

Monitor Exercise Book – Book Number 1, Introduction

My Life in the R.A.F

I hope to give a true account of my activities in the Royal Air Force. I will try not to exaggerate, but just give a true account as I see it. It is not intended to run down service life, but from time to time I hope to give my personal opinion of various incidents, and make a few criticisms.

Monitor Exercise Book – Book Number 2, CHPT I

My first inclination to join the Royal Air Force was long before war broke out in 1938. It did not materialise however, largely due to the influence of my father who disliked military service. Strangely enough my mother was quite neutral – she did not wish me to go but on the other hand she not wish to stand in my light.

September 1939 arrived, and poor old Neville (a gentleman to the last and a pacifist) informed us on that fateful Sunday morning that we were at war with Germany. Like other people, I was rather bewildered, not knowing what to do. I was feeling quite patriotic and wishing to do my bit. However as I was only 18, I was advised by quite a few of the "old Sweats" to hang on as long as possible.

Time marched on – my brother was called up into the army May 1940, and naturally after this (being the only other left at home) my parents persuaded me to stay home as long as possible.

I'll admit I was doing my bit at this time. I was on the A.R.P Report Centre staff at Swindon, and I was also working for the war Department in the capacity of Surveyors clerk. I'll explain here that I was lodging home from home with my "good old" aunt and uncle in order to be nearer work.

Time marched on again and in February 1941 I registered for Military service with the 19's and preferred the Royal Air Force. In March I was medically examined at Bath, and interviewed by an R.A.F officer. I heard nothing until May when I was called for another examination for Air Crew at Oxford.

Here I had my first experience of waiting and queuing which seems to be so prevalent in the services. I was fairly "browned off" with it, but I am glad to say that now I take it as a matter of course. It took from 9am until 4pm to go through all the stages of the medical examination with a short general knowledge test included. I was passed as Grade 1, placed on the Volunteer Reserve, and sent home to await that fateful letter which would make me an active member of H.M Forces.

I waited quite a long time - from May until mid - August. On arriving home late one Monday evening a letter in a blue envelope awaited me marked O.H.M.S. Well, that was it - to report to Lord's Cricket ground on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941. I thought it quite unusual to be given 14 day's notice, but I needed it.

Then came a hectic two weeks of flying around bidding farewell to all my acquaintances which had grown in numbers. The A.R.P Report Centre staff came first, because they didn't really trouble whether I went to hell or not. It's a pity that some of the .... Office staff didn't have chance of military service. Of course there were some exceptions. Anyway, I was happy to show them that I intended to do my bit, and this put a stop to the gentle hints. Yes, it was a grand opportunity. My glamorous Swindon cousin hinted that it would make a man of me, and this has been proved since.

I had mixed feelings concerning my call up. The office staff had depleted for this reason, and consequently a large amount of responsibility fell on my shoulders - I was glad to know that I should leave this behind. Kate and Bobby were to carry on the good work and I didn't envy them their job. I think they were sorry to see me go, as I was the only man in our office, and they liked someone to kick if they had the opportunity. Still they rallied round, and gave me an "Eversharp" pencil - the only present which I received from Shrivenham Staff.

I bade farewell to the "..." at whose .... Over Rimes Garage I had spent many an enjoyable evening. Also the Pagets (Stella and Frank) who were my best friends in Swindon. Then, my Aunt, Uncle and cousin. I had lived with them for almost four years, and I was treated as one of the family. I had everything I could wish for - in fact in some respects I was quite spoiled. I left Swindon behind on September 4<sup>th</sup>, and arrived home. Here there was much activity as my brother was to be married on Sept 6<sup>th</sup>, and naturally I had to fill the role of best man.

The wedding was a fine one, and I was glad to know that I could be my brother's "prop." So the weekend passed and on Monday morning at 7am I prepared myself to fly from the nest, and see the world alone. I bade farewell to my parents and the Andrews, and set off fully armed with plenty of eats for the journey.

#### CHPT II

I arrived at Paddington at 11 am and moved across London to St Johns Wood. Here I found many hundreds of fellows in the same plight as myself - feeling a little jittery and wondering how the day would end.

At Lords we went through the usual formalities that is name, number, religion etc entered on special forms. After this we were sorted into flights of 50, and marched off to quarters which took the form of flats in Prince Albert Rd facing Regents Park. We did very little that day, but managed to become acquainted with our room mates.

