment into Palestine. A circular letter advised senior officers to set a good example by evacuating their families.

So Dulcie departed, not from any fear or wish of hers, but because I felt it right to submit to the official plan. And I will include here in the following Chapter Dulcie's story, in her own words, of her adventures on the way back to England, when her ship was torpedoed in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean.

It was eight weeks before we had news of Dulcie's eventual arrival in England. In the meantime, while she was still crossing the Atlantic, came the Battle of Alamein and the defeat of Rommel. In a few months, the war in North Africa and the Middle East was over.

At this stage I asked for the command of a General Hospital, and so found myself taking over Number 9 General Hospital from Colonel Robin Atkins, someone whom I had known since boyhood in Ireland.

No. 9 was housed in the famous Heliopolis Hotel near Cairo, and surgical work 'Chest' and 'Plastic' was its special function. One day we were inspected by General Montgomery, and it was then I learned the real secret of his success as a commander. His personality electrified the troops. I have conducted other famous generals around hospitals, but the patients were never excited by their presence. To see and speak to 'Monty' was the event of his life for every soldier. General Montgomery never tired. As he went from bed to bed, he gave himself wholeheartedly to each patient.

Later I saw letters in circulation headed *PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE C-IN-C To be read out to all the Troops* in advance of the combined Allied forces attack in Western Europe, in the next phase of the War. The message read: *To us is given the honour of striking a blow for freedom which will live in history; and in the better days that lie ahead men will speak with pride of our doings. We have a great and a righteous cause. ... I want every soldier to know that I*

have complete confidence in the successful outcome of the operations that we are now about to begin.

Plans and preparations exactly carried out were important, but the active co-operation of all the individuals was the greatest factor in the winning of battles.



No. 9 General Hospital in Cairo, 1942. General Montgomery is greeted by Roy and the matron



DRAWN BY E. STAMMERS & GEN: HOSPT



No. 9 Hospital, Cairo, 1942. General Montgomery visits patients, escorted by Roy (right)

1942 Dulcie Is Torpedoed At Sea

Written by Dulcie Oram

In those days in Cairo, when I went down to work in the canteen every morning, I always left two suitcases packed for sudden emergency – all I could carry myself. Captain Jasper Maskelyne, a friend of ours who was staying in our flat at the time, gave me a powerful electric torch with a strap for my wrist, which I left with my cases. It turned out to be a valuable present, as you will see.

My name was down to leave voluntarily. I was told I could go all the way to England, to join your mother, Judi, and your Uncle Tom, whom I had not seen for three years. So one day, on 3 September 1942, orders came - *Train leaves Cairo today* - and I had time to take all our baggage. From the moment of boarding the train and waving your grandad goodbye, I could neither write nor receive letters, for security reasons, and no one knew where or how I was for the next eight weeks.

The first two days were spent in Suez, in a Families Camp behind barbed wire. Then we went aboard the *SS Oronsay*, a big Orient Liner, and off we went down the Red Sea with the *Duchess of Atholl*, the same size, behind us.

Our first stop was Durban. I had a very pleasant day ashore with kind Oxford Group friends, and we had plans for a long drive inland the next day. But alas, in

the night all the women and children were secretly transhipped to the *Duchess of Atholl*, and the ship sailed off in the early dawn, alone, for Cape Town.

At Durban, by the way, I had my first news of your Uncle Richard for many months. He had called on our friends only two weeks earlier on his way from England to the Burma border, to join the famous 'Forgotten 14th Army'. Our ships had crossed.

At Cape Town all the lights were ablaze - no blackout! The sight of Table Mountain and all the twinkling lights was wonderful. I was lucky enough to be able to have a very happy week ashore in this lovely place. Then off I went on the *Duchess of Atholl* again, as it sailed unescorted up the South West coast of Africa, and far out towards South America, I think.



Duchess of Atholl

Photo: from the Allen Collection

Nine days later, on 10 October, I was just awake, and my cabin-mate was in the bathroom next door. We felt a shudder, as if a giant had shaken the ship, and a dull thud – and out went all the lights. We dressed by the light of my torch, and expected signals. We had had practices every day on signals and lifeboat drill. So many hoots for torpedo attack, so many for a fire, so many for an air attack. But NO signal came!

We took a blanket each and went out into the passageway. Others appeared. An officer said, "Better go to your boats". This everyone did, quietly and rather puzzled.

On our way up there was another thud and shake. On deck it was a grey early morning – dull, cloudy sky, and a big swell in the dark sea made the ship roll. I don't remember any orders. We got into our lifeboat: 61 people – 38 women and children, invalids, two sailors, two gunners and others. I sat by the older sailor in the stern. He said "I am in command, what I say goes".

