

HOW I TRIED, BUT FAILED TO SAVE THE BRITISH EMPIRE
OR ALTERNATIVELY, WHY I FLED TO NEW ZEALAND, By Jim Butler

This is how I describe my efforts in the RAF before coming to New Zealand in 1955.

But to begin in the beginning, when the Second World War began in 1939, I was 14 years old, living in a little market town, Henley-on-Thames, in Oxfordshire, between London and Oxford. (It is now in the millionaire's belt round London) With my parents, we were living in Berkshire Rd which is on a hill (number 5) we looked out onto green fields, as this street was then right on the edge of the town. These green fields we looked out on all those years ago are now covered with many more streets and houses.

My mother, Edie Butler, joined the Women's Voluntary Service, the WVS, serving meals in Henley's wartime British Restaurant in Duke St that provided cheap basic meals. Her uniform was a buff coloured smock with green piping and a similar coloured wide brimmed hat. My father, Jack Butler, became a Civil Defence Firewatcher spending three or four nights a week on the top of a tall building. He was given a flashy armband and a tin helmet. He was on shift with other Firewatchers, on the lookout for fires started by incendiary bombs. No bombs of any sort fell on Henley. But two high explosive bombs fell nearby. One killed a goose!

Henley was far enough away from London to be largely unaffected by the Battle of Britain or the subsequent Blitz. However we had evacuees billeted on us, both adults and children. These came and went. Some stayed for a few days, others for months. Also my schooling was disrupted somewhat. Henley Grammar School had to share its premises with a secondary school that had been evacuated from London for a while. One school used the premises during the mornings, the other school in the afternoons. As a consequence, we must have missed quite a bit of education.

Henley Grammar School was an old style secondary school, the fee paying, rugby playing school in a building that had started its life as a mansion built for a wealthy owner. It had very fine surrounds with gardens, trees and a large playing field. The woodworking and chemistry classrooms were in what had been the stables, probably because I was no good at rugby, I have hated it ever since. In every game I seemed to get either flattened into the cold mud or on to a hard frozen ground.

In 1941, my teachers decided that I, along with 17 others, had no show of passing School Certificate. So to keep the school's pass rate up, we were not allowed to sit this exam. My father who was paying 5 pounds a term to keep me at school, about 2 weeks wages at that time, decided I should leave school, which suited me fine. I went to work for a local farmer, Mr. Borlase, haymaking, for 6 pence an hour. (Present purchasing power, about \$10) I then carried on doing other odd jobs for him until Christmas 1941.

The war was going badly at that time and knowing I would be conscripted when I was 18, my father, who had spent time in the trenches in World War 1, wasn't going to have his only boy conscripted into the Army. As a person who had spent his working life in service, first as a footman, then a butler, he considered it very important to get me into what he considered would be a proper trade. Finding the RAF were training boys between 15 and 17 in aircraft trades, the Apprentice scheme, it was arranged I would sit the entrance exam. Surprisingly, I passed quite well, particularly in math. This was probably why I was selected to train as a Wireless Mechanic at Cranwell.

So on the day when about 140 000 British in Singapore surrendered to about 50 000 Japanese in Feb 1942

(not that I knew that at the time) my mother took me by train to London (Paddington) and then by underground onto Marylebone Station for a tearful farewell. With about 300 other young lads, we were shepherded onto a train to Wendover in Buckinghamshire, and from there, to near- by RAF Halton.

The first memory I have of Halton on our arrival was a shower of white objects being thrown out of the third floor windows of a barrack block to crash onto a parade ground below. These were the china mugs of the 41st Entry who were just passing out. All apprentices were issued with these big china mugs which were easily broken.

Then followed a hectic three weeks of medical examinations, inoculations, getting kitted out and given a RAF identity card and service number (mine was 578 790). We were taught how to wear our uniforms, to make our beds, lay or kit out, to march in step and swing our arms. We were generally mucked about, particularly by senior entries (lads who had joined up in previous years). Then 75 of us were selected to go to Cranwell in Lincolnshire to begin a two year training course to become Wireless Operator Mechanics. (Now we would be called Communications Technicians).

At Cranwell, with about 50 others of my entry, I was placed in a great long dormitory, one of 4 dormitories in a barrack block, 2 upstairs, 2 down. This was joined to a similar barrack block by a corridor, forming an "H" with the toilets and washing facilities in the middle of the "H". These "H" blocks would house about 400 trainees and there were several of these along one side of the parade ground. This is where I would live for the next two years.

Shortly after arriving at Cranwell our dormitory was raided twice after lights out. The raiders were the two entries ahead of us, the 42nd (the senior entry) and 43rd. Each took it in turn to come charging into our dormitory and tip some of us out of bed (to put us sprogs in our place). We slept on metal McDonalds beds. These were sort of kit-set beds, with more than a dozen parts. These beds could fall apart quite easily, particularly when tipped over. Also there was not a single mattress, but 3 'biscuits' which would go their separate ways when the bed was tipped over. Obviously the raiders could not hang around long for the ruckus would attract the Duty NCO and took off smartly before they got caught. So only the poor devils near the door got tipped out of bed. Then suffered the ire of the Duty NCO, who surveying the shambles, wanted to know what in the hell they were playing at. We lucky ones down the far end of the dormitory were still snug in our beds. Needless to say, 6 months later when a new entry arrived, we did the same to them.

At Cranwell we 75 became Entry 4M3 which indicated we were to be passed out in March 1944 and were divided into 4 classes, 4M3A, 4M3B (my class) 4M3C and 4M3D. A class leader was selected whose job was to march us, 3 abreast, between the barracks, classrooms, workshops, parade ground, gymnasium, airmen's mess, etc. Willie Williams was the class leader for 4M3B. He had one brown eye, the other was blue. After about year at Cranwell he was made a Leading Apprentice with one stripe. A few months later he got a second stripe as a Cpl Apprentice. When the last senior entry before us passed out, he was made a Sergeant Apprentice for the last 6 months of our stay at Cranwell. But these ranks carried no extra pay, just extra responsibilities trying to keep our somewhat unruly class (4M3B) in order. Needless to say I never got any stripes.

Another character in my class was Sailor Short. He was called Sailor because he had been to a Naval School but hadn't been accepted into the Navy because of colour blindness. While he wasn't as thick as two planks, because he passed his Apprentice training OK and ended his service career as a Squadron Leader, he was pretty solid in more ways than one. He sat in front of me in class and when the opportunity arose I would take the mickey out of him. His response was to always to swing round and thump me and I would give a yelp of not always of pretended pain. This break in the tedium was enjoyed

by the rest of the class including the instructor, whose response was usually "Serves you right Butler."

On sports afternoons (Wednesdays) I played hockey which usually kept me out of the mud, but I still have a bent finger. The result of trying stops a hard whacked ball. I always froze in PT strip at physical training and wasn't much of an athlete anyway, just a better than average long distant runner. Worst of all for me were the drill sessions where we were shouted at and screamed at by drill instructors. I wasn't much good at drill. I had, and still have, trouble with knowing which are my left and right hands and feet. Also, I had difficulty in keeping in step with the rest of the squad. I learnt an awful lot of new words from our DI (drill instructor), Darkie Dawes. There were lots of inspections to see our boots and brass buttons were gleaming and that our uniforms were properly creased.

Once a fortnight we had a payday. We were lined up and when our turn came to approach the pay table, I would say Butler 790 salute the officer and the pay clerk handed out the cash, 5 shillings one fortnight and 10 the next, alternatively throughout the term. While our actual pay was a shilling a day, the money not paid out to us during term time, was paid out to us when we went on leave. Two weeks at Christmas, one week at Easter and 3 weeks in August. I often managed to make my money last out during 5 shilling fortnights, so on 10 shilling fortnights, I would sometimes catch a bus to visit the nearby towns of Sleaford (Slush) or Lincoln on Sunday afternoons, our only half day off in the week. I even bought cigarettes occasionally. We were forbidden to smoke and were put on a charge if caught, but most of us smoked, if we could afford to buy cigarettes. It was possible to buy them singly from a little shop on the road that passed through the middle of Cranwell. We often used to light up after lights out, 9.30 pm. holding the lighted cigarette below the bed so its glow could not be seen from the doorway if the Duty NCO looked in. I cannot remember ever smoking after leaving Cranwell.

We had a 6 day week divided into 8 periods from 8 am to 5 pm with a hour for lunch. At 10 am and 3 pm we had a short break when the NAAFI wagon came round. We could buy a cup of tea for a halfpenny, also a jam bun for the same price. Other cakes were a penny each. I only bought a cuppa and a jam bun. I was always careful with my money because after a 5 shilling payday, this had to last a fortnight. After a 10 shilling payday one could afford to lash out a little. Often I tried to save a shilling or two to tide me over the following 5 shilling fortnight. As most of us were perpetually hungry, we could go to the YMCA in the evenings and buy a nice plate of chips, or baked beans of toast, for a penny. And if funds allowed, go to see a film in the camp cinema for 3 pence.

During the war meals at Cranwell were pretty basic. For breakfast lumpy porridge, boiled potatoes, boiled cabbage and carrot stew seemed to be the norm for dinner, and for afters, usually plumduff covered with a revolting yellow stuff called custard. I cannot really remember what we had for lunch, perhaps more of the same with a slice of grey (unrefined) bread and jam. I think we had reconstituted egg on Sundays. We had to take our own irons (knife, fork and spoon) to the mess hall and, also a big china mug which was easily broken. It cost sixpence to get a new one. After the meal we had to wash these in a trough filled with warm greasy water. It was quite surprising that more of us did not have to attend the daily sick parade.

I think reveille was at 6 am. I know we couldn't afford to lie in for long. We had to get washed, shaved and dressed. Then off to the Mess for breakfast. Back again to polish our boots, buttons and tidy our bedspace. Every morning we had to fold our sheets and blankets up into a pack with first a blanket, then a sheet, blanket, sheet, blanket, with the 4th blanket folded lengthwise wrapped around them with the 3 biscuits stacked underneath and the pillow on top. Our kit had to be folded neatly and laid out in a certain order in metal locker above our beds and the small wooden side locker beside it. While doing this we were usually moving around on floorpads, pieces of old blankets so we were polishing the lino round our beds. Each day some of us were detailed for chores such as sweeping and polishing the floors, cleaning

the wash basins and toilets, etc. Then on parade for inspection at 8 am. After which, depending on our programme, we were marched off by our class leaders to our classroom, workshop, and the gym or to remain on the parade ground for drill. The barrack rooms were inspected every morning and if your bed pack was not correct, your kit not laid properly and bed space clean, one would get a message to report to the Admin Office at lunch time where Willie Fleet, the Admin Officer of the Apprentice Wing, would dish out what he considered to be a suitable punishment.

We were given Jankers (confined to camp) for minor misdemeanors. I collected a lot of Jankers at Cranwell. I was and still am, continually amazed that most of my entry got through two years at Cranwell without getting any Jankers. I found it only too easy to be placed on a charge and being wheeled in again and again before Willie Fleet. Where, unless you had a very good story, he would award you so many days Jankers. I must have collected at least 30 days jankers at Cranwell. For being late on parade, for not saluting an officer properly, having dirty brass buttons, dirty boots, an untidy bed space, not being in bed by 9.30 pm and the loss of a text book for which I was fined one shilling and given a lecture on the care of important documents.

Once on Jankers, it was difficult to get off. Three days Jankers could easily be stretched in to a week or more. In the mornings at 7 am, one had to parade at the Guard House in full kit for inspection. If one was late, or one's kit did not pass inspection, another three days was likely to be added. Then one had to report again to the Guard House at 6.30 in the evening, where one got detailed for two hours of chores. Perhaps cleaning pots and pans in the Cookhouse or cleaning the floor. Not an unpopular chore because in the Cookhouse, one could often scrounge something to eat. I can remember acquiring a tin of sliced pears and scoffing the lot while sitting in a toilet. Once, in the Officers Mess, I remember being given a plate of strawberries and cream by a kindly WAAF.

Of course there were plenty of jokers in our room. It didn't pay to make one's bed too early and leave it unguarded. On return one could find an apple pie bed, or it would collapse when one sat on it. But when it came to pranks to get a good laugh at some poor devil's expense, quite often mine, we had two experts in our room, Pete Clarke and Johnny Ridler. Their most spectacular effort, with some willing helpers, was to carry Jock Fraser, a renowned heavy sleeper, still asleep in his bed, out onto the parade ground one morning and place it near the flag pole. In later life one of these was to become a Wing Commander, the other a policeman. After he retired, Jock settled near Whangarei, New Zealand, where he attended 2 or 3 Ex NZ Apprentices Reunions. He died in 2011.