Three times daily we were marched to the Zoo Restaurant where the Air Ministry had provided a cookhouse. For the first time I realised how they feed thousands of men, and the cookhouse staff worked like hell to ensure that we had our food. There were some moans concerning the food, but I personally found no fault with it. It was pretty to watch these plates being slung down the counter, caught at the other end by the lads and carried away to various tables. Here we forgot we were human beings and reverted back to a primitive state by grabbing everything that was edible. Manners did not exist.

The second day we were issued with our glamorous blue clothes. Of course most of the lads were conscious to try it on, and show themselves to the various London girls. I was a "glamour" or "Brylcreem" boy at last. Why I was called this – I really don't know. I have found very little glamour concerning the R.A.F as yet. Some people think that the R.A.F is just a holiday camp, but seeing is believing – let them try it themselves. It's true that the discipline is not as strict, but I don't think this an advantage at all.

This was my second visit to London, and consequently there were many sights which I had not seen. Fortunately I picked up with an old school pal of mine – Bob Palmer – who knew his way around London very well. We visited Hyde Park, listened to various soap-box orators spitting out Communism (which is still popular) and some venting their wrath at the Roman Catholics and the Pope. We walked through Hyde Park where in the growing darkness so many dark deeds are committed. From there to Trafalgar Square where Nelson's monument stands upright still under the effect of the pigeons. From there we walked down Whitehall, saw the barricaded famous Downing Street, and then to see the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey. These were marvellous sights, and even more so after the effects of those bloody German bombs and bombers. We often visited the Y.M.C.A canteen in the Strand. Here we used to have supper and play table tennis before taking the tube back to Baker Street and to our quarters.

Here one word of praise to the Y.M.C.A canteens. They are fine organisations and so are the workers. We were always assured of a good feed at a cheap rate, and there were always free games to occupy our spare time. In fact, I wonder how the canteens managed to pay their way. Well, they still carry on. What a contrast to the N.A.A.F.I canteens. Here, it was definitely Capitalism – someone behind the scenes raking in the dough – and all at the expense of us service men. Some of the excess profits were supposed to be spent on things beneficial to our welfare, but were they? Let the N.A.A.F.Is take a pattern from the Y.M.C.A.

It was rather a pitiful sight to see the Londoners still sleeping in the tubes. Being from a more remote place in England, I didn't really realise what bombing meant. Fortunately London had no air raids whilst I was there, and I was thankful.

The days rolled on. I was very much cross-examined by various officials of the R.A.F including officers and W.A.A.Fs. "What were my hobbies" – "Was I keen on Sport," etc I was inoculated vaccinated, blood grouped, and had a night vision test. Of course I heard no results from these various examinations, but I assume they were entered in my records.

Almost another week passed and then the "postings" rumours began to circulate. Should we be posted immediately? Would it be Newquay, Scarborough, Stratford or Cambridge. Some poor devils had been awaiting their posting for many weeks – so we couldn't complain if we did not move. On Friday morning the lists came out, but I had been put on Reserve Posting. Fortunately that evening the Reserves were called on and I found I had been posted to No. 9.1 T.W at Stratford. There was a hasty packing of kit, and of course (as my brother will understand) I had my webbing equipment in a hell of a mess.

Saturday Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> dawned fair. By noon we were on our way to Paddington in lorries, and from there by train to Stratford. I had a grand opportunity of seeing parts of England which I had never seen before. The journey took four hours, and at the end of it a few N.C.Os were waiting to kick us into shape and show us our quarters.

On Monday we were sorted out and I found myself at the Washington Hotel. Then the work started – up at 6am breakfast at 7am parade and inspection at 7.40am and start lectures at 8am. These continued during the day until 6pm with a short break at 10.30am and the dinner break at 1pm. Well it was a pretty long day and it shook me for the first week. The P.T and Drill made one as stiff as a poker, and I was first feeling the effects of the vaccinations. I didn't feel too happy, and was ready to tell the R.A.F to go to hell. Anyway what was the use? I had to stick it – Whilst at the same time appreciating a bit of home life. The Corporal in charge of the Flight was a perfect b... , and was disliked by many of the lads. Anyway we settled down quite well, and the cheerful sport among the lads helped us all.

The P.O (Kingdon) was in charge of the Flight and he was a gentleman. He liked his discipline of course, but we always had a square deal from him. He always led the Flight to various lecture rooms in the town, and he could maintain the good old 140 all the way making even us young 'uns a bit tired.