We began to be lowered – oh so slowly – to the sea far below. As the ship rolled we crashed into its side, and as we had no fenders it seemed as if the boat would break each time. Finally we flopped into the water, and washed up and down beside the *Duchess*, while men were trying to get the oars out that people were sitting on.

At last we were moving away. I saw the third torpedo (no doubt now what had happened!) streak under our boat and hit the *Duchess* forward, making a fountain shoot up. I was later told that this third

torpedo broke the ship's back. It certainly began to sink faster. We struggled to get as far away from her as we could. I was so frightened, I did not want our rowers to stop and pick up people who had been pitched into the water when the last torpedo upset the boat being lowered after ours. However I'm glad to say we did stop and when I saw them I felt ashamed.

At the same time we got a shower of bits of orange, because the hold that was blown up had been full of fruit! Our lifeboat began to fill with water, and the oranges choked the pumps we were using. I wish I had been told a lifeboat would not sink, for it seemed as if it must. Actually, though, we all got uncomfortably wet. We managed to get rid of most of the water in her during the morning.

Just after the *Duchess* had tipped up and finally slipped under the sea, the German U-boat that had sunk us came up beside our lifeboats. "What is the name of your ship?" one of the submarine crew shouted in very good English. As we did not answer they went on to the next lifeboat. Before disappearing again, they said, "You are 1300 miles from Freetown. Sorry for the inconvenience!"

When we first got into the lifeboat, Judi, I was so terrified I could hardly think, even though I behaved quite properly, as almost everyone did.

I said to myself, "This is the time to listen to God, not just to pray desperately for help". But it only seemed like ten radios were all blaring different programmes in my mind – no quietness, no clear

thoughts. Then one thought did come clearly to me. "God promised St Paul the lives of everyone in his ship when he was shipwrecked". I nearly laughed to myself. "I'm not a great saint like Paul!" I thought. Yet it began to make me think of the others around me. My fears came under control, and my mind became quieter. I was able to see the needs of others and help them. As you will read later, every single person in 23 lifeboats from the *Duchess of Atholl*, spread over miles of rough sea, was eventually saved.

Most people were seasick. After two gallant boys of 12 and 14 (who had been in Egypt after terrible times in Malta) had managed to get the sail up, we all had ship's biscuits and a measure of water. It took quite a time handing the measure to each of 61 people. I dished it out from a large container under my knees.

Then it began to get dark. A lady began the hymn *Abide With Me* and everyone joined in. Then someone said the Lords Prayer. Some men took shifts in trying to row. Others had to continue bailing and pumping. The old bosun by me had to keep awake at the tiller, to keep the boat's head on to the swell. I talked to him, and tried to look after two ladies who were in a pretty bad way just below me. The stern of the boat was the only part decked, where anyone could rest and keep fairly dry. We dozed uncomfortably as much as we could.

Once or twice we heard the purr of a submarine and smelt the diesel oil, and we knew the U-boats were

amongst us. I will never forget the sound of their engines on the water and the smell of the oil!

Such a long night, though it was never black dark. Then dawn – grey, grey dawn. At about 8 am I thought I saw smoke on the horizon, but I didn't dare say anything. Then a few minutes later came a shout from the other end of the boat, and hands were pointing. Alas, we knew a single ship, even if it were British, would not dare to stop for us in such U-boat-infested waters. But we were happy to see the smoke and then the ship getting nearer. Then came a flying boat – a Sunderland I think – with the Allies' white star painted on her. It circled and circled low over us and all the other boats while the ship stopped three times and picked up all 23 lifeboats, scattered over a wide area.

Our turn came at about 12.30 midday. It seemed we'd never reach the ship. Then a loud voice came over the water "Only a few more pulls, and a good cup of tea!"

Most of us couldn't climb the rope ladders let down for us. They are never easy, and when the end is at one moment yards above you, and the next moment dragging in the rough sea, then it's awful! However, the sailors let down a great rope net over the side of the ship, under the ladders, and they swarmed down and pushed and pulled us up. Some sick people had to be taken on board in a 'bosun's chair'. Finally we got our hot tea!

Now our rescue ship was a small cargo boat that had been taken over by the Royal Navy. It had a crew of

170 and was very crowded. But they took on 830 of us from the *Duchess of Atholl*. That was everyone from the torpedoed ship except for four men killed by the first torpedo in the engine room. So there were a thousand of us on board this ship, *HMS Corinthian*.

Our lifeboats had to be thrown off, and we were still four or five days' journey away from Freetown in West Africa. We were really in greater danger with only six small lifeboats on board now, but the Navy made us feel absolutely safe, even though very crowded! Most of us slept like sardines on deck, just leaving a passage to the guns in case they were needed. Life belts don't make very nice pillows, but as we were near the Equator we were not cold.