Stan Horler who had the next bed to mine was a very good natured lad from Somerset. He was very difficult to upset and I only managed to do it once. The more stupid ones in our entry, like me, went through a phase of marking our irons (knife, fork and spoon) by taking out the light bulb and sticking the handles into the socket causing a short circuit that pitted the iron handle. When I tried to do this, I held my knife in the socket too long which started an electrical arc. First molten brass, then the remains of the socket and shade and finally molten copper from the wire to the ceiling rose came raining down, quite spectacularly. Fortunately the arc went out at the ceiling rose. But this occurred above Stan's bed and the molten brass and copper stitched his blankets and sheets together. Stupid Idiot was one of more repeatable expressions he called me.

I struggled during my first year at Cranwell and came close to being sent packing home. But just managing to get enough marks to scrape through the tests we had at the end of each term. Those in my class who had lower marks than me were either "C Teed" (ceased training and removed from the Apprentice Scheme) or "F Teed" (further training, moved back to a lower entry). Some of these were replaced by those "F Teed" from the entry ahead of us. During the first year we were stuffed full of electrical theory by education officers, ohms law, magnetism, batteries, electric motors and generators, all

very boring stuff. I was no good at filing metal squares in workshops because I could not file straight. Then at Morse training, I had trouble reading dah dit dahs and my writing was so bad, I had trouble reading what I had written. All dead boring when one is unable to do well.

Fortunately I found the second year more interesting when we got onto more practical stuff with radios, in particular how they worked and how to service this equipment, in particular transmitters. So I managed to pass the final exams better than any of the others in my class, becoming a AC1 (aircraftman first class) with sixpence a day more pay than they did, but as a Wireless Mechanic, not as a Wireless Operator Mechanic. This was because I failed to reach the required speed (18 words a minute) at Morse. In fact I was held back at Cranwell for a few weeks after the rest of my entry left to try to get my Morse up to speed. But my writing was so bad it mostly was unreadable. Even I had trouble reading it. With all my mates gone, it was a very miserable few weeks and I was very pleased when they let me go, but as a Wireless Mechanic. On the whole the training I received at Cranwell was very good and stood me in good stead for the rest of my working life.

After leaving Cranwell, I was posted to 192 Special Signals Squadron, at RAF Foulsham in Norfolk. Because this was a dispersed airfield with sizeable distances between the living huts, the messes, the hangars and the airfield, we were issued with bicycles. Very useful to visit the pub in Foulsham village on evenings when there was no flying. The first job I remember was to load bundles of thin aluminum strips (Window) into Halifax bombers. While I did not know what was going on at that time, it was D Day and the Halifaxes of 192 Squadron and other squadrons were taking turns at dropping this 'Window' in the sea near Dover and Folkston in the English Channel. This was to try and fool the German radar that ships were being assembled there to invade France near Calais and Boulogne instead of Normandy. It apparently worked for a few hours.

192 Squadron was part of 100 Special Signals Group whose purpose was to reduce the effectiveness of German radar. 192 Squadron had three different types of aircraft. The four engined heavy Halifax bombers, the fast two engined Mosquito bombers and the elderly two engined Wellington bombers with which Britain began the war with. I don't know where our planes went. Obviously our Mosquitos could have flown deep into Germany because they were fast and difficult to shoot down. I suspect our Halifaxes didn't fly much beyond the line of German radar stations or the Wellingtons much beyond the coastline. I cannot remember if we lost any planes through enemy action while I was there. I remember seeing a Halifax that came back with some holes in its tail fin.

I was placed in the Special Signals Equipment Servicing Section which contained all sorts of strange equipment which I had never seen before or since. Some was to record the frequency and pulse rate of German radar so it could be effectively jammed. Other equipment was to record the speech and frequency of the German ground controllers used to communicate to their night fighters and also for jamming or for confusing their instructions. Our equipment was a mix of commercial and homemade gear whose serviceability in vibrating aircraft was poor to put it mildly. There was a civilian scientist working in the section trying to make improvements.

My job, along with several others, was to fit this equipment into the planes in the late afternoons, prior to take off in the evenings. Then we hung around for an hour or so in case a plane returned because the equipment wasn't working. Not an infrequent occurrence. In the mornings after the planes returned, we would take it out the equipment again and return it to the section for checking and repair. The staff there would extract any information that had been gathered during the Op (operation). It was pure manual labour on our part, because most of the gear was heavy and often had to be fitted into awkward places. Balancing a heavy 'black box' on one's shoulder while climbing a ladder to enter a Mosquito through a small hatch was particularly tough and it was easier in the Wellingtons and Halifaxes because there was

more room. Rather surprisingly because I was not doing any technical work, I was promoted to LAC, (Leading Aircraftsman). This was worth another ninepence, to three and sixpence a day. I suppose it was considered I had been an AC1 long enough. But I was just a labourer at Foulsham!

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A funny incident happened a few weeks before the end of the war. A Halifax came back and the Pilot reported that the plane had been hit by flak (antiaircraft fire). There had been a big bang, the plane had filled with smoke and three of his crew had disappeared. But the ground crew could find no holes in the plane. It was then found that a unit of our special equipment had exploded through an internal fault. Just after the end of the war, the three missing crew members turned up. They had bailed out because they thought the plane was on fire and had spent six weeks as prisoners of war.

Most of us doing this manual work were young, 19, 20 and 21 years olds. But there were two old men among us who had driving licenses, Old Bert who was 32 and Old George who was 36. We youngsters considered them to be really old men. They were the drivers of the two beat up old vans which were used to transport us and the equipment from the section workshop to the planes in the afternoons and back again in the mornings.

One of our planes crashed landed at an American Base in Berkshire. I think it was at Greenham Common. Three or four of us were sent down to remove our equipment. It was quite an eye-opener. We noticed how much more appetising the food was in the American Mess. Then the whole airfield except the runway was covered with gliders and their DC3 Dakota tugs, hundreds of them. It was just before the disastrous airborne attempt to cross the River Rhine at Arnhem. As Greenham Common is not far from Henley, I took the opportunity to hitchhike home. It was very easy for servicemen in uniform to hitchhike during and just after the war. I got picked up by a man in a small van and we stopped at a pub on the way where he bought me a double whisky. The first time I had drunk whisky. My head was still going round and round when I got home.

When the European War ended in May, 1945, I managed to get down to London and be part of the enormous crowd outside of Buckingham Palace to cheer the Royal Family and Churchill every time they appeared on the balcony. Cannot remember how I got there or how I got back to Foulsham but I must have been in uniform because every time I went into a pub I got shouted a free drink. So no doubt I was in no condition to remember anything of my journey back.

Back at Foulsham, demobilisation of the older men began and Old George and Old Bert soon went. Various things were found to keep the rest of us occupied. Our Halifaxes were used to take ground crew for flights over Germany to view the bomb damage. The plane I went in flew over Cologne and most of the buildings I saw had lost their roofs. We did a lot of arms training and target practice, shooting off lots of ammunition in an old quarry with rifles and machine guns. Also field training, crawling around in ditches, hiding behind hedges, with plenty of blank round to shoot at each other. It was great fun during warm summer weather. Then a station parade for all personnel was held on the airfield. The first and only one I went on at Foulsham. What a shambles. It seemed that none of the officers or NCOs had much idea of what to do or say.

In July we younger ones in the Special Signals Section were told we were going to be posted to the Far East to 'Tiger Force' for the invasion of Japan. But first we were sent on a course at the Radio Countermeasures Establishment at Malvern, Worcestershire, to be trained on servicing two pieces of equipment called Bagful and Blondie. The names are all I can remember about this equipment. We were still at Malvern when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and they surrendered. We celebrated the end of the war with a big bonfire. I cannot remember what we found to burn, but running short of fuel, we lifted a large wooden gate off its hinges, the entrance to a nearby estate, and threw it on the bonfire. The owner

was naturally very upset with the loss of his gate. Finding its fittings in the remains of the bonfire, he demanded payment to replace it. In the meantime our Bagful and Blondie Course had been cancelled and we were on the way back to Foulsham. We never heard anything more about the required payment. I suppose it was too difficult to chase after us.

When we returned, we found Foulsham was being closed down. A big hole had been dug near our Section and much of the special signals equipment was thrown into it and buried. I was told later that most of it was dug up soon after, cleaned up, repaired and reappeared for sale in shops in Lisle St, London. We were then moved to nearby RAF Watton and told our overseas postings had been changed from the Far East to the Middle East. From memory much of my time at Watton was spent on guard duties. It was not very pleasant with winter approaching. RAF bases all over Norfolk were being closed down and furniture was being moved to Watton for storage in its large hangers. A lot of thievery was going on. I was told that even a dentist chair had gone missing. No doubt with the assistance of the guards, I suspect.

I was sent on embarkation leave over Christmas 1945 and then to a cold and snowy embarkation camp at West Kirby near Liverpool in January. There was a good train service into Liverpool but so soon after the end of the war it was a very bleak and damaged city. But instead leaving by ship from Liverpool, hundreds of us were put on a troop train for a long cold journey across a very snowy England to Newhaven in Sussex. Although I cannot remember, we must have been fed and billeted before being shipped by channel steamer over to Dieppe in France. Dieppe was still bearing the scars of the disastrous raid in 1942 where so many young Canadians died. There we were billeted in what had been German barracks. Well built, quite warm and comfortable as I remember. But we did not enjoy them for long. We were put onto a French troop train for a long cold journey across a snow covered northern France. In what I presume were marshaling yards somewhere near Paris, we were shunted back and forth in the middle of the night that made any sleep impossible.

When morning came we were in a different world. The sun was shining. There was no snow. The almond trees were covered with pink flowers and we were passing through the city of Limoges in southern France. This was a very pleasant memory which remains with me still. About twice each day the train would stop by a group of elderly women (to us) standing round steaming cauldrons who ladled out something between soup and stew into our mess tins and added a sort of bread roll. Another day and night on the train and we were finally unloaded near Toulon on the Mediterranean coast of France. Here we spent a few days in some sort of barracks near a little seaside town of Hyeres. Some of us walked into Hyeres and had a meal in a cafe which had a brothel upstairs. One of our party went upstairs to sample the goods. We questioned him furiously when he returned, but no one else was prepared to follow his example. Either too shy or too careful!

We embarked on a very fine ship, Orontes I think it was called, for a very pleasant five day trip across the Mediterranean. It had been a passenger liner (probably was to become one again) and the standards had not dropped much. The food was excellent. We passed through the Straits of Messina between Italy and the Island of Sicily with the great big smoking volcano Etna glowering down on us. As the sun went down in the evening and out of sight of land, there was Mt Etna hanging in the sky and still smoking furiously. As we came into Port Said in Egypt, we passed close to another ship coming out. It was full of servicemen going back to the UK. "Get your knees brown" they yelled at us.

We got off the ship and onto an Egyptian train parked beside the wharf. There was plenty of ventilation because it had no windows. Egyptian Police carrying rifles were not only patrolling the wharf, but were patrolling the corridors in the train as well. But this did not seem to worry the hitchhiker Egyptians on the roof of the train. There were dozens of them. It was a slow, stop, start journey to Cairo. One of the stops was caused by a young lad falling off the roof between two carriages and being cut in half by the wheels

of the train. A policeman pulled the two halves from the track. There was very little blood. The first time I had seen a dead body.

We were taken to Almaza Transit Camp at Heliopolis near the Pyramids where we waited for a posting. We had to parade twice a day for the postings to be read out. We were accommodated in four man tents. Hundreds of them in rows! One day a tent on a corner of the block disappeared while the occupants were having a meal in the mess. The tent, beds, their kit, everything had gone by the time the occupants returned. A hole in the nearby boundary fence showed where it had all gone. The result was that more of us were detailed for guard duties. With some others, I went to the Pyramids and tried to climb the biggest one, Cheops. While the rocks it is built of, appear to be steps that went right up to the top. But at the base of the pyramid I found each 'step' was well over a meter high. So after climbing up two or three of these "steps" with hundreds more to go, I had enough.

On another day a group of us went into Cairo. We got on a train in Heliopolis which became a tram in the wide streets in Cairo. We got off this tram / train at the entrance of a well-known and infamous street called the Birka because it was full of brothels. There were two Military Policemen with red hats standing there and seeing us, they asked where we were going. "The Birka is out of bounds for British servicemen now," they said, "but if you go to that cafe over there you will get some good entertainment. But be back here by 3 pm because we raid the Birka every few hours and any British servicemen we find gets locked up in a military prison."

The entertainment in this bar consisted of a young girl wearing roller skates. That was all. With great skill she weaved in and out between the tables and chairs did somersaults and cartwheels, etc., all very clever stuff. After a little while the proprietor asked if any of our group would like to catch his little girl, but they would have to wear roller skates. One fool (not me) volunteered but he had no show. Every time he grabbed her, she slipped out of his grasp. She ran rings round him, even diving between his legs and he was soon exhausted. Naturally the rest of us enjoyed his discomfort and as it was approaching 3 pm, it was time to leave. Also we had to get back to Almaza in time for roll call.

After about three weeks at Almaza, my name was read out for a posting. Along with some others we were trucked to RAF Cairo West airfield, quite a way out in the desert and then flown to RAF Qastina in southern Palestine. It was a typical dispersed RAF base with barrack huts, various messes, stores, workshops and hangars spread out round the airfield. But unlike Foulsham, we were not issued with bicycles, we had to walk everywhere. It was a good mile between my barrack hut and the Airmen's Mess and even farther to the NAAFI canteen for a beer and a plate of eggs and chips in the evenings.