Two weeks passed, and the rumours began to fly around concerning overseas posting. It is remarkable how the rumours circulate even if they are true or not. Anyway this one materialised, and we were informed by the C.O that we were being sent overseas immediately. We stayed to



take our Maths examination, (quite a simple one on fractions and proportions etc) we were medically examined, inoculated again and interviewed individually by the C.O. Then they sent us on five days leave. It took me four hours to reach home – a distance of 40 miles which in fact shows how train services were fixed during the war. I had previously written home and told them the news, and naturally mother wasn't too keen.

My leave passed quickly. I fled around bidding my various friends and relations a farewell. In the meantime, I became more intimately acquainted with a certain friend of mine which I very much regret led to quite a lot of complications on her part with another man, and after bidding them a good farewell I returned to Stratford. At Cheltenham I had to wait for connections, and consequently Bobby and Kate came to keep me company. Anyway I arrived at the Washington about 10.30pm. I found that my room had been occupied by a new bunch and had to sleep elsewhere I could. This shows that R.A.F hadn't lost much time in replacing us at Stratford. We hung on for two or three days, being issued with flying kit and other items to replace those which had been pinched or borrowed from us.

The day before the last one at Stratford we were inspected by the station W.O and he picked fault with everyone's webbing, and our dress in general. In fact we were fed up with this b- s-, and then started to wonder if we would ever fly at all. Still that passed away, and very early next day we were on our way up North. After a five hours journey we arrived at West Kirby, and were transported by lorry to the camp which was 2 miles away. This was the queerest camp I have ever seen. There didn't seem to be any system at all, and they didn't really know if we were there or not. We were put into huts in which was a mixture of single beds and wooden two tier bunks. The blankets were very damp. However after swiping some coal, and taking strips of wood off the bunks we managed to light the two stoves (one at each end of the hut) Unfortunately the stove pipe on one had been badly battered by our predecessors and consequently the hut was soon dense with smoke. Several remedies were tried such as blocking the hole with a flattened out tin, a piece of lino torn from the floor etc but they all failed.

Even the staff here were lackadaisical some corporals went around with shirts and white collars attached, they didn't really bother about parades, and consequently few too relaxed into a state of laziness. Reveille was any time after 7am breakfast at 7.30am, and a parade between 9 and 9.30am. Such was life – the remainder of the day we read, wrote letters, or played cards. We were eventually issued with khaki tropical kit, which when new look quite smart, however after a few turns by the laundry, and a few more by myself it looks quite like standing on its last legs. The M.O at West Kirby gave us a lecture on hygiene in the tropics, and this was quite amusing. In fact he spun some quite vulgar limericks just as a way of illustration. All this happened within a week. Then the unexpected happened – we went on leave for another five days. There was great jubilation

the night before we went home. Some of the lads went to West Kirby and after visiting many pubs, and scrounging what drink they could they came home fairly tight or a pretence at being tight. Yes, there were quite a few lads on our mob who like to act drunk. I don't know why, there is no hero stuff about that.

Anyway, we didn't get much sleep that night. We had some Scotch lads with us complete with bagpipes, and as I am not partial to these instruments it was a hell of a row.

By 2pm the next day we were on our way to our respective homes. I had 150 miles to travel and more. Consequently it was 10pm before I reached Gloucester after changing at Crewe and Birmingham. I found to my dismay that the last train to Cirencester had gone, and that the only available would be the 1am to Kemble only. Well, I didn't relish the idea of walking from Kemble, and consequently I pushed off to the Simmons home. They were surprised to see me, but after a good supper I went to bed. The next morning my sister-in-law drove me to Lyppeat Park where my mother was supposed to be staying. Anyway she had gone the day before. My uncle and aunt were however pleased to see me. The former knew something of the last war, so that he was able to give me a few hints. On Sunday afternoon I arrived home much to the surprise of all the folks. It was rather a fools game for me after saying goodbye before, and now coming home again. Still, I made good use of the leave and it went much quicker than the first one. I was able to say cheerio to the folks whom I had not seen on my last leave. The days absolutely flew away and it wasn't long before I was saying cheerio to father at Watermoor Station. I should imagine this place has a reputation by now as this is where all the tender goodbyes have taken place both for this war and the last one.

During my leave I had spent good times with my female friend, taken her home; in fact it had developed into little more than a friendship. It was first the case of the other man which held up things. Anyway this problem (we hoped) would be solved during my absence, and I don't think the day is far off when we shall develop this friendship still further. My mother and father were quite pleased about it and I'm really glad - at it was my own choosing and perseverance. I had known her since those far off school days, when contact of any kind was forbidden between the boys and the girls - due to the pig-headedness of a bachelor headmaster.