We queued for meals in a long line round and round the deck. The food was excellent too! It was dished out of buckets. Plates had to be handed back as soon as possible, to be washed in another bucket, and used again later in the queue. So meals hardly stopped during the daylight hours!

After two days we were met by two Destroyers, and escorted for another two days until we reached Freetown Harbour. There we were transhipped in open barges, and during a tropical deluge, onto a big liner called the *Nea Hellas*. It was so hot that we dried off fairly quickly. We found survivors from no less than ten big ships being packed into this ship, women, children and civilians. Soldiers and sailors boarded the *Carnarvon Castle* beside us. We learned at this point that the poor *SS Oronsay*, on which I had begun this journey from Egypt, had gone down too.

Lots of brightly coloured wools were brought on board and some old clothes for those in need. Over the next two weeks all who could knit worked hard, using slivers of wool the sailors gave us, to make warm clothes for the children. Here I was able at last to get a comb and a toothbrush and a shoe-cleaning outfit. All the baggage I now had was in a wee sailcloth bag!

After a day or two in harbour, we set off from Freetown, the *Carnarvon Castle* beside us, with an escort of two Destroyers, on the last two perilous weeks of our journey. Sometimes we seemed to be sailing north, other times east, or even west. We passengers were told nothing.

One morning I went on deck early. A red misty sun was rising straight ahead, so we were sailing due East. "We are going in!" I said. A few hours later we were sailing up the Clyde in late autumn sunshine. How beautiful it was!

Owing to official secrecy and muddle, we had some difficulty getting off the next morning. My cabin mate and I finally helped to carry some children who had no shoes half a mile in the cold and blackout to a tram, which took us into Glasgow. We put them onto a train, and found some buns and coffee in the back of a canteen, as we had had no food all day. At 11pm that night I was sitting on a luggage truck, kicking my heels, waiting for a train to Chester to join your mother, Judi. Chérie was working as a land girl at Tarporley in Cheshire. I remember sitting there in jersey slacks, an old grey coat, and a red scarf round

my hair -with my wee sailcloth bag - thinking, "I shall never be so carefree on a journey ever again!"

Endnotes

"Richard had called....on his way from England to the Burma border, to join the famous Forgotten 14th Army"

'Forgotten' because this army, commanded by General Slim, was so far from Europe, and its heroic operations in the Burma Campaign received minimal media attention, and remained obscure to the general public for a long time after the war finished.

"Dulcie is torpedoed at sea"

A number of personal accounts of the sinking of the Duchess of Atholl can be found on the internet, including on www.merchantnavyofficers.com and www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories.

On both these sites, one of the most interesting angles on the story is given by John Trevor Liney, a young naval telegraphist posted on Ascension Island at the time, who picked up the distress signal from one of the Duchess of Atholl lifeboats. Liney recalls how, being a bit bored that morning during a four-hour 'watch' shift, he had actually disobeyed orders and wandered off the distress band in order to find some dance music. After listening to the music 'for only a few seconds', he heard "the faintest stutter of the SOS from

behind the music". After fine-tuning, he made contact and established the ship's position, just before the lifeboat's batteries failed completely. Realising he was the only recipient of the distress call, Liney notified his superiors, and HMS Corinthian, which happened to be in the area, was despatched to find survivors. Liney wrote "The sobering thought that, had I not broken the rules for those few seconds on this occasion, the lifeboats may never have been located – certainly not in time – has stayed with me for 62 years."

I don't think Dulcie ever knew this part of the story, and the debt that she and her fellow-travellers owed to Liney.

"the poor SS Oronsay, on which I had begun this journey from Egypt, had gone down too"

The SS Oronsay was sunk by an Italian submarine the day before the Duchess of Atholl. The majority of its survivors were eventually rescued by a British warship and brought to Freetown, but a smaller party were picked up by a Vichy French ship and interned in Dakar.