During the first weekend I spent at Qastina, buses were available to take anyone who wished, to spend a few hours in either Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. I went on the bus to Jerusalem. During the following week Tel Aviv was placed out of bounds to British service personnel so I never got to Tel Aviv. At that time there was a squadron of Halifax bombers based at Qastina. While I did not know this immediately, these planes were being used to search the eastern Mediterranean for ships bringing Jewish refugees from Europe to Palestine. If any of these ships were spotted, the Navy escorted the ships to Cyprus where the refugees were interned.

Immediately after the first weekend I spent at Qastina, saboteurs struck. Being a very spread out and open RAF base, they had no difficulty in first reconnoitering then attacking the Halifax bombers. After their daylight operations were over, these planes were lined up on the main runway overnight. Patrolling in pairs, six armed guards walked round these planes all night being replaced every two hours by fresh guards. The saboteurs noticed that at the end of each two hour shift the guards tended to congregate by the plane nearest the guardroom to be ready to meet those who were coming to relieve them. So just

before 8 pm towards the end of the first shift, when it was getting dark, the saboteurs moved in, fitting a time bomb to one of the wheel supporting struts on each of the planes.

As the bombs started to go off, all hell broke out. With one wheel blown off, the plane crashed down on one wing, breaking its main spar. The explosion also caused some planes to burst into flames. With glimpses of the saboteurs disappearing into the darkness, the guards on duty took after them, shooting at them with their rifles as they went. Led by the guard commander, the off duty guard came rushing out and joined in the shooting. Our barrack hut overlooked the airfield so we went running out to find out what was going on. We found the airfield lit up by burning planes. There was a gun pit near us and the guards manning it were blazing away with a machine gun, shooting at goodness knows what, until they ran out of ammunition.

A sergeant rounded up us onlookers and ordered us to bring more ammunition from the armoury, a good half mile away. As fast as we carried back heavy boxes of ammunition, the contents were fired off by the machine gunners. By about 11 pm the firing had gradually died down and we were thoroughly exhausted. The odd rifle shot was still heard until after midnight. We heard later that a truck travelling at high speed crashed through an Army check point a few miles down the road at 8.15 pm. presumably with the saboteurs aboard. The amazing thing was that in spite of thousands of rounds of ammunition being fired in all directions, no one got hurt.

Next morning revealed that of the 12 Halifaxes lined up on the runway the evening before, 11 were now write-offs. The bomb fitted on the twelfth, did not explode. So with the two Halifaxes in a hangar undergoing maintenance, there were only three planes left out of fourteen. The effect on the C O (commanding officer) was way over the top. The number of guards to be on duty every night was not doubled, or trebled, but was increased by six times.

Along with other new arrivals, I was rounded up and placed on guard duties the following evening. I was issued with a stengun, a small machine gun. When it became my turn to go on guard, I was taken out to patrol a section of the perimeter wire. It was dark and having only been on Qastina for a few days I had no idea where I was. At one end of my patrol was a gun pit built up with sandbags. My orders were to patrol back and forth along the wire between the gun pit and where I met a guard coming from the other direction. In the gun pit there were two Irishmen with a brengun. They were fiddling with it, apparently trying to find out how it worked. Eventually they succeeded and there was a short burst of gun fire.

Running back to them, they told me that something was moving out there. All I could see was some lights in the distance that appeared to be moving. (I was to find out later these lights were from vehicles travelling along a main road). Remembered that I had fired a stengun last year during weapon training, I now had a chance to fire one for real. I brought the gun up to my shoulder, aimed in the direction of the lights and gently pressed the trigger. Nothing happened. I hadn't cocked the gun. When I sorted that out, I pressed the trigger again. The bolt went forward with a bang but the gun did not fire. I had not put the magazine in. By the time I had that sorted, the guard commander, a young officer, with pistol in hand had arrived and lead off the duty guards. In response to what the Irishmen told him, he jumped onto the sandbags round the gunpit, shouting "Follow me men" and jumped over the wire and much to his anger, fell into a muddy ditch. In the following confusion, I quickly disappeared into the darkness to resume my patrol. I like to call this episode "How I nearly fired a stengun in action."

The six fold increase of those required for guard duties meant that every serviceman on Qastina, not on essential works, had to be on guard every night. Two hours on, four hours off plus a further two hours on during the daytime. Very tiring for everyone! Some got trigger happy and one or two unfortunate fellows got shot. One day, returning from our evening meal prior to going on guard, a group of us were taking a

short cut over a playing field when an idiot on guard outside the admin building, opened up on us with his stengun. With the bullets whizzing overhead making frightening whirling noises, we, flat on the ground, were trying to dig into it with our finger nails. When he had emptied his magazine, we charged at him, yelling, with the intention of doing him serious harm. Luckily for him, the guard commander arrived and we got ticked off for not keeping to the road. Fortunately, after a few weeks, the powers that be decided the RAF should be evacuated Qastina. Later I was told, it was taken over by the Army.

With all our kit, we were put onto a train run by the Army. I cannot remember where we got on, probably not far from Qastina....possibly Gaza. Because of sabotage, this train made very slow progress out of Palestine. When it was moving, we could stroll along beside it, but much of the time it wasn't moving, because repairs were being made to the track ahead. Presumably because of our slow progress, provision of food and drink was inadequate. In fact I cannot remember getting any. At the beginning of the journey the train passed by a series of orange groves, so oranges kept us going for a while. In fact, there were so many oranges we threw them around, using them for catching practice. Later, when there were no more orange groves, we wished we hadn't wasted so many. When the train stopped just over the Egyptian border, we just about cleared out the little town of El Arish of soft drink, tiny little hard boiled eggs and very hard crusty bread. I cannot remember how long this journey took but we made better progress over the Sinai Desert to Port Said in Egypt. From there we were trucked to RAF Kabrit beside one of the Bitter Lakes, through which the Suez Canal passes.

It was at Kabrit I caught up with members of the radio servicing section that I had been posted to Qastina to join. But because of all the guard duties at Qastina I never got to the section. The few weeks at Kabrit were great. I celebrated my 21st birthday there, sharing a bottle of rum with those sharing my tent and drunk out of enameled tin mugs. Although we were accommodated in four men tents, there were no guard duties and very little official work. We had to look after the radio equipment in troop carrying gliders. This consisted of a tiny amplifier. One person could check these in every glider in less than an hour and there were about dozen of us in the section. But we found plenty to occupy ourselves. The section was accommodated in some large wooden crates that the gliders came in, all joined together and situated alongside a dump of smashed up DC3 Dakotas. The USA gave Britain a great deal of equipment under the Lease Lend Agreement during the war. When the war ended, while not wanting this equipment back, the USA did not want Britain to continue to use it so it had to be destroyed. Hence these DC3 Dakotas, used by the RAF, were bulldozed into the dump.

To make ourselves comfortable in our section, we removed the seats from the Dakotas. One of our clever mechanics found he could make little radios able to receive the local British Forces radio station out of the large amount of America radio equipment in these Dakotas so we set up a construction line to turn out these radios and sold them mostly to Army lads for an Egyptian pound each. We were able to swim in the Bitter Lake, but it was a bit off putting to find toilet paper floating around in the water and worse. We enjoyed watching the paratroopers practicing with their gliders. Having being released by their tugs, Halifax bombers, the objective of the glider pilots was to put the glider down on the ground as quickly as possible and close to the others. Sometimes the gliders would crash into each other and being made of very light timber they would disintegrate, spilling out the paratroopers. Amazingly, few ever got seriously hurt. But this pleasant existence at Kabrit could not last.

All too soon we were flown back in Palestine to 113 Squadron at RAF Aqir, which I think was not far from Qastina, and back on frequent guard duties. But RAF Aqir had a very fine swimming pool. This was a mixed blessing for me because most times I went swimming, I got painful ear infections. Two former Halifax Squadrons had been combined into 113 Squadron which was based at RAF Aqir, and like the squadron at Qastina, was searching the eastern Mediterranean for immigrant ships. Unfortunately, I must have made a very bad impression on the Squadron's Signals Officer from my very first interview

with him. From memory, I think his name was Pomeroy. (Or was it Lockyer?) While I certainly did not think so then, looking back on it from this distance in time, I think I can understand his point of view. He probably joined the RAF prewar when discipline was tight and airmen readily obeyed orders without question. He had worked his way up the ladder during the war and had obtained a temporary commission. This he wanted to keep and to see his time out in the RAF as an officer.

Now this officer was in charge of a grossly overstuffed signals section, many whose only interest was counting the days to when they would be going back to the UK for demobilisation. Some of them would ask me when I would get out of the RAF. When I said "1955", they would say this made them feel much better about their few weeks or months left to go. For as the war had ended the previous year, they considered they were wasting their time in this awful place. Many of them were a scruffy, surly lot, bordering on being mutinous. I turned up, a regular airman, but similarly scruffy and apparently with a similar attitude. Obviously I was a very poor example of a former aircraft apprentice. This officer was less than impressed.

Furthermore he was soon to find that I wasn't much good at my job either. I had not had to deal with the then standard aircraft radio installation of the HF T1154/R1155 and the VHF TR1143 since leaving the Cranwell training school over two years earlier. It took me a while to learn how to test and service these and I made several stupid mistakes in the process. One person who helped me a lot was Jimmy Joule of the 43 entry, the entry before me at Cranwell. He was one of the few regular airmen in the section. He had managed to complete a tour as aircrew since leaving Cranwell in 1943 and had left aircrew with the rank of Warrant Officer. But on reverting to a Wireless Operator Mechanic again, he went back to a permanent rank of Corporal, but was still allowed to wear his Warrant Officer's uniform and use the Sergeants Mess.

The radio maintenance section was round the other side of the airfield and we were bussed there back and forth, morning, lunchtime and after work. If one missed the bus, one had to hitchhike which one had to do in the mornings when one had been on guard the night before, on room orderly duty or just damn late. Invariably when I was hitchhiking, I would be picked up by the Signals Officer who would always ask why I had missed the bus. One day while I was on guard duty, some camouflaged jeeps arrived at the main gate. Sitting beside the driver in one of these was Jock Fraser. The first member of my Cranwell (44th) entry I had met since leaving Cranwell. He was wearing a peaked hat, goggles and with binoculars slung round his neck. If I had taken a photo of him then, I am sure I could have passed it off as a photo of (the German General) Rommel taken in the desert in 1941. (I used to remind him of this some 50 years later when he came to live in New Zealand)

Also the Signals Officer's opinion of me was not improved when I won a trip to the UK. I was told later that he had attempted to stop me going. When a Halifax was sent back to the UK for a major overhaul, as well as the aircrew, the names of five ground crew were drawn from a hat and allowed to go along for a few days of home leave. We had an overnight stop in Malta at Lucca airfield, where I took the opportunity to take a quick visit to the Gut, an infamous street in Valetta. But nothing much seemed to be open. Probably too early in the evening! The next overnight stop was at Istris in the south of France and then to Lyneham in Wiltshire from where I was able to hitchhike home, much to the surprise of my parents. I went back to Palestine the same way a week or so later. This was one of the last perk trips for the airmen of Aqir because on one of the next trips, one airman did not return and so spoilt it for lots of others.

Early in 1947, I was told to report to the Signal Officer's office. He ripped into me saying that as a regular airman I was a disgrace to the service. Apparently my promotion to Corporal had come through but he had blocked it, saying that I wasn't fit for promotion and he was having me posted to RAF Amman in what was then called Transjordan, now Jordan. I was to spend the remainder of my first tour in the

Middle East in Transjordan. The first year there was just like being on a holiday camp. There were no guard duties as these were carried out by the Arab Legion. One could go off the base and wander round the countryside in complete safety. Go down to the dusty, smelly, little town of Amman where there was little to see and do except to view the large Roman amphitheater. We could even borrow rifles and shotguns from the armoury to go shooting. There were supposed to be deer around but I never saw any. On one occasion when I had borrowed a shotgun I tried to stalk a large scavenging bird we called shytehawks that looked like very large dirty seagulls. This bird appeared to be feeding on some carrion, so I crawled along the ground, creeping behind rocks and bushes until I thought I was close enough and fired. The bird gave me a dirty look, flapped its wings and flew off. The first and last time I have ever been shooting. This little perk was lost when some idiot (not me) shot a goat belonging to a local sheikh who created merry hell and demanded, and got, compensation from the CO. (commanding officer)

There were only about 50 airmen on the base. About six officers, a similar number of senior NCOs, the rest corporals and airmen. There was one airframe and one engine mechanics to look after the Anson and a couple of single engined training planes, both were corporals. There were two telegraphists, myself and a flight sergeant who was my boss. There was quite a big transport section but the messes were largely staffed by local civilian staff that produced marvelous meals. We didn't have lunch, we had tiffin. Even better, we had a bearer in our barrack room who kept it clean and tidy and made our beds. For a few months I had a glimpse of the pre-war air force.