I have gone off trail a bit. This is an account of my service life not school life although they have some principles in common. I arrived back in West Kirby, and was almost enveloped in mud caused by the heavy rain. Another day passed, and on the following morning we were up and away by 4am. "Well" we thought, "This is it" meaning the sea voyage. However after travelling around Lancashire we finally arrived at Heaton Park near Manchester. Here a new station had just opened for the benefit of these W/T Air Crew who were being sent overseas. The living huts were not ready, and hence we were lucky to be billeted out with civilians at Prestwick.

Berty Farrant and myself were billeted with Mr Garlick. She was a good sort one of these rare good ones which you meet these days. In fact the majority of the lads had good billets. Of course they only had to provide an empty room. The R.A.F provided the bed and blankets etc. of course if anything more was required – well – it depended on the land-lady or her family. Mrs Garlick had one daughter of 15, the pride of her eye., and an expert pianist for her age. I know as on Sunday afternoon they invited me to their drawing room to help sing a few songs etc.

Yes this was grand – we had baths and could actually shave in hot water. Our duties however were very boring, and the “browned off” state developed further. We arose at 6am away to the mess hall (2 miles away) by 7.15am, breakfast, and a parade at 8.45am, after this we did hardly nothing, but just out, stand and wait in that park for hours on end. The weather was becoming cold too, and it didn't help matters. Being a new camp the food was very good – in fact the best I have had I the R.A.F. This waiting continued for a fortnight, and the lads were becoming very fed up. Berty Farrant (my room mate) told me that as he was able to go back to his civilian job as a “cooper” he wouldn't mind chucking the whole idea altogether. Well, I didn't blame him. All the lads including myself were volunteers and keen to go through the course and on with the job. We didn't wish to be hung about. It would have been better to let us remain in our “civv” jobs until they could actually cope with us. But no – this couldn't be, and I expect the ministry of labour had a few headaches.

I did manage to go to Manchester on quite a few occasions. There I saw some real bomb damage, which the people at home had fortunately never experienced up to date. One day we spent quite a busy time at the cookhouse. The staff was too small to cope with all the personnel on the station, and so we volunteered to give them a hand. We had some food that day, did our share of the work – washing dishes and pans, and peeling potatoes.

2 Weeks after arriving at Heaton Park we left again. After saying cheerio to my landlady and thanking her for her kindness I boarded the train again and this time bound straight for Liverpool. The train, after winding through a long dark tunnel, brought us almost to the quayside. Strangely enough this very day was the anniversary of the end of the last war. The war to end all wars, but here we were in the midst of another due to the lack of men suitable to deal with the situations which have arisen since 1918. I entirely agree with Vera Brittain in her book “England's Hour” that if we put the energy into keeping peace after the war as we have into the war itself then a better future will be assured for our children.

### CHPT.III

After being issue with our shipping index cards we duly boarded the SS now T S Mataroa. I had never heard of her before (and do not wish to again) but she was originally cargo ship converted

into a troopship. We thought we should have some sort of cabins to share, but we were rather a taken back when we were crowded into various section below deck.

I was in section 6 at the end of the boat along with 300 others. An idea of the size can be given when I say that it was the same size approximately as the village hall. In this space we had to sleep, eat and keep our kit. We were sub-divided into various messes according to the size of the mess table. I was on mess 74 with thirteen others. How we were going to stick this – we didn't really know, but we hoped for only a week. If we were bound for America this was the main secret and despite our tropical kit we didn't really know if we were bound for Rhodesia or America. A rather remarkable but sound fact as the civilians usually know more about our business than we ourselves.

In the afternoon of Nov 11 we moved into the Mersey, and there waited for a day. In the meantime we were trying to become accustomed to the boat, and also to the ground staff draft who accompanied us. There were also army drafts on the boat. Here it will be opportune to state that the relations existing between the R.A.F and the army are not very good. Those people who have been convinced by various reports in the Press that the R.A.F and the Army are complete brothers in arms, then they are under a false impression. Bad relations should not exist between us, and it is the duty of the authorities to see that they do not exist. My own personal opinion is that the Army is at fault. They are rather jealous of the fine show the R.A.F put up in the battle of Britain whilst they had to be evacuated from Dunkirk. They even blame the R.A.F for that, but why was it that the evacuation was so successful. However, I think that the Army will have its opportunities and I don't think they will be found lacking. It was a typical November day on the 12<sup>th</sup>. There was plenty of fog – in fact typically English. In the afternoon we slowly moved down the Mersey and into the sea. In fact we had started our voyage adequately protected by the Navy. On the following morning we could just see the West Coast of Scotland which gradually went out of view. So we had left England not knowing where we were going or when we should return.