**1943 - 45 The Second Front: France, Belgium,
Holland, Germany**

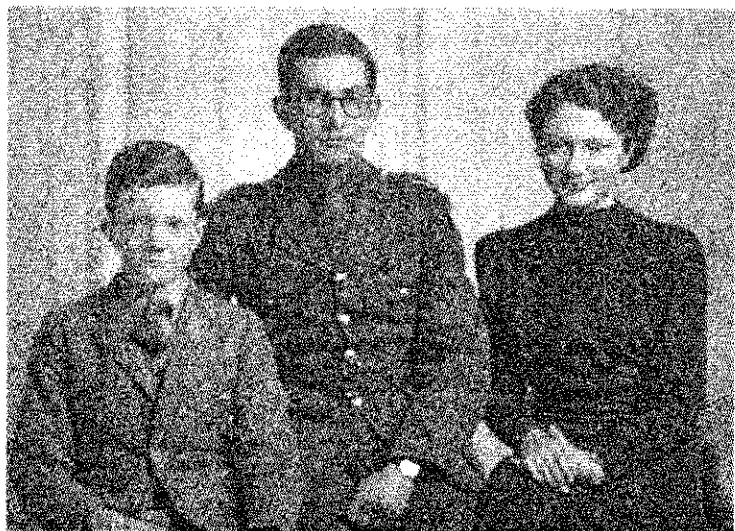
Roy's story continues

And then we were all away home in a big convoy of transports, a great force of trained troops leaving North Africa to form the backbone of the new Liberation Army. We were to join the 21st Army Group, formed in London in 1943 under Montgomery's command, and assigned to Operation Overlord, the invasion of Europe.

One early morning we steamed up the Firth of Clyde, and when we landed, the soldiers were so glad to see the familiar big dray horses, they fed them their sandwiches, which were their whole day's rations!

No. 9 was reorganised as a General Hospital (600 beds) for duty in the rear of General Dempsey's Second Army, which was to spearhead Montgomery's advance across the Low Countries into Northern Germany.

First we went to Knutsford, which was conveniently near Tirley Garth, Tarpoley, where Chérie was spending the war years as a market gardener, and where Dulcie, after recovery from her maritime adventure, went to help with the cooking. There also I met Thomas on holiday from Eastbourne College.



The War years: Tom was at school, Richard joined the 'Forgotten Army' in Burma, Chérie became a land girl



England 1943. Roy in Britain to prepare No. 9 Hospital for the Normandy invasion

Then the hospital moved to Woolwich (Royal Artillery Barracks) where we practised daily marching up Shooter's Hill in order to be fit for landing on the coast of France following the D-Day invasion.

Next, getting nearer to the South Coast, we moved to the castle home of the Duke of Richmond at Goodwood. There we practised erecting hospital tentage with the greatest possible speeds.

My bedroom was in a round tower, the very doors were rounded. On one wall there were two great ornamented bell ropes for summoning the domestic staff, who, of course, weren't there any more. The Officers' Mess was in a room with a painted ceiling. I had read up the story of Goodwood, so one evening I was able to interest our guests, American Officers, by telling them that the Duke who had devised the painting of the ceiling was the same one who had put so much effort into trying to prevent the breakaway of the American Colonies.

Our last move was to some woods near Southampton. Thousands of troops were hidden away under the trees. They weren't allowed to wash clothes, as there was a fear that a lot of fluttering garments might give away the situation to enemy aeroplanes. What I remember is music, lots of music from radios, and again on the transport ship when we crossed to an artificial harbour in France.

By this time the fighting was well away inland. For us the first 24 hours were just a picnic. Each man carried his own rations, compressed into a packet,

and we made bivouacs (shelters) with our groundsheets. We were allotted three fields at Ranchi, near Bayeux, for the hospital, so it was easy to arrange one for the Surgical Division, one for the Medical Division, and the remaining one for our accommodation and stores. I was able to get the use of a bulldozer to make passageways between the sections. Soon we were erecting the great hospital marquees. It was like setting up a circus.

I was reading aloud a notice fastened to a tree on the roadside, when a French woman passed. She heard me say the word *fortement*. "Non, c'est pas 'fawt-meant'" she said, "C'est 'forrrtement'!" And I just knew how poor my French was.

When I visited the surgical wards filled with wounded, I realised the miracle of healing which had become possible since World War I. Now, owing to antibiotic drugs, and in particular to penicillin, there was no more sepsis (infection). All the faces looked bright and hopeful.

Then came a move forward to Rouen. The town was very battered, but in the centre, undamaged, was the memorial to Jeanne d'Arc. Everywhere, stuck on walls, were pictures of the poor saint being burned at the stake, with the words beneath *Les Anglais revenants* (The English are coming back). These posters were meant to embitter the French against us, but I don't think they had much effect.

Our instructions were to take over a tall modern hospital, used by the Germans and now left empty. To my horror I found that the main electric supply

cable had been destroyed. In such a hospital we could not even convey the patients to the wards without the use of the lifts.

I rushed off in a car to enlist the help of the Royal Engineers. With the cable repaired, every bit of apparatus began to function, and we soon took on the aspect of a smart city hospital.

The next move was a big jump forward in the rear of the Second Army, all the way to Antwerp in Belgium. Part of the retreating German Army was still only the other side of the River Elbe. In fact, a Military Police Officer told me that a German Patrol had taken a wrong turning, and marched back along a tunnel right into the arms of the British Military Police. It was a story I never knew whether or not to believe.