I was the only radio mechanic and had several duties. None of them required much effort. I had to look after the radio gear in the planes which did not fly much. The small amount of radio equipment in the control tower was used even less. The radio receivers in the signals section, AR88s, were only used to listen to public broadcast stations. The transmitting station contained one T1154 aircraft transmitter mounted in a 19 inch rack fitted out for ground station use. It was for emergencies and never got used while I was there. Then there was the battery charging room where the lead acid batteries for the planes and motor transport were charged. This probably took up more of my time than anything else.

There was a supply and mail run by two or more trucks into Jerusalem once or twice every week and armed guards were required to sit in the cab with the drivers and also in the back. Volunteers were required to "ride shotgun". I volunteered for two or three of these trips which were quite interesting. The road wound steeply down from Amman to the Allenby Bridge that crossed the River Jordan which was the frontier between Transjordan and Palestine. Not a very impressive river. It was much smaller than the River Thames at my old home town at Henley-on-Thames. The Jordan Valley was a long way below sea level at this point which wasn't far from the Dead Sea. The road wound steeply upwards until it passed below the massive walls of Old Jerusalem into the New City and Headquarters at the King David Hotel. A wing of this hotel had been recently blown off by a huge truck bomb, killing a lot of service personnel in the process.

While in Amman I got permission to take a fortnight leave in Cyprus. I got a ride to Jerusalem and from there to Haifa in northern Palestine. There was no difficulty in knowing which land was Arab and Jewish. The latter was green with crops and orchards. While Arab lands were usually covered with a brownish scraggy grass on which goats and donkeys were grazing. At Haifa I booked a return trip on a ferry to Cyprus. We called in at Beirut in Lebanon but I didn't go ashore and just remember a beautiful bay fringed with golden sand, palm trees with white washed buildings behind. The ferry then went on the Famagusta in Cyprus with its Crusader castle by its port and then on to Limassol where I got off. I spent a pleasant week in a little hotel on the sea front, had a lot of fun with the little girls in the hotel and got a taste for the local wine, then returned the same way. (About six years later I was to stay in the same hotel, but the little girls had grown up and were not so amusing).

On one of its rare flights, our Anson returned to the airfield trailing strips of fabric. A lead acid battery used by some of the radio gear had leaked acid during the flight which had burnt holes in the fabric skin and the slipstream had opened up these holes, peeling back the fabric in strips right to the tail of the aircraft. The Airframes Corporal whose job it was to make repairs, demanded to know if the battery I had installed prior to the flight, had been cracked? Apparently my assurances to the contrary were believed, because I heard no more about it.

It was in the Battery Room that I probably did the most stupid thing I have ever done in my life and could have easily been badly injured, even killed. A transport driver came to pick up a battery with a cigarette in his mouth. He quickly backed out of the battery room, taking the cigarette out of his mouth and saying he mustn't smoke in there. Don't worry, I said, 'It is quite safe'. It is not a naked flame and taking his cigarette I waved it around near batteries on charge. There was an almighty bang and I was sprayed with acid and bits of battery casing. Fortunately it was only a small 2 volt aircraft battery with thin casing that exploded and I was wearing goggles. The driver threw a bucket of water over me, kept there for that purpose and except for my clothes, I came to no harm. It would have been a different matter if it had been a big truck battery that exploded. Amazingly there were no repercussions over my stupidly and shortly afterwards my promotion to corporal came through. How lucky can one get?

Probably the most interesting of my duties was my weekly check of the pump engine that pressurised the water in the fire hydrants. This was located in a hut by the swimming pool which provided the source of water in the case of fire. It was a very ancient one cylinder petrol engine that drove the pump. If there had been a fire, it would have been my job to get this pump going. So to keep in practice, I had to start the engine up every week. Fortunately no fires occurred while I had this job. It was quite a temperamental beast to start and I am sure I could have never got it going in a hurry if there had been an emergency, for the engine needed careful priming. I would do these checks in the mornings because that was when the wives and children from the married quarters on the base and those of the British officers seconded to the Arab Legion had the use of the pool. When I got the engine going I used to let it run for 10 to 20 minutes. This gave me the opportunity to peep out of the window overlooking the swimming pool for there were often some very comely ladies in swimsuits around the pool.

One day I noticed the engine was labouring a bit, but thought nothing of it until one of the admin staff came rushing into the pump house yelling for me to turn off the pump. "You have flooded all the offices." Also one of the wives, who had been at the swimming pool, poked her head round the door to tell me that swimming pool was half empty. After being initially blamed, it was found that firemen had been round the base checking that the cocks on all the hydrants would turn. They must have left the cock on the hydrant near the administration offices turned on. Water had flowed right through all the offices, including the Commanding Officer's.

The main communication link for Amman was by phone and teleprinter to Air Headquarters in Jerusalem. These were maintained by an Army mechanic from Air Formation Signals. Naturally he was called Monty. He was one of my pals, but he played a real dirty trick on me which got me thumped. There was not much flying done at Amman although periodically one of the aircraft would be flown down to a base near Cairo for an overhaul. On one such occasion one of the maintenance corporals, Blondie, a strapping big lad, went along for the ride. Once there he told the pilot he was going into Cairo but would be back when the aircraft was due to be flown back to Amman. In Cairo, Blondie booked into a high class brothel, paid for three nights services and full board, went downstairs to the restaurant for a meal and right into the arms of the Military Police who were raiding the place. So there was Blondie banged up in the Military Police Lock up until he could be handed over to a senior person to take him back to his unit.

But In Blondie's case this could only be the pilot, the officer from RAF Amman, and he could not be

found. This officer probably went into Cairo on a similar lark to what Blondie had attempted to do, but unlike Blondie, he wasn't caught. It was only when the pilot turned up at the base to take the aircraft back to Amman that he was told about Blondie's plight and had to get him out of the Military Lock Up. When the news got around back in Amman, there was great hilarity. Blondie was apparently repeatedly asked to tell of his experience until he got thoroughly exasperated and threatened to thump the next person who asked him. About this time I innocently wandered into the barracks and Monty pointed out to me that Blondie was back and I should ask him how he got on. Bang, stars everywhere, I didn't know what hit me. I was flat on my back and everyone was laughing.

Towards the end of 1947 and when Britain had decided evacuate its military forces from Palestine in the following year things began to change for the worse at RAF Amman. While it happened slowly, more personnel were posted in and our very nice stone barrack blocks became very crowded. I was given three radio mechanics doing their National Service. They had been given only very short basic radio training courses. But all three were university students and quickly became very competent mechanics. About the same time four high frequency T1190 transmitters were delivered to the transmitting station for 24 hour operation to provide communications by Morse code to Air Headquarters, Egypt when Air HQ Jerusalem closed down. These were the crystal controlled version of the T1087 transmitters on which we had received training at Cranwell.

These transmitters had been in use in RAF transmitting stations in Palestine. Very little care had been taken with their removal and they had suffered a fair amount of damage. We managed to get three of these working by stripping needed parts to make these serviceable from the fourth. The term we used for this sort of servicing was that the fourth transmitter became a 'Christmas Tree'. A radio fitting party had come from Egypt with two non-directional beacon (NDB) transmitters and some VHF transmitters, T1131s which they installed in the transmitting station. One was an enormously big high powered Cossor NDB transmitter, the other a smaller lower powered RCA one. These additions just about filled the transmitting hall in the transmitting station.

Fortunately, unlike the T1190s, these transmitters were delivered by the fitting party who got them in working order before they left. I had never seen or even heard of the NDB transmitters before. Also an aerial fitting party had also come from Egypt to put up additional masts to hold up all the aerials required for all the transmitters we had received. As the transmitting station now had to be operation for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the three radio mechanics had to move their beds and kit into the crewroom in the transmitting building. This was no hardship because it contained washing, toilet and cooking facilities.

There were problems with this big NDB transmitter. It needed so much power that the lights dimmed, not only in the transmitting station but in the nearby married quarters, when they were switched on. A big 16 KVA diesel electric generator on a trailer was obtained and parked beside the transmitting station to power this radio beacon and then there were complaints of this noisy diesel when it was switched on as the engine was run all night. It was decided the low power beacon should be operated at night as its power requirements did not affect the mains supply. We had to start the diesel in the early mornings so the high power beacon could be operated during the daytime.

It was a brute to start. Sometimes it took all four of us, taking turns in pairs on the starting handle, to get the engine turning over fast enough for it to be started. With a third person to bang down the compression lever when we had it turning fast enough. It also had a water leak which we asked the transport mechanic to fix. But he said it needed a new radiator and none were available. One morning we apparently did not top up the radiator and about lunchtime silence suddenly descended. Not only had the high power beacon stopped but so had the noisy diesel generator outside. We rushed outside but could not get near the diesel engine because of the heat radiating from it. It was just about red hot. So we started up the low powered

beacon and hoped for the best. Eventually the diesel engine cooled down, we refilled the radiator and started it up. But instead of taking two of us an arm straining struggle to get it going, one person could now easily get it turning over with one hand, while operating the compression lever with the other. And the generator was still producing sufficient power to operate the high power radio beacon.

There was also a design fault in the big radio beacon. One of the internal plug socket arrangements was unable to handle the amount of electric current passing through it without becoming hot. Consequently it corroded and would pass no current at all. Although cleaning up the plug and socket would get the transmitter working again, it was only a temporary fix as the plug and socket would quickly corrode up again. I overcame this problem by soldering heavy duty jumper wires across the plug and socket. This meant the plug and socket could not be separated. But it overcame the overheating problem. Some years later I found out I should have sent in a written report about this fault and how I had fixed it.

Because other radio mechanics had now arrived at RAF Amman, my duties were reduced to looking after the transmitting station and the battery room which was in the same building. A frequency change was usually required in the evenings and back again, fairly early in the mornings. There was also the need to start up the diesel generator, switch on the high power beacon and switch off the low power one. Then reverse this procedure when it was getting dark. Even with the battery room, we were certainly not overworked, particularly when it became possible for one person to be able to start up the diesel engine on his own. As by then I had also moved into the transmitting station the four of us used to stay up quite late sitting around on the beds in the crewroom, drinking tea, eating baked beans on toast from the shift work rations. Quite often we would be joined by other mates to enjoy a late night snack and who would sometimes bring along a few beers. So having changed frequency and started up the diesel and the big NDB, we tended to lie in the mornings. As long as there was one person to mind the 'shop', the rest of us were free to do more or less what we liked most days.

I went on some recreational trips, one I remember to the Crusader ruins at Jerash, crossing the beautiful green Zerqa valley to get there. All three of my mechanics went on a trip to Petra ("Rose Red City, half as old as time") in the south of Transjordan, leaving me looking after the 'shop' for three days. When able, I sometimes wandered off through the rock covered hills and gullies on the other side of the airfield. A railway line ran through these which had once been part of the Turkish railway line from Damascus to Medina in Saudi Arabia. Now it only ran as far as Maan in the south of Transjordan. This was the railway line that Lawrence of Arabia used to sabotage during the First World War. With this line winding through a series of cuttings and viaducts, sabotage would have been quite easy in this area. Naturally, the only time I ever saw a train chugging along this line, I didn't have my camera with me.

The date for the British to complete their evacuation of Palestine was rapidly approaching and more and more personnel were being posted into Amman. When I heard that all airmen were to be moved into a big block of 4 man tents that were being erected so senior NCOs could take over our cool roomy stone barrack blocks I picked up my bed and bedding and moved into the transmitting station. As there was no room for a fourth bed in the crewroom, I found a nice secluded place behind the big radio beacon (NDB transmitter). As this was not in use at nights, it was ideal place.

British services barely completed the evacuation of Palestine when the Jews announced the formation of the State of Israel and six Arab armies prepared to invade. Four of these armies, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, did little, but the large Egyptian Army with its armoured vehicles and artillery came charging up through southern Palestine aiming for Tel Aviv. When almost within sight of Tel Aviv, the Egyptian Army ran out of fuel and supplies and became immobile in a little Arab town.

The only news we received in Amman was about the progress of the Arab armies. The Egyptian Army was attacking Tel Aviv and the Jews were being pushed into the sea. The Arab Legion were overrunning Jewish settlements, had captured Jerusalem and reached the coast. They brought all the men they had taken prisoner, to Amman, and put them in a compound near the RAF base. I went to have a look at them and they seemed to be either old men with beards or young lads. There was great astonishment when early one morning a small plane flew over RAF Amman and dropped about half a dozen small bombs waking everyone up. Lots of us rushed to the armoury to draw rifles where the armoury sergeant, very sensibly, told us to scatter and take cover. "If it comes back and drops more bombs, a lot of you could be killed." I can only assume we were bombed because the Arab Legion was doing well and the Jews believed the RAF must be helping them. There were no casualties and very little damage, but one of the little bombs hit the hangar and jammed its sliding doors. As our Anson and little trainer planes were inside, they could not be got out until the doors could be opened. This took two or three days. It was surprising how quickly some Army gunners with anti-aircraft guns were provided for our protection.