During the first few days complaints were made concerning the quarters. Of course nothing could be done now. The only answer the officer could give "We had to rough it in 1914 so you'll have to do likewise." I thought this quite irrelevant as we were now alive in 1941 and not 1914. Conditions have changed; science plays a greater part both in war and in living in generally and is not to be compared with a period 27 years ago.

The weather was fairly cold and the wind had a nasty habit of blowing down the gangway which made the quarters very cold at night. After a few days the convoy increased. The seasickness began to be fairly obvious as well. There were many hanging their heads over the side (myself included) As I have been told – it is not pleasant at all – and I can now heartily confirm that statement.

Inspections were carried out by the Captain daily at about 10am. The tables, forms, utensils etc had to be cleaned, and 2 mess orderlies were appointed from each table daily to carry it out. Otherwise discipline was almost nil for the first 10 days. However after the seasickness had been overcome, parades were held on the upper deck each morning. It first meant standing up on one's feet for a solid hour, which did not tend to higher morale any more. The only bright spot on the boat was the canteen. Here biscuits, chocolate, cigarettes, tinned fruit and fish, sardines, pickles were easily obtainable. Of course there was always the usual queue but it was worth the wait. Cards were very much in evidence, and strangely enough a library was started with a limited number of books. Penguins were obtainable from the barbers shop but were soon reduced to such subjects as "Russian Science and the War" etc which of course were not so popular as the thrillers. As far as washing facilities were concerned the water was only turned on at certain times during the day. Showers were always available but with salt water, and a special soap had to be used. Ordinary soap just stayed as a white mass on the skin and was a hell of a mess. The weather improved, and the temperature began to rise. Lectures were started for the W/T Air Crew, which were quite interesting. Khaki dress was introduced which was quite a relief. The heat became almost unbearable below deck, and at night the close packing of human beings made it almost impossible to sleep. In fact the ship soon earned the nickname the "Altmark." The officers found it hot too below deck and consequently they soon abandoned the idea of taking lectures. They, of course had their own respective cabins on deck and I can honestly say that it started to breed a certain amount of communism amongst the lads.

Then sleeping on deck was allowed. Of course this was a relief to be able to sleep in the open air, although the deck was very hard. It was quite a sight to see hammocks being slung up. They were slung from the ships rail, from the cranes and every conceivable hook and nail. The remainder of the lads slept on the deck.

After 8 or 9 days out, land was sighted, and there was much speculation as to where it was. However it was afterwards stated that it was the Azores. Now we were convinced that we were bound for South Africa and that America was out of the question. Otherwise no land was sighted at all - just water and more water. I don't think any of the lads will wish to go to the seaside for a holiday after that trip. There was still plenty of moaning, and the Army did their share as well.

The food was not of the best. The potatoes were always served with their skins, and the cabbage was fairly yellow. There was very little variety, and the liver and porridge for breakfast was nearly always uneatable. The bread was good, and this provided the main food. A daily ration of jam and butter was issued to each mess table, and sometimes a few pickles. Quite a few of the lads lived entirely on their own food bought from the canteen. Condensed milk was much in evidence, and also the tinned fruit before the supply ran short. Two weeks passed, and then land was

sighted again. It was bright sunny morning when we had our first glimpse of Africa and Freetown in Sierra Leon. The green mountain slopes and around the coast reminded one of a small English seaside resort.

The natives, always eager for business, came out in their small home-made canoes to meet us. We could tell that troopships had been here before us, because the natives had picked up the service "swear words" quite well, and they dived into the water for "tickies" and sixpences. The way in which they got back into their boats was a skilful operation. Of course they brought out fruit to sell, which however was "forbidden fruit" to us because of the danger of infection.

We stayed in Freetown for three days, but were not allowed on shore. During this time the ship was refuelled with oil and her water tanks refilled. I may say here that I hadn't appreciated the English water until I tasted the water on board ship. It was always tepid, and had a bitter taste, and was consequently not very pleasant. We actually arrived on Freetown on 25 November. I think that **Hawhaw** was correct for once when he stated from Hamburg that a large British convoy had out in to Freetown on this date. However the Germans did not think fit to attack it, as they are so scared stiff of the navy, I suppose. Well, it's a good job we have the Navy to depend on. Without them, I think that Britain and her empire would be fairly sick.

We left Freetown behind, and proceeded on our voyage. There was so much speculation and rumour concerning how long we should be on the water. Some estimated a