In Antwerp we took over the Colonial University and a big school for our hospital. We, the staff, were billeted in houses in the neighbourhood. Belgian ladies came with gifts of fruit. One lady, Madame Meyhi, said to me "I would like to have an officer billeted in my home." I had one look at her kind face and said, "You can have me."

A couple of years later she and her husband flew over to London to attend the wedding of your parents, Judi. And Dulcie went to Belgium for the wedding of the Meyhis' son.

It was easy and pleasant to live in Antwerp – and so many people could speak English. The one trouble was the bombing. Antwerp was important to the

British Army because of its docks, and the Germans wanted to destroy its usefulness.

ANTWERP
With
The
MEYHIS



Antwerp, Belgium 1944. Roy with M. and Mme Meyhi



No. 9 Hospital, Antwerp 1944. Staff of Newman Ward

With the winter came the snow, and the Hoofnagel (in English this means 'hoof nail'!) children used to give me a ride on their toboggan. One day I met their father. "Couldn't you get these children out of Antwerp with all this bombing?" I asked. Mr. Hoofnagel did not reply, but the next day the children came along to my office with a letter and a parcel. "I have a large number of employees," the letter read. "I cannot arrange to evacuate their families, so I feel my family must take its chance with theirs. But please accept these etchings as a token of my appreciation of your thought for my children." These pictures, Judi, hang on the walls of the staircase in Croydon, where we are now living.

At Christmas time we had Christmas trees and decorations in the wards, just as if it were peacetime.



The Officers' Mess, Antwerp 1944. (Roy is seated)

With the spring of 1945 came the next advance. We occupied buildings at Venray in Holland, as near to the Rhine (and the German border) as possible. One day we saw squadrons of aeroplanes overhead, many of them towing gliders.

Very soon the wounded began to arrive. I happened to see the name on the label of one of them. "Could you be a son of Colonel Sarsfield of the RAMC?" I asked him. "Yes", he said. So I was able to order his evacuation to his father's hospital at Brussels. By a strange chance, Sarsfield and I, who had lived for years in the same village in County Cork, were now commanding the two hospitals, he No. 8 and I No. 9.

Then happened the worst imaginable tragedy for a hospital in our situation. We were depending on a normal civilian water supply, and a shell or a bomb blew up our water main! We had to use water carts and lorries to fetch water from a distance, and carry water to the operating theatres and wards in buckets and pails. The Church of England padre became O.C. Water Supply!

The Battle won, and the casualties evacuated, we were ready to move forward again in the wake of the Second Army.

But this time our task was different and unexpected. Along with another hospital we had to take over the care of the survivors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northern Germany.

A dread disease, typhus, was rampant in Belsen among the survivors, and we had to fight this with

DDT powder. That is all I am saying in this history about this difficult episode, except for two short stories about the surviving (200) children.

The typhus had been overcome, and we were becoming more cheerful. The sergeants of No. 9 suggested we give a party for the children. Now I happened to see Miss Mary Churchill, now Mrs Soames, and then an officer in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (the women's branch of the British Army during the Second World War). I asked her to come and see a sight worth seeing. The children were excited to see the tables spread with pretty cakes and jellies, and in such a short time all the good things had disappeared.

Then we started a school, and the interesting thing is that it was carried on in eight languages. I visited it one morning, and the children in their various classes said "Good morning" to me in eight different ways.

Our last move was into Hamburg, which had surrendered to the British five days before the final official surrender of the Nazi German forces on 8 May 1945 (Victory in Europe Day). The war was over! As we were crossing a bridge leading into the city on Sunday morning, I heard on the car radio a Service of Thanksgiving being held in Westminster Abbey.

The day came for the dissolution of the Second Army. General Dempsey addressed representatives of all the combatant troops. The next day officers of all the non-combatant units (Royal Army Medical

Corps, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, etc.) were paraded. To my surprise, I was the Senior Officer of this parade, and had to take command of it and present it to General Dempsey.

In his speech, the General, after thanking us for good work, told us that we had been through perhaps the biggest military operation in history. He told us how, at the last conference before D-Day, General Smuts had said, "Gentlemen, this is such a tremendous operation. Let us be quiet for a few minutes and think once more: is this the right way?"

Endnote

"we had to take over the care of the survivors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp...that is all I'm saying about this difficult episode"

Roy did not to talk or write much about his shocking experiences at Belsen, which had been liberated by the British 11th Armoured Division in April 1945. The stark facts are that around 53,000 prisoners were discovered inside, most of them starving and seriously ill, and more than 10,000 of these were too weak to recover, and died after Liberation. A further 13,000 corpses were found lying around the camp unburied.

The BBC's Richard Dimbleby accompanied the British troops into the camp on 15 April, and his harrowing report can be heard online on the BBC News website.

Another eyewitness that day was the actor Michael Bentine, who wrote "I've tried, without success, to describe it from my own point of view, but the words won't come. To me, Belsen was the ultimate blasphemy."