But my pleasant existence at Amman was rapidly coming to an end. While still lying in bed not long afterwards, I heard a car draw up outside the transmitting station. Peeping out I saw an officer getting out. Hurriedly pulling on my clothes, but unwashed and unshaved, I walking into the crewroom where I discovered the officer was my 'bête noire' from Aqir, Flight Lieutenant Pomeroy. While the mechanics were all up and dressed, the crewroom was in a mess with beds unmade and the remains of last night's supper piled in the sink. Seeing me, he stopped reaming them out and started on me.

Although everything was running smoothly with the diesel engine running, the high power non directional beacon in operation and the T1190 transmitter on circuit to Air Headquarters to Egypt was being keyed it seemed everything else was wrong. Where was the duty roster? (We never needed one, we had always worked things out between ourselves without any arguments). Where was the log to record frequency changes? (It never occurred to me to have one as I knew these were recorded in the Signals Office). What steps had I taken to make the 'Christmas tree' T1190 transmitter serviceable? (None, we had three serviceable transmitters). One each for the two frequencies that were ever used, plus one spare). Why was there was no proper panel for switching the incoming control lines to the transmitter in use? (I had to make something up in a hurry with the bits I had on hand, or could scrounge. It served our purpose OK, so there seemed no need to obtain a proper service issue control panel).

Fortunately he did not see my bed behind the high powered NDB transmitter, or the workshop in the basement where lots unauthorised work was spread around. Where was the record of the fuel used in the diesel generator? (The Transport Section filled the tank every week so there did not appear to be a need for one). Then in the battery room, where was the log that recorded incoming and outgoing batteries and their condition? (There was no such log when I took over and it never occurred to me to make one up) and these are only the things I can now remember.

Later that morning I had a call to report to him in his office. By then I had smartened myself up and also found out he had been posted in as the Signals Officer for RAF Amman. The interview was as painful as the one I had with him at Aqir, about year earlier and with a similar result. I was to pack my kit a join a detachment at an emergency landing field at Mafraq some 50 miles from Amman. Because the airfield at Amman was then quite small, larger planes had to use the airfield at Mafraq which was just an area of flat hard earth. The only indication that it was an airfield was the wind-sock. The detachment was accommodated in what was once the officers mess in a depot constructed when the Army was tar-sealing the Baghdad Haifa Highway. There were only six of us and we had civilian staff to do the cooking and cleaning, and the Arab Legion to provide security. It was back to the life of Riley again.

Because of the invasion of Palestine, the local distribution system had broken down and there was a

shortage of fuel in Mafraq. It was known that there was still some petrol in the bottom of the underground tanks in the depot so an arrangement was made between various local parties which included Arab Legion guards and us airmen, to remedy this fuel shortage. We would be paid for getting petrol out of the tanks which our civilian partners would sell. While there was a fuel shortage in Mafraq, we and our partners made quite a lot of money. We pooled our share and spent it on luxuries. Mostly on items we could eat and drink. I can recall a decision we made to have liquors with our evening meal but it was very quickly found we could not drink liquors like beer, so liquors quickly came off the menu after we were horribly sick and badly hung-over.

The Army had left behind a number of vehicles including some very large trucks and trailer units that had been used for road making. We enjoyed giving these a test drive on the long straight Baghdad Haifa Highway. With the accelerators pushed hard down the truck and trailer unit would gradually pick up speed to about 50 miles per hour when it would develop a speed wobble swinging from one side of the road to the other. Great fun!. We usually had the road to ourselves as there was hardly ever any other traffic. Amazingly no one rolled any of these units.

There was a dovecot in the depot but no doves in it. One day one of our civilian staff told me that he would pay me a Palestinian pound if I would deliver this dovecot to his house in Mafraq town. With some difficulty we got the dovecot down and onto the back of a truck which I drove to his house where we unloaded it. Instead of backing out, I tried to drive around the house. These houses have thick mud brick walls, the material for which is dug out of the ground leaving a large hole by each of the houses. I went into a hole and got firmly stuck. As no amount of the village manpower could push me out I had no option but to walk back to the Depot about a mile away to get someone to tow me out.

I was walking back along the Amman Mafraq road when a van drew up beside me. Sitting beside the driver was my *bête noire*, Flight Lieutenant Pomeroy. Fortunately my stuck truck was out of sight and he accepted my explanation that I was getting some exercise. He told me that he had come to take me back to Amman as my two and a half year overseas tour was completed and I had been booked on a flight to Egypt.

If you wish, you can skip the bit of history in the next 9 paragraphs. It is not part of my story, just part of the background of my time in Palestine of which I knew little when I was there.

There have been Jews in Palestine since the times of Moses. After the Moslem invasion in the 7th century, the Jews tended to become town dwellers and most towns and cities had their Jewish quarters (and Christian quarters) including in the Old City of Jerusalem. As a general rule, Jewish people fared much better in Moslem countries than they did in Christian countries. Particularly after Palestine became part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire in 15th Century. In the late 19th Century, things began to change. A Zionist organisation based in New York began buying up land in Palestine and setting up Jewish farming communities on this land.

During the First World War, the British, including an Australian and New Zealand Mounted Infantry Division, were involved in a series of hard fought battles that finally drove the Ottoman Turkish Army out of Palestine and from much of the surrounding area. There are New Zealand soldiers buried in the Commonwealth military cemeteries in Gaza, Israel and the West Bank including four men from Motueka. After the First World War, Britain was allowed to hold Palestine under a mandate from the League of Nations. Between the wars Jewish immigration to Palestine continued and more Jewish settlements were set up and flourished through export of citrus fruit to Britain. As a consequence, their Arab neighbours became envious and there were attacks on Jewish settlements. These, in turn, became fortified and were defended by volunteers. The mandate Britain held from the United Nations was transferred to the United

Nations when it came into existence after the Second World War.

During much of 1946 and early 1947, as a young RAF erk, I spent much of the first year on long boring guard duties in Palestine. With fellow erks, we were trying to protect, not always successfully, British military installations from sabotage by Jewish terrorists / freedom fighters. Which term one used depended on what side of the barbed wire one happened to be on. Yet less than 5 years earlier the British Army commanded by General Montgomery that containing a Jewish brigade had first stopped and then defeated a German Army commanded by General Rommel, from occupying Egypt and Palestine and so had protected the Jewish population in Palestine from annihilation by the Germans. So what had happened to produce these terrorists / freedom fighters from amongst this population?

The defeat of the Germans in Europe in 1945 led to many of the Jewish survivors of the holocaust there wanting to get away from the countries of their sufferings. Palestine had been designated by Britain as Jewish Homeland during the First World War in 1917 largely to gain the support of the big Jewish population in the USA. So what better place than Palestine, for these holocaust survivors to head for. Ships filled with Jewish refugees sailed across the Mediterranean from southern European ports, heading for Palestine. But Palestine in 1946 was very different than it is now, particularly in its population. Then the total population was only about one million, less than the population of the Gaza strip is at present. There were several minorities but the 3 biggest groups were made up of Jews, Christian Arabs and Moslem Arabs, all roughly in equal numbers.

The intention of British Government of the day was to create a Palestinian State containing both Jews and Arabs. It did not want the balance between these populations upset with a big inflow of European Jews. So these ships were located by the RAF and stopped by the Navy and their passengers interned in Cyprus. This greatly upset the Palestinian Jews eager to set up the Jewish state of Israel, turning friends into enemies and produced the terrorists / freedom fighters from within this community.

Meanwhile the fate of Palestine was being decided in New York. The powerful Zionist lobby there was clamoring for a Jewish state to be set up in Palestine and got the backing of the United States Government. And surprise, surprise, also the Soviet Union, whose aim, one suspects, was to weaken British influence in the Middle East. With these two heavy weights on the same side, the British plan had no show at the United Nations. The mandate Britain held to occupy Palestine was withdrawn and Britain was given a time limit to withdraw its forces. A plan was drawn up by the United Nations dividing Palestine into six regions, three for where the Jews were in the majority, three for the Arabs and Jerusalem as sort of independent city with a mixed population. The plan was rejected out of hand by both the Palestinian Jews and Arabs. The Jews announced they were going to set up a Jewish state. Led by the United States and Russia (on the same side for a change) the United Nations voted for a Jewish State to be formed in Palestine. So Britain gave up its intention to form a Palestinian State and announced it would withdraw all British military personnel from Palestine in 1948.

However, the neighbouring Arab states, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, announced they would invade Palestine when the British left, to prevent a Jewish State being set up. Expecting these invasions to succeed, the British Government believed its preferred option, a Palestinian State, would be set up anyway. With their tanks leading the way, the Egyptian Army advanced up through southern Palestine until they were almost within sight of Tel Aviv where they were stopped because their inept command structure had allowed the Jews to cut their supply lines and they had ran out of fuel and supplies. The Egyptian Army remained bottled up in a little Arab town until a cease fire armistice allowed them to ignominiously retreat to Gaza, leaving much of their equipment behind. Except for the Arab Legion, the other Arab armies did little.

On the other hand the relatively small Arab Legion with its British officers, seconded from the British Army did amazingly well. Over running several Jewish settlements on what is now the West Bank and with some difficulty after a fortnight's siege, they captured and ethnically cleansed the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Arab Legion even made inroads into the largely Jewish New City, cutting its road link to Tel Aviv and almost reached the coast that would have cut Tel Aviv off from their settlements in the north of Palestine.

With the Egyptian Army bottled up, the Jews were then able to stop further advances of the Arab Legion, preventing them reaching the sea that would have cut Jewish territory in half. But they were unable to open the road between Tel Aviv and the New City of Jerusalem which was virtually isolated until a new road was constructed after the cease fire. As both the Jews and Arab Legion were running out of steam, the United Nations was able to arrange a cease fire. Egypt retained the Gaza strip, while Transjordan took over all the land occupied by the Arab Legion including all of the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank, in the process renaming itself just Jordan. This 1948 cease fire line remained the official United Nations boundary of Israel into the 21st Century.

Now back to my story.

I can remember nothing of the journey back to the UK. It was in summertime, August 1948, so I must have had an uneventful voyage back to the UK. When we got off the ship at Southampton, the customs men made all of us, Army, Navy and Air Force, empty our kitbags out. Kit was spread out all over the wharf while the customs men walked around poking at it. Goodness knows what they were looking for. I had brought back several tins of 50 cigarettes for my Dad but they were not interested in these. When I got off the train at Waterloo (I think) with my kit bag on my shoulder, I was stopped by two Military Police to check my rail pass. When I got it out to show to them, they told me to do up my buttons up. These I had undone to get my rail pass out. Not the sort of welcome one would expect by a serviceman returning from overseas service. My next recollection is of waking up in Burton Wood (Manchester) transit camp and hearing a blackbird outside the window, singing its heart out. Hurray, I am back in England.

After some leave I was posted to the Signals Development Unit at RAF Henlow in Bedfordshire where I was to spend an unpleasant year. The chief advantage of Henlow for me was that it was relatively close to my home at Henley. I overhauled my three-speed Raleigh bicycle that my mother had bought for me before the war for 7 pounds. While it was about a two hour bike ride from Henlow to Henley, it was much quicker and of course, cheaper than the train journey. This involved a slow stopping train journey into London, an underground train journey to Paddington Station and another slow stopping train journey to Henley. It took four or five hours at least.

But the trouble with Henlow was the work. It was in a large hangar with several long work benches. Each of these benches were manned with about twenty National Service mechanics in the process of completing their two years of service. In charge of each bench was a sergeant with a corporal as his deputy. My bench was involved in stripping down TR1196 transmitter receivers which was the replacement of the TR9 transmitter receivers on which we were trained at Cranwell. These TR1196s had not been used but had been very poorly stored, with the result that their metal chassis were badly corroded. The work of my bench was to remove all the components from the chassis, clean off the corrosion and send the chassis off for replating. On their return they were re-assembled and tested. It was sole destroying work. Obviously it would have been much cheaper to have dumped these corroded TR1196s and replaced them with newly manufactured items. I suspect this had already been done and the exercise at Henlow was merely to make work for a lot of National servicemen. As this was the time when the Berlin Airlift was in full operation one would have thought more productive work could have been

found.

My estimate is that for every ten TR1196 transmitter/receivers we stripped down, we managed to re-assemble only one that would work. Some of the cleverer mechanics were able to make broadcast receivers from the components they removed. Our output was inspected by a former Cranwell apprentice, Dickie Lock of the 46th entry. He held the position of AIS inspector. As far as my bench was concerned, he would have not been overworked. In theory the Sergeant was in charge of the bench but apparently my Sergeant had an important job in the Sergeants Mess that took him away mid-morning and kept him there for much of the rest of the day. As a consequence I was in charge for most of the time of 20 National Servicemen. Their chief objective was to kill time by finding something more interesting or amusing to do. Unfortunately there was an upstairs office in this hangar with large windows overlooking the whole hangar floor and this is where Warrant Officer Mace and his tannoy resided. Time and time again, the tannoy would boom, "Corporal Butler, the men on your bench are not working." Or worse, "Corporal Butler, report to my office," when I knew I was due for a good ticking off.

The chief industry on my bench was the Football Pools syndicate. From memory our syndicate had 729 lines. I cannot remember how many lines each member of the syndicate had to pay for or how much each line cost. I do remember that some of these 729 lines were winners every week, but seldom were the winnings big enough for a payout to syndicate members. Most weeks the winnings went back in the pool to help pay for next weeks lines. All too often syndicate members were asked to top up the pool so the syndicate could continue. Of course the permutations required to submit 729 lines required a lot of study and discussion. There was also a small team checking of football results and with the paying out of winnings. Or more often, the collection from members to ensure there is sufficient money in the pool to keep the syndicate going. This was just about a full time job for several members of my bench. Also a lot of time was spent by others in frequent discussions and checking to ensure there was no fiddling going on. All this had to be hidden from the eagle eyes of Warrant Officer Mace.

A main road ran through the middle of Henlow with accommodation on one side of the road and the Technical workshops on the other side. There was a high fence round the Technical workshops and the gate was manned by Ministry of Defence security guards who stopped and searched anyone seen carrying anything out of the technical compound. Though this did not stop a lot of thievery, for on wet days, quite large items could be carried out through the gate under the service issue waterproof capes we would be wearing. We had to be formed up in threes and marched across the road, to and from work. One morning I was in charge of a squad going to work. Inside the gate, I called out, "Squad Halt, Left Turn, Dismiss." all in one breath. The squad promptly disintegrated and slouched off to their places of work. The next moment a window opened in the nearby Headquarters building and there was a red faced Air Commodore yelling at me. I could not clearly hear what he was shouting, so I threw him a quick salute and hurried away in the opposite direction as fast as I could.

One day I was given a break. I was driven down to London to Olympia where there was a trade fair in progress. The RAF had taken a stall and was exhibiting some signals equipment. A very smart looking WAAF told me the equipment wasn't working. After fiddling around for a while, I found all the other equipment would work if I switched the T1131 VHF transmitter off. So I opened its back door to see if I could find out what was wrong. Deciding I needed to jam the door switch so I could look inside while the transmitter was working, I made a big mistake. Although I knew the two terminals by the door switch were the powers input terminals, I just wasn't thinking. I tried putting a jumper across these terminals in the mistaken belief I would be bypassing the gate switch. Not only did I get an electric shock, but I had started an arc in the mains input cable. This was enclosed in metal conduit that ran across the floor to a fuse box on the wall. As the mains cable burned back, a puff of smoke shot out of each joint in the metal conduit until it got to the fuse box. Quite fascinating to watch! I told the WAAF that I could do nothing

and she needed to get an electrician and cleared off smartly.

One of the airmen on my bench told me he had a date to take a girl to the cinema in Luton and would I come along to look after her friend which she had insisted in bringing along. We were to meet them outside the cinema. When we got on the bus he told me that if you say you are going to an evening class in Luton you don't have to pay. So like a fool I followed his advice. We duly met the girls and saw the film. I did not fancy 'my' girl and I expect the feeling was mutual. After the show we walked them back to one of their homes and then got the bus back to Henlow. What we did not realise was that there was a warrant officer sitting behind us as we were all in 'civvies'. When we got back to Henlow, he stopped and asked us if we had been attending evening classes. The airman I went with was with reeled off which evening class he had been attending (but obviously not on that particular evening) and very guiltily I repeated the same story. The warrant officer told us he would check up and if he found we were lying we would be in serious trouble. While I heard nothing more, there was a very worried corporal at Henlow for the next few weeks.

Towards the end of 1949, Dickie Lock and I were posted back to RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire to be instructors. Not radio apprentices, but to the National Servicemen doing a short eight week course. There were also some longer courses for regular airmen. Dickie was made a classroom instructor and I got the Aerial Laboratory. The most apt assessment of my instruction was given to me a few years later when I met up with a couple of my former students. "We enjoyed going to your Aerial Lab, Corp. Your lessons were great fun but we never learnt anything."

One operation I had to teach was how to raise and lower a Type 34 aerial mast. This was the two section version of the three sectioned Type 23 mast which was in quite common use. This operation took place on an open space overlooked by the Radio School's offices and classrooms, so I usually had quite an audience. I quickly learnt that if the stays and halyards were not laid out correctly, the end result was a disaster, or a very crooked mast at the best. One day, having erected the mast correctly, the trainees lowering the mast got it halfway down and then stopped passing the rope through their hands. "Come on" I said, "Keep on lowering". But they continued to firmly hold onto the rope not letting anymore out. "Don't mess me about" I said, "Let it go". They all promptly let go of the rope so the mast dropped, hitting the ground with a big thump. "Well you said let it go Corp" they said.

After a year at Cranwell, in the summer of 1950, our Radio School was moved across England to RAF Locking in Somerset, near Weston-Super-Mare. The Apprentice Radio School was to follow us about a year or so later. The move was quite well organised and on a Monday morning, the instructors and trainees began to move the furniture and equipment out of the classrooms and labs onto Queen Mary's (very long articulated vehicles normally used for moving aircraft by road). On Wednesday, the Queen Marys, with the instructors and trainees following in buses, were on their way across England in a big convoy to RAF Locking. By Friday morning everything had been unloaded and the classrooms and labs were set up, ready for training to begin again on Monday morning. The officer in charge of the Radio School was so pleased with our efforts that he gave us, trainees and instructors, the Friday afternoon off.

It was hot summer afternoon and there was a good (double decker) bus service into Western-Super-Mare. After a lot of heavy work, we were thirsty. In Weston we found that Somerset cider, Scrumpy, was half the price of beer and we also found out very quickly, the effect it had on the tummies of those not used to it. There were airmen in uniform lying down in the streets being sick into the gutters and others hanging out of windows of the buses heading back to Locking being sick. I hung over the side of the pier, feeding the fishes. I suspect the first impression the Radio School personnel would have made on the people of Weston-Super-Mare would not have been good.

The 18 months I spent at Locking was probably the most enjoyable part of my RAF service. There were several former Apprentices among the instructors. Most of them from the same entry as Dickie Lock (the 46th) but the only name I can remember now is Ed Fleming. There was also Peter Painter, only the second member of my entry (44th) I had met since leaving Cranwell in 1944. My best friend was a fellow instructor, Howard Beavers, who some years later was to return as a civilian instructor to Locking. He had a 350cc BSA motorbike from which, as a pillion passenger, I saw quite a lot of Somerset such as Cheddar Gorge, Wells Cathedral and Glastonbury. The most frightening experience being suddenly meeting a large coach that appeared to be completely filling the narrow road we were on, both of us travelling quite fast. I must have shut my eyes because I do not know to this day how we got passed.

It was at Locking that I became a proud owner of four wheels. A cousin in the motor trade, John Burton, purchased for me a 1935 Morris Cambridge saloon car. He also taught me to drive it and gave me enough knowledge to pass a driving test. The car was about 15 years old and it would have had little use during the war. Most of the instructors had motorbikes, and I was the first to own four wheels. As a consequence I became very popular with persons wanting to borrow it and also for those going my way who wanting a lift at weekends when I drove home. On one of these trips I got my first ticket for failing to give way at a pedestrian crossing. I was fined two pounds. It certainly was worth lending my car to the Radio School Admin Flight Sergeant because my name appeared much less frequently on the duty rosters.

The Commanding Officer was a Wing Commander Smith, generally known as Pecker Smith because of his hooked nose. He caught me in bed once when inspecting the barrack huts and fortunately I was on leave at the time. I had not been able to get away because the gearbox had jammed on my car and I had worked on it for a good part of the night. After a struggle I managed to open up the gearbox, pull out the gears, solder a bearing back in place with a large soldering iron and after three attempts re-assemble the gearbox correctly. Would you believe I had no more problems with the gearbox for the rest of the time I owned the car and I got nearly as much when I sold this car, as I originally paid for it.

Come Christmas 1951 I was on embarkation leave again as I was posted back to the Middle East. My parents were pleased it wasn't to Korea and to the war going on there at that time. The troop ship I travelled on was the Devonshire and we slept in hammocks over the mess tables. It was an awful ship and it was an awful journey in awful weather. We left Liverpool in a winter storm which got worse across the Bay of Biscay and did not ease up much even when we got into the Mediterranean. Much to our surprise we stopped at Algiers and were allowed ashore for a few hours. Although it was great to get off that dreadful troopship for a few hours, I was not impressed with Algiers. It was dirty smelly place and we could not sail on time as two servicemen had been arrested and it took some time to get them out of jail. They had apparently tried to rob a jewelers shop.

The bad weather followed us right to Port Said. I believe it was the only time I have been badly seasick and I suspect this was because I became very tired. We were packed in like sardines with the hammocks touching so anyone moving during the night disturbed all those around him. The hammocks had to be put away in the mornings and what with the mess decks being so crowded, the weather so bad (and cold and wet on deck) there was nowhere one could have a quiet snooze to catch up on lost sleep. Then I was on 'Man Overboard Watch' every third night. It was not surprising I became over-tired and was very pleased to get off that dreadful ship at Port Said. RAF personnel were taken to the transit camp at RAF El Hambra alongside the Suez Canal.

After a few days at El Hambra I was posted to RAF Abyad, to 109 Maintenance Unit where I was based for the next two and a half years. Stalag Luft 109 we used to call it. Back on guard duties again! RAF Abyad was beside the Great Bitter Lake through which the Suez Canal passed and next door to RAF Fayid, which at that time was the most important RAF airfield in Egypt because the British Forces had

been pulled back from their bases in the Cairo and Alexandria areas to bases alongside the Suez Canal. I believe there were about 80 000 British servicemen in these bases and maybe 80 service women. However this withdrawal had not satisfied the Egyptian Government who wanted the British out of Egypt all together. King Farouk had recently abrogated the treaty that allowed Britain to protect the Suez Canal and there had been some fighting between the Army and the Egyptian Police in the Canal-side City of Ismailia.

I was put to work in the Radio Repair and Installation Section of 109 MU (Maintenance Unit). Initially I was put on servicing R1392 VHF receivers, the replacement for the R1132 VHF receivers we were trained on at Cranwell. I do not think I was much good at this as I was moved on to make up panels and cable harnesses for fitting parties to install. Even then there was complaints about my soldered joints which I had made between cables and connectors.

While at RAF Abyad, I looked forward to leave in Cyprus. Every six months we were allowed to apply to be flown to Cyprus for a fortnight's leave. I made certain that I got the maximum four leaves in Cyprus while I was at Abyad. On one of these leaves I had been asked by an airman to give a packet to his brother who was based at RAF Nicosia. In trying to find him, I found myself in a barrack block for the ground crew of New Zealand Air Force's 14 Squadron. In talking to them I found most were former RAF servicemen who had joined the RNZAF and they had been posted to Cyprus from where they could get to the UK for leave. They were also much better paid than their equivalents in the RAF. This got me thinking.

I had made friends with another corporal, John Hughes, and we used to go to Cyprus together, hire a car, drive all over the island and generally have a lot of fun. Also I found out that one of my 44th entry, Arthur Jepson, was in charge of the Transmitting Station at RAF Fayid. It became a regular routine for me to walk to this Transmitting Station on Sunday afternoon's to meet Jep, for a cuppa, baked beans on toast and a chat. On a couple of occasions another of my entry, Garth Wheeler, would drop in on us. He was a Signaler on York transport planes travelling between Singapore and the UK.

My big break came when I had been at RAF Abyad for about a year. It was early in 1953 and the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth was coming up. A squadron of Venom fighter planes were to be sent from the Suez Canal Zone, to Southern Rhodesia (as it was then called) to take part in the coronation celebrations there. Because of the relative short range of these fighters, several small airfields between Egypt and Southern Rhodesia had to be set up so these fighters could use them for refueling, both going and coming back. One of the Valletta transport planes, taking the personnel and equipment for the Tabora airfield in Tanganika, had been loaded badly and some heavy cases broke loose when the plane hit a lot of turbulence near Wadi Halfa in southern Egypt. One of the casualties with a broken arm was the radio mechanic from 109 MU. His job would have been to set up the radio direction equipment at Tabora to guide the fighters to the airfield. I became his replacement.

It was a great to get away from RAF Abyad and it was an interesting flight to Tabora. We stopped at Wadi Halfa and stayed overnight at Khartoum in the Sudan. Next day we flew low over the Sudd, an enormous marsh, and buzzed a herd of elephants. The next stop was Juba in southern Sudan and then another overnight stop at Nairobi in Kenya. On the way to Tabora, the pilot pointed out the two or three belts of green that ran from east to west across Tanganika. He told us these were mango trees growing along the old slave routes from the Congo. The mango trees were planted alongside these routes to provided food for the slaves during their enforced trek to the coast.