I presume Roy felt the same way, though he did write elsewhere about his arrival at Belsen:

"Cartloads of corpses. This was the sight that greeted me at the entrance to Belsen Concentration Camp. At the first opportunity I spoke on behalf of decent burial for the dead. The discovery of a store of unused paillasses (thin mattresses) solved the problem of the provision of coverings. Henceforth the dead were laid out decently, and burials were conducted in an orderly manner. Outside each of the 75 buildings in our 10,000-bedded hospital was a school blackboard, inscribed thus:

MALE	VACANT BEDS.....	DEAD.....
FEMALE	VACANT BEDS.....	DEAD.....

This gave the requisite information to the ambulance drivers bringing in fresh cases, and the collectors of the bodies of those who had died. (The collectors were Hungarian Cavalrymen. A note from the Second Army HQ told us "Deal tactfully with these Hungarian troops. It is not yet known whether they are to be treated as allies or prisoners of war.")

A. Roy Oram, One Hundred Strange Stories
(unpublished)

A full account of the hospitalisation of Belsen appeared in the British Medical Journal (Belsen Camp: A Preliminary Report, W.R.F. Collis, 9 June

1945), and is widely available including on the website www.bergenbelsen.co.uk. This account describes "the colossal medical task of transforming a death-trap into a hospital, though it could not be regarded as a commitment which came strictly under the Army Medical Services, but the dictates of humanity required quick action."

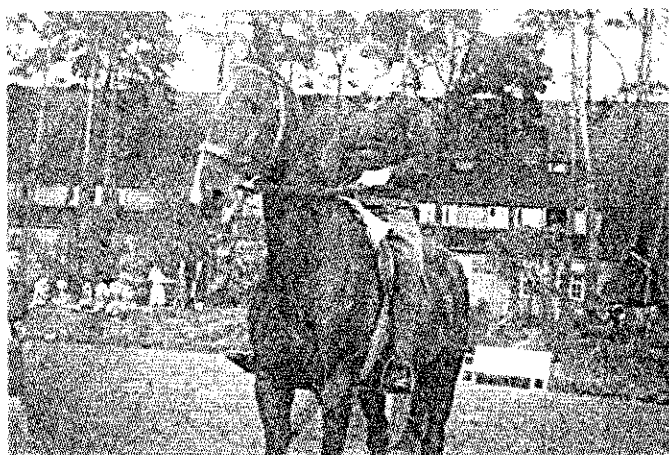
The report lists the first British medical units sent to the camp, and continues, "Some days later these were reinforced by No. 9 General Hospital – 600 beds (Col. A.R. Oram), and these have been followed up by another C.C.S. and another general hospital of 1200 beds. The work carried out by these medical units...produced results which have to be seen to be believed. The setting up of hospital accommodation of 17,000 beds in ordinary barrack buildings is one of the monumental tasks undertaken and accomplished".

The report goes on to describe other achievements, including finding supplies and equipment and recruiting staff, on a vast scale, and tackling the problems of hygiene, disinfestation, typhus and rehabilitation.

1945 -46 After The War

No. 9 General Hospital was now under the British Army of the Rhine, in the British Zone of occupied Germany. We established ourselves at Hamburg-Rissen, in the old quarters of the German Luftwaffe (air force).

German labour was easily available at the time, so with 20 gardeners the area around the hospital was tidied up and planted with grass seed - with chains and white posts to protect it. I wonder if all this grass has survived to this day. I wish I could see it.

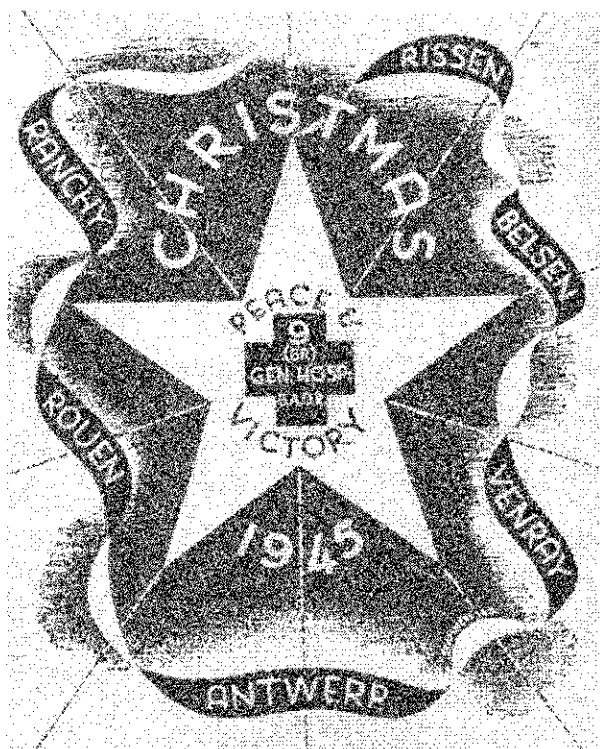


*Hamburg 1945. Roy taking part in the No.9
Hospital Sports Day, riding 'George'*

By Army Orders I had to offer to my British staff accommodation for their wives. But this could only be made available by turning the already

overcrowded Germans out of their homes. No one on my staff wished to accept the offer at this price.