We unloaded all our gear when we arrived at Tabora and with help of the three radio operators we had no difficulty in setting up and getting the VHF radio direction installation into operation. We were even

able to test it with the help of RAF transport planes on a regular service between northern and southern Africa. We were fed and accommodated in a hotel near the airfield and for us aircraftmen whose accommodation at RAF Abyad was in four men tents and having to queue for meals in the mess, this was luxury indeed. Furthermore, the few British residents made a fuss of us. They bought us drinks at the bar and the hotel manager lent us his car and the air field manager kept a fatherly eye on us, passing on all messages of aircraft movements to ensure we knew when we needed to have our direction finding installation in operation.

Tabora was quite an interesting place. Prior to World War 1 when Tanganika was a German colony, Tabora, roughly in the centre of the colony was laid out to be its capital. In the centre was the Boma, looking like a fort, and used as offices by the British administration when I was there. Radiating from it were twelve roads like spokes of a wheel, each several kilometers long. The Germans were not in Tanganika long enough to do much building along these roads, however they did arrange for a railway to be built from the coast. The contract was given to a Greek firm and some of their workers remained so there was a Greek settlement along one of these roads. During World War 2, Tabora was the site of a prisoner of war camp for Italians captured in Ethiopia and some of them came back, bringing their wives, to settle in Tabora. Thus there was an Italian colony along one of these roads. Prior to European occupation Arab slave traders had been active in Tanganika and there were still some of their descendants, dressed in traditional Arab robes in Tabora where they had their own settlement. Finally there were the native Africans but these were of two sorts, the Moslem dressed in white, and the others, many of them Christians but of different denominations, mostly dressed in their native costumes. These native peoples also had villages along these roads.

I mention all these different peoples because on Coronation Day they all gave performances in honour of the occasion with little school children in traditional costumes singing and dancing, Arabs in their flowing robes on horseback riding up and down the sports field cutting down mangoes off poles with their swords and performances and games (soccer played in bare feet) going on from morning to night. I suspect that most of the inhabitants of Tabora must have been involved. Before the Coronation Day festivities took place, the squadron of Venom fighter planes plus their servicing crew in transport planes passed through and the direction finding equipment worked perfectly with no problems in guiding them in. There were probably more planes together on the little Tabora airfield that day than there had ever been before.

I had not seen Venom fighters before and I was standing quite close to one just before takeoff. There was an enormous bang and a great cloud of smoke. Oh my God, the plane is on fire, I thought. I rushed towards a large fire extinguisher mounted on wheels but before I could make a fool of myself there was another big bang and a cloud of smoke from another plane followed by a series of bangs and smoke from the other planes. It was the first time I had seen jet planes being started up by starter charges. In effect their engines were started by explosives.

About a week after Coronation Day, the Venom Squadron and their entourage came back through Tabora, again with no problems for us. We then dismantled our equipment and packed up for our return to RAF Abyad after a most enjoyable month away. I had been constructing control and distribution panels and fitting these into a 19 inch solidly constructed metal racks for installation at RAF Habaniya in Iraq. This involved making hundreds of soldered joints and possibly because of my reputation of making poor soldered joints, I was given the job of taking it to Habaniya and installing it in the Transmission Station there.

Although it was wintertime, I can remember arriving at RAF Habaniya on a very hot day, and carrying my kit into a stone barrack block with the sweat pouring off me. Right beside my allotted bed was a big metal radiator. "What on earth is this for," I said. "Wait to 8 o'clock tonight" I was told. "You will be

hugging it". My control rack had already been delivered to the Transmitting Station, when I got there and other than two National Service watch keeping mechanics on shift, no other staff was present. I was told that the sergeant in charge was at home looking after his children and sick wife and the corporal was representing the Middle East Command at some sport. I forget which and the LAC on servicing duties was on sick leave.

It was the biggest transmitting station I had ever seen. There was a long row of T1131 VHF (very high frequency) Transmitters, another long row of T1509 HF (high frequency) Transmitters (of which I knew little) and four high powered, high frequency Transmitters, SWB8s and SWB11s used for long range communication to the UK and Singapore. I don't think I had even heard of these transmitters before. Having moved my control rack alongside the rack it was to replace, I began to transfer the control wiring from the old to the new rack. This was quite tricky work as I had to ensure I did not disrupt and circuits in operation. I kept on being interrupted by the watch keeping mechanics with requests such as, "Could you have a look at this transmitter, Corp? It's not working properly."

I quickly found that many of the transmitters were unserviceable to a lesser or greater degree. Some could be quickly made serviceable by tuning them properly while others were not so easy. There were hardly any useful spares in the Transmitting Station stores so I adopted the same process I had used years earlier at RAF Amman by using the parts of some unserviceable transmitters (Christmas Trees) to make others serviceable. All these interruptions made it very difficult to get on with the work I had been sent to Habaniya to do. Although I was spending up to 14 hours a day, 7 days a week in the transmitting station, only breaking off for meals and sleep, it was taking me much longer than expected to change the control wiring over from the old rack to the new rack.

After I has been at Habaniya for about 2 weeks, my boss from RAF Abyad turned up at the transmitting station, presumably to see how I was getting on, accompanied by the Signals Officer. It was an opportune time for me to have a good moan to explain why I had made so little progress. I had spent far more time on servicing than I had been able to spend on the control rack changeover. Many of the transmitters were now serviceable and more would have been if there had been spares at hand. I even had to carry out watch keeping duties when watch keepers did not turn up or had to leave. That morning I had been called out at 5 am because an overseas circuit had dropped out. I had not found time to wash, shave or get any breakfast (I had actually had a wash and got stuck into the watch keeper's rations). I laid it on thick. The Signals Officer made various excuses and I learnt later he wanted to keep me at Habaniya. I was surprised when my own boss took me aside to tell me I was doing a good job and he expected I would find it easier from now on.

This happened quite quickly. The sergeant turned up for a few hours 2 or 3 times a week and soon got the watch keeper's roster sorted out and the spares situation rectified. The corporal also turned up and got the floor cleaned up (so he could do press ups) in my opinion, because he didn't do much else. Apparently he had been spending time in the gym instead of coming to work, and the LAC radio fitter who had been on sick leave, now on light duties, also turned up. I found him very useful in helping me complete the changeover of the control racks and getting most of the 'Christmas treed' transmitters serviceable again. It was quite a useful exercise for me too, as I learnt quite a lot about T1509 and SWB high powered transmitters which I had never seen or heard of before. (This was to come in very useful when I joined the RNZAF. But that is another story)

Before I returned to RAF Abyad, I managed to get on a recreational trip to Baghdad, about 100 kilometres away. The streets of Baghdad were full of pot-holes and as it had been raining they were full of muddy water which the traffic was splashing in all directions. Mostly over me! I became coated in a yellow mud. Other than that and a rather monotonous journey along the side of the Euphrates River, all I

can remember of Baghdad was the beautiful domed mosque coated in bright blue tiles. I never really got around RAF Habaniya which was spread around the lake of the same name. Apparently it could be divided into 5 different bases. No doubt there were other ex-apprentices there, maybe even one or two of my own entry.

But I did visit 'Cheapside'. This was a town that grew up to provide labour and security guards for RAF Habaniya and was reputed to be the third biggest town in Iraq at that time. Most of its inhabitants were Assyrians, a Christian tribe that had been driven out of Turkey after the First World War. They had been recruited by the RAF because isolated from their Arab neighbours; their loyalty could be relied on. After the RAF left Iraq, for their own safety, these people also left and are now living in other countries around the world, many in New Zealand.

Back at 109 MU I found I had been made Middle East expert on NDBs (non directional beacons) transmitters and Frequency Shift Units. The latter equipment I had never heard of before and would you believe, the first job I got, was to be sent to the RAF base at Aden to repair this equipment. It took me about 48 hours hard graft to find and fix this fault. During this time my ankles became swollen through standing so long on a stone floor. Much of the time was spent finding out how the equipment was supposed to work. The defective item was a tiny little component right in the heart of the equipment. Very difficult to locate!

It was during this first job as a Middle East expert that I found this work had disadvantages. A serious failure gave the 'expert' a priority one passage on an aircraft. A senior officer could be unloaded to make way for a mere corporal. However one did not get this priority for the return journey. Then it was priority four and I had to hang around in Aden for nearly a fortnight before a seat could be found for a priority four passenger. During this enforced stay I would go for a walk along the beach in the early morning before it became too hot. One morning I came across the body of an enormous shark that had been washed up and I rushed back to the base to get my camera but by the time I got back there was only truck tracks in the sand. I also had a quick look at Crater, the native town at Aden. A truly dreadful place! Most jails would be more pleasant. When I finally got away from Aden I was actually pleased to get back to Abyad.

It was about this time in 1953, I was promoted to sergeant. This made life at RAF Abyad far more tolerable. Instead of a four man tent I had a room to myself in a barrack building and the meals in the Sergeants Mess were quite an improvement too. Because my work now required a lot of travelling, I think I must have visited most of the RAF bases in the Middle East Command. If there was an emergency, I would likely be awakened at 2 or 3 a.m. in the morning by the Orderly Officer to be told that I had been booked on a plane leaving RAF Fayid at about 6 a.m. I kept a tool box in my room and the Orderly Officer would have organised an early breakfast for me and transport to Fayid.

My travels took me to RAF El Adam near Tobruk in Libya. I was surprised to find a few of the German Afrika Corps still there. They were employed as Ministry of Works staff on the base. While there, I took the opportunity to visit Tobruk, still with many damaged buildings and the Commonwealth Cemetery there. It had been recently completed and was in a beautiful condition but it was disturbing to see gravestones for 18 and 19 year old Australian boys. I also got back to RAF Amman where a hill had been removed so as to enlarge the airfield and provide a base for the Jordanian Air Force. Some of the equipment in the Transmitting Station had been replaced but the high powered NDB transmitter was still there and I was amused to find my unofficial modification, carried out about six years earlier, was still in place. These were the jumper wires I had placed across a plug and socket to prevent these from overheating.

Because of our terrible journey to the Middle East in the troopship Devonshire two and a half years earlier, John Hughes and I obtained permission to make our own way back to the UK when our overseas tour ended in mid-1954. The RAF flew us to Cyprus where we purchased bicycles and got some practice in. We then got on a ferry to Naples (Italy) via Piraeus, the port of Athens (Greece) where we got ashore for a few hours and had a quick look at the Pantheon. At Naples we got on our bikes and peddled north. As we had plenty of time, we would stop for two or three nights at places we found interesting. In looking for cheap overnight accommodation, we picked on those so called hotels which had paint peeling off their doors. Generally this worked quite well except in Rome where we stayed for 3 days to see the sites and were well and truly fleeced. From then on the limiting factor was money.

My memory of our journey is sketchy. I can remember stopping briefly to look at a beautifully maintained Commonwealth War Cemetery near Casino. Although the war had ended nine years earlier there were still bridges waiting to be rebuilt on Italian roads and we had to backtrack once or twice to find an alternate route. I can recall the wheels of my bike getting stuck in tram tracks in Milan in the middle of a lot of traffic. Outside of the towns there was very little traffic and we might meet or be passed by a truck every half hour or so. We were more likely to meet other cyclists like us.

When we got to Switzerland, we took a train to the top of an Alpine pass and freewheeled most of the way down the other side. We travelled well over 100 miles that day to Lucerne. At Basel we crossed into Germany and stopped at a nice little town called Freiburg. We crossed into France at Strasbourg but I can remember little of our journey across France except that we were getting very short of money. Most French roads we biked on were within avenues of apple trees and as it was August the apples were ripening. It was easy to spot good eating apples as people before us had left the apple cores lying around

The big disappointment was Paris. I had family friends there and we hoped to be given a decent meal and perhaps even a bed for the night. But no such luck. It was August and my friends were on holiday so it was back on our bikes to Le Havre on a diet of apples. We must have had prepaid tickets for the overnight ferry to Southampton, because we arrived there hungry and broke. Fortunately John Hughes had a sister living in Southampton and she gave us the best breakfast I have ever eaten which enabled me to happily bike the 50 or so miles to Henley and the comforts of home.

My 12 year contract with the RAF was due to end early in 1955, so I had only a few months service left. This was spent at 16 M.U. at RAF Stafford and I honestly cannot remember what work I was supposed to be doing there. Probably very little! Stafford was too far from Henley to push bike home so I bought a little motorbike, a two stroke 125 cc James with a top speed, downhill with a tail wind, of 45 miles per hour. Average speed 35 miles per hour! The five hour ride to Henley was a bit of a test of endurance, particularly when I ran out of fuel one night near Coventry and had to push the bike a good couple of miles. I also bought a little 1931 Singer car. It was like a box on wheels. One sat up quite high in it and the windscreen was vertical. I cannot remember what use I made of it except that it broke down. This must have been not long before I left for New Zealand because John Hughes acquired it and must have got it going again for he told me quite recently that he actually got some use out of it for a while.