At the approach of Christmas, a choir was carefully trained to sing carols in the wards on Christmas Eve 1945. We obtained authority to hold a party for the German children, and each child was presented with a toy, manufactured by the soldiers themselves in the hospital workshops. On Christmas Day two officers turned themselves into reindeers, to drive me round the wards dressed as Santa Klaus!



No. 9 Hospital's Christmas card in 1945 charted the Hospital's locations over the previous 18 months

And then it was 1946, and in that year I bid goodbye to No. 9. There had been so many adventures with No. 9, in so many places, from 1943 to 1946!

I moved to London and took over command of Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital in SW1, where I had served as a junior 22 years before, and where, as a patient, I am writing some of these memoirs 16 years later. But the hospital in 1946 was in a sad state owing to bomb damage. There was a bigger section of it (600 beds) at Horley.

About half the staff both in London and Horley were German prisoners-of-war. My first effort at improvement at Horley was to get gardeners and mowing machines. Fortunately Dulcie and I were able to have a share in a flat in London, so I was home every second night.

And then came two family marriages. In September 1946 Richard married Joy in West Monkseaton, Northumberland - once again an association with this county. Having joined *HMS Test* on the River Tyne, and later the Northumberland Fusiliers in World War I, we now had a family connection with Northumberland. Joy, with her twin sister Mabel as her bridesmaid, were a charming pair.

And from our own London home in Welbeck Street, your mother, Judi, was married in December of that same year. Chérie looked lovely with all her bridesmaids in the wedding to William Conner at St Peter's Church, Vere Street.

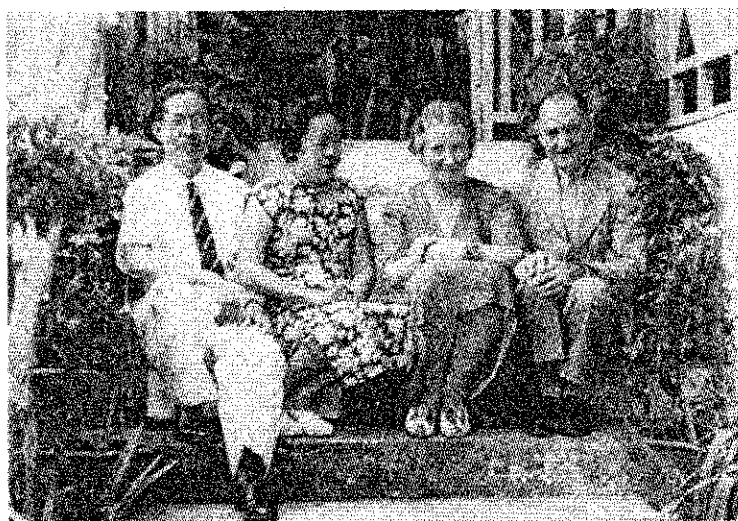


London December 7 1946. Roy and Dulcie at the wedding of Chérissy to William Conner, with William's brother Arthur and sister Erica

1947 -53 Journeys In Asia And The Pacific

The next episodes were not so happy. In 1947 I was appointed Deputy Director of Medical Services Burma. We had a party in London with a pagoda centrepiece on the table. But Burma elected to leave the British Commonwealth, and I never went there.

Then I was Deputy Director of Medical Services for the Far East Land Forces, based in Singapore, a British colony moving towards self-government. But unfortunately I was invalided with arthritis, so it was home to London again for sick leave.



Singapore 1948. Roy and Dulcie with friends Eunice and Dr Thio Chan Bee, who played a role in the Singapore and Malaysian independence negotiations

In 1948 I was once again in command of the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital until my retirement from the Army in January 1949. My last task in the Royal Army Medical Corps was to close up, gradually, the Horley branch of the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital.

At this point Thomas was a medical student at the Middlesex Hospital, and we needed more money than an army pension provided to keep things going.

I had served in the Navy and the Army, and now I joined a third Service: the Mercantile Marine (Merchant Navy). On the P& O line, I made voyages as Ship's Surgeon in the *Carthage*, the *Corfu*, and the *Ranchi*, and short trips in the *Canton* and *Chusan* as well as journeys on the *Orcades* and the *Rangitiki* as far as New Zealand.