It was a much shorter ride from Stafford to Rotherham to visit my friend Howard Beevers and his family. He was then out of the RAF and was working in Rotherham and It was about this time, the end of 1954, that I spotted an advert asking for former RAF mechanics to join the New Zealand Air Force. Remembering the meeting with RNZAF ground crew at RAF Nicosia about two years earlier, replied to the advert and was invited to attend an interview early in 1955 and provided with a rail warrant for travel to London. I had been considering signing on for a further ten years in the RAF to age 40 when I could have retired with a pension but 10 years gave enough time for two more tours in the Middle East. New Zealand sounded much more attractive. So wearing my best blue uniform, buttons gleaming, shoes

shining, sergeant strips on my arms, medal ribbons on my chest, I travelled to London for the interview.

New Zealand House had yet to be built and the New Zealand High Commission was accommodated in the Adelphi building on The Strand. There I was wheeled in before an Air Commodore and after giving him with a brief history of my experience in the RAF, (leaving out all the bad bits of course) he said "You are just the sort of man the RNZAF needs." Obviously he was a very poor judge of character. I think he was Air Commodore Cohen, but I could not keep my eyes off the suit he was wearing. He was in civvies wearing this beautiful suit. It was probably the only Saville Row suit I have ever seen close up. He was telling me that I could buy back ten years of my RAF service to go toward pensionable service in the RNZAF (It cost me 240 pounds only. The best investment I have ever made). The only bad news was that I would have to revert to corporal but I would soon get my sergeant strips back again. (This was to take me all of 7 years). My pay as a corporal in the RNZAF would be nearly twice as much as I was getting in the RAF as a sergeant. I was sold and completed an application form to join the RNZAF before leaving the building.

The initial arrangement was for me to join a draft sailing for New Zealand shortly after my RAF service ended. But there was some muck up and I was put on a draft leaving in July, so I had about four months to fill in. Much of this time was spent with Howard Beevers who was going into business on his own account by setting up in a little shop at a village, Kilnhurst, just outside Rotherham. It had been a butchers shop so we had a fair bit of work turning it into a shop to sell and repair radio and electrical equipment. I was his chief painter and decorator. His main business was to be the selling, installation and repair of television sets as the second TV channel, the ITV service was just starting up. Howard did very well for some years until he could no longer compete with the big stores for sales. He then joined the Ministry of Defence and again went back to RAF Locking, but this time as a civilian instructor.

The sailing to New Zealand was delayed until early August. Members of my draft met up at Adelphi House. There was only six of us and we were sent down to Tilbury Docks to board the New Zealand Shipping Line's Ruahine which carried a lot of cargo as well as about 250 passengers. My fare cost the New Zealand Air Force 105 pounds. Little did I know that about three and a half years later, my future wife, Beryl, would be travelling on the same ship to New Zealand. By then the fare was 125 pounds. I was in a six berth cabin with other members of our draft and it was quite comfortable as long as the six occupants did not all try to get out of bed, get dressed or undressed or go to bed at the same time. Being summertime it was a very pleasant voyage across the Atlantic. We stopped to refuel at the Dutch Island of Curacao and were allowed ashore at a rather quaint clean Dutch town of Willemstad. The Panama Canal was quite interesting with going through all the locks being towed by rather strange looking engines. We stopped again at Panama City and were allowed ashore again. It was hot and smelly.

A day out of Panama and into the Pacific and the temperature dropped like a stone. The nearly three week voyage across the Pacific was rather cold, boring and miserable. It was cold because it was winter, boring because there was only sea to see, except when we heaved to by the Pitcairn Island when some of the islanders came aboard via their long boats to sell the curios they had made. Miserable because several passengers became sick with polio and there were two deaths. So, entertainment on board was curtailed. This was before polio vaccines became available and the treatment available onboard for the sufferers was very limited.

Eventually, early in September, 1955, we arrived in Wellington on a lovely sunny winter morning. The Harbour and its surroundings were stunning. here were no high rise buildings in those days and the biggest building in sight was the Monastery above Oriental Bay. We were taken to RNZAF Shelly Bay for a meal and then back to Wellington Harbour to board the overnight ferry to Lyttelton, the port of Christchurch. All passengers had bunks to sleep in so it was a reasonably comfortable journey. At

Lyttelton we were taken to RNZAF Wigram, which was then on the outskirts of Christchurch. Because we had been in contact with polio, we were put in quarantine in the sick quarters for three weeks. When let out of quarantine, we were told to report to Wigram's Administration Officer, a Flight Lieutenant. His door was open and he was busy sweeping the floor. "Hang on a minute chaps. Let me get this office cleaned up first." I then realised I had joined a very different airforce.

We were then kitted out and given some indoctrination into the ways of the RNZAF. I was disappointed to find that the RNZAF's 14 Squadron was no longer in Cyprus. This Squadron had been withdrawn to Singapore. Even more surprising was to learn that all British Forces had been withdrawn from Egypt. There was certainly no indication of this withdrawal when I left Egypt only one year previously. At that time 109 MU staff were still installing equipment in RAF bases in the Canal Zone. My reasons for leaving the RAF was the fear of returning to the Canal Zone for a third and maybe a fourth overseas tour and the ease of which members of the New Zealand Squadron base in Cyprus could get leave in the UK now no longer existed. I had been gazumped!

Soon after I arrived at Wigram, my little James motorbike arrived. I had crated it up before leaving the UK and had it shipped on the Ruahine to be unloaded at Lyttelton. Once I got it unpacked, I was able to see some of the countryside around Christchurch and I soon discovered there was a disadvantage of touring on Sundays, as very few petrol service stations were open. Heading back to Wigram, one Sunday afternoon, I passed several closed service stations until I ran out of fuel. With the prospect of pushing my bike several miles, I was delighted to find the next service station I came to was open.

It was early November 1955 before I got posted away from Wigram to RNZAF Ohakea in the North Island. So I was back on the overnight ferry to Wellington, this time with my little motorbike. It was mid-morning and with all my kit strapped on the back, I headed north out of Wellington. Foolishly I had not acquired a map, but had merely been told the various towns I would have to pass through to get to Ohakea. (Johnsonville, Porirua, Paekakariki, Otaki, Levin, Foxton and finally Sanson) Turn left at Sanson and I would be just about at Ohakea. Little did I know then, that I would be a resident of Johnsonville some years later for nearly 30 years.

What I wasn't told was that the farther north I went, the farther apart these towns would be. Also, there were still unsealed stretches on this main North Road. About an hour after leaving the Wellington docks, I was delighted at the progress it appeared I was making. Passing through Paekakariki, I believed I was halfway there, but then, slowed down by the unsealed parts of the road, another two hours passed by. Although I did not know it then, I was on the endless Himatangi straight, and became certain I must have passed to turnoff to Ohakea. Very worried, I stopped to turn back, when in the distance I spotted two of the so called bomb-proof domed hangars. It must be Ohakea? What a relief.

Initially I was accommodated in a twin room and while unpacking my kit, the other occupant came in. We looked at each other and both of us said, "We have met before." We worked through each of the RAF bases where we had been stationed and when he said Aqir, in Palestine, I said "Bingo." He had been an airframe mechanic on the same squadron where I had been a radio mechanic. One of his jobs was to ensure that all Form 700s were completed before the aircraft flew. He had a lot of trouble chasing me, to get me to sign for the serviceability of the radio equipment. So we had plenty to talk about.

Next morning I had to report to the Signals Officer, Squadron Leader Don McGlashen, who I was to find had a well-deserved reputation as being an Officer and a Gentleman. I was to be told later that he had joined the RNZAF before the war as a radio mechanic and was one of the servicing crew sent to the UK to learn how to service the Wellington bombers being purchased for the RNZAF. Before these planes could be brought to New Zealand, the Second World War began and this squadron of bombers with their

flying and servicing crews were offered by the NZ Government to the RAF for service in Europe and became 75 Squadron. About 40 years later I would go and live in McGlashen St, Motueka, which I was told had been named after his uncle. I was told I was to work at the Transmitting Station which was four miles from Ohakea so my little James motorbike became quite useful. At the Transmitting Station I met my new boss, Sergeant Tommy Methven, ex RAF like me. One of the first things he asked me was did I have any relatives in New Zealand. In response to my negative reply, he asked me if I would mind working over Christmas / New Year holidays. I had no choice.

The Transmitting Station was a smaller version of the one at Habaniya with many of the same types of transmitters. Several VHF T1131s and HF T1509s and a couple of high power SWB8 transmitters for a tele-type circuit to Melbourne and a Morse circuit to the RNZAF base near Suva in Fiji. There were also four high powered, high frequency America Transmitters, two Collins, two RCA. These had an interesting history and as they had been supplied to New Zealand under the Lease Lend agreement had to be destroyed at the end of the War. I was told that they were dumped in Wellington Harbour and after the necessary paperwork had been completed, were fished out, washed out, dried, repaired and brought back into service. No doubt with difficulty, if this story is completely true. As it was difficult to change the frequency on these transmitters they each had a dedicated channel. Their use was for long distance transmission, complementing the SWB8 Transmitters on the Melbourne and Fiji circuits.

Like Habaniya, this Transmitting Station operated for 24 hours a day all the year round. So there were three watches with two mechanics on each shift, plus another mechanic on the day shift who filled in if any of the watch keepers were absent. With the Sergeant and me, that made a complement of nine which was just the same as at Habaniya, but because we were so far from Ohakea, we had to cook our own meals. One of the responsibilities of the watch keepers coming on for day shift was to pick up rations from the Mess. During my time at the Ohakea Transmitting Station, we turned out some very good cooks and even I took turns without too many disasters.

There were only three of us on duty over the Christmas / New Year holiday period but there was very little to do. As long as there was one person to mind the 'shop' the other two could do and go where we liked. About four years later, one of those I was on shift with that Christmas, Trevor Bushby, was to introduce me to my future wife and be my Best Man at our wedding in 1961. We even left the Transmitting Station vacant for a couple of hours on Christmas Day, when we all went to the Airman's Mess at Ohakea for Christmas Dinner. I took my Christmas leave in February, 1956 and having nowhere specific to go, it was suggested I spend the time at Nelson and earn a bit of extra cash picking fruit.

So back down to Wellington on my little motorbike with an overnight stop in a little Bed and Breakfast hotel on the Terrace and then on the ferry to Picton in the South Island. Next morning back on my bike to Nelson, this was a slow journey because so much of the road was unsealed. It was quite late in the afternoon before I reached the Labour Department Office in Nelson and within five minutes I was out on the street again with two scraps of paper in my hand. One had the address of an orchard where I would work and the other, the address of accommodation where I could stay. I found my way to Stoke, then a little village just outside Nelson, and to the address I had been given. It was owned by a lovely family, the McAlpines. Mum, Dad and six children, and there was no difficulty in fitting me in.

The orchard was in Richmond, the next village out from Stoke. The owner was a Dutchman and I was to be picking pears. My pay depended on how many I picked and it was here that I found that pear trees can have some really nasty thorns. I would start picking at 8 am and finish at 5 p.m. with an hour off for lunch. The only other picker was a young mother who brought a toddler along with her after having seen her other children off to school; she would arrive about 9 a.m. She also took a hour for lunch and finished at 3 p.m. so as to meet her children coming home from school. In spite of having to chase after her toddler

at times, in these five hours she would invariably pick more pears than I would be able to pick in eight hours. It is just a matter of practice, the owner told me, she has been picking fruit since she was a young girl.

When he found I was a radio mechanic, he asked me to look at an amplifier he had built from a kit set as it wasn't working properly. It was the simplest of faults which I fixed in about two minutes. He was so delighted that he wanted to pay me. I refused, but I noticed that afterwards he always paid me more for the pears I picked, saying I had always picked the pears higher up on the trees. I spent two weekends in the Nelson area and on both Sundays the McAlpines took me out for a picnic lunch. Mr McAlpine was a contractor and had a small truck with an open tray on the back. Mr and Mrs sat in the front while their six children and I sat on old mattresses on the tray. The first Sunday we went to Rabbit Island. We had to start early get there at low tide. There was only a ford over to Rabbit Island then and we had to stay on the Island until the tide went out again. On the second Sunday we went to the beautiful Kaiteriteri Beach, passing through Motueka to get there. Little did I know then that about 40 years later I would be retiring to live in Motueka!

Back at Ohakea I attended a Corporals Club meeting early in April 1956 and someone asked if the bar could be opened on ANZAC Day, April 25th. There was some discussion but no one seemed to be certain. Eventually the Chairman said "Any Kiwis here." There were about 40 corporals present, but not one was a born and bred New Zealander. All of us were ex RAF. How could this happen? When the Korean War began in 1949, the price New Zealand was getting for its wool exports increased by about five times virtually overnight so suddenly the NZ Government had a lot of spare cash.

The Prime Minister of that time, Sid Holland, was over in London and got offered a job lot of 50 Vampire jet fighter planes at a bargain price. They were the 'state of the art' fighter planes at that time. While Sid was convinced that he had got a good deal, it is doubtful if he knew what he was getting into. The RNZAF had been run down after the end of the Second World War and had no experience of jet planes.