My best adventure was to Australia in the *Ranchi* in 1950, in medical charge of 950 migrants.

Most of the parents spent their time chasing round after their children. But not so the Waldrons. After breakfast they settled down with rugs and books and deck chairs. Their elder daughters looked after the rest of the nine children.

On 1 April (April Fools Day) I sent them a telegram from the Governor-General of Australia. For a time there was great excitement. "I don't think April 1st would mean anything to the Governor-General of Australia", said Mrs Waldron hopefully.

I had a Russian assistant called Dr Skinemoffski. He wore dark glasses and a beard. Curiously he and I were never seen together at one time.

Before we reached Port Melbourne we were given over the tannoy the numbers of the trams and their routes around Melbourne. I noted the number of the tram for the Zoo. Then the opportunity came to have a day in the big city.

On arrival at the main station, I asked one of the first men I saw "Which way to find No. 46 Tram? I want to go to the Zoo." He looked me over in amazement, as if I was somebody quite out of his understanding. "I didn't know" he said "that there was anyone in Melbourne unaware of the fact that there has been a tram strike for the past fortnight!"

As we approached Sydney Harbour by sea the cliffs looked so bare and uninhabited that the thought occurred to me that we were looking at Australia in the same way as its first European discoverers.

In New South Wales I met for the first time many nephews and nieces and great-nephews and great-nieces. My brother Arthur was known here as 'Pat', and I was able to spend a day at his station called Boggy Creek. Following heavy rains the grass was so thick that there was no sign of the sheep. To find them the dogs were taken to clear patches of ground. There they leaped into the air to see or smell the direction to be taken.

My last story will be from a voyage taken the following year (1951) to New Zealand in the

Rangitiki. As we drew near to Pitcairn Island a message was received to say that there was a woman requiring medical attention. (There was no doctor on the island).

It was about midnight when a great long boat drew alongside, and about 50 islanders, men and women, clambered aboard, carrying baskets and carvings, and wonderful fruit to sell. Some were dark-skinned. They did not look English, and yet they spoke English.

These were the descendants of the mutineers of the *Bounty*. The sick woman was called Mrs Young, and I believe that a Young was one of the mutineers. Now this is of interest because at this time, in 1962, another *Bounty*, a replica of the original ship, has been built and is sailing the sea for the sake of making a film of the story.

In January 1953 Dulcie and I moved to 9 Chichester Road, Croydon, a large four-storey Victorian house bought by our son-in-law Bill. It was divided into four separate apartments, and had a big garden with a lawn and many trees.

I remember it was apple-blossom time when Tom and Vivian were married that year, because we used apple blossom from the garden to decorate the church (All Souls, Langham Place).

And you, Judi, were at this wedding, brought to the church in a carrycot, and afterwards all the guests were so pleased to see you!

1953 - 66 Retirement Years

So this is the end of my story, because Dulcie and I are now settled in Croydon, not so far from where we both grew up in South London.

The adventures on land and sea belong now to our children and grandchildren. As I write, only Richard and Joy are in England. Chérie and Bill are in Sao Paolo, Brazil and Tom and Vivian in Scotia, USA.

And soon it will be your turn, Judi, and your brother Patrick's turn, and your cousins' turn too - David, Penny, Felicity and Robert - for your own adventures around the world.

Postscript

By Judi Conner

In fact, Roy did have one more home with Dulcie after this. Shortly after he completed these memoirs, they went to live in a residential caravan in Hampshire's New Forest. Roy had experienced heart problems at this time, and wanted to move to a smaller place of their own. The house in Chichester Road, which he and Dulcie had looked after for many years, again became the home of Chérie and Bill, who returned to Britain after two years in Brazil.

Neighbours in the caravan park were surprised to find an army brigadier in their midst. But the fact was that Roy and Dulcie had often struggled to live 'well' on an army salary, at a time when officers were expected to have sources of extra private income. Most of their savings had gone towards the education and professional training of their children. They could not afford a larger home of their own, had they wanted one.

Life might have been very different had Roy not completed his medical studies during the First World War, and gone straight into the services. As a civilian doctor, Roy would probably have ended his days in a fine house, but without experiencing such adventures, in so many different countries.

As it was, the caravan in the peace and quiet of the English countryside suited Roy and Dulcie well after a life permanently on the move, and with its three

bedrooms they could still enjoy visits from the family. Dulcie often said they had had about 50 home moves in all, from post to post around the world, and now the travelling could stop.

Roy died in March 1966 at the age of 75. Dulcie moved back to live with Chérie and her family in Croydon, and died in 1971.



London 1956. Roy and Dulcie with Chérie and Bill Conner, and their grandchildren Patrick and Judi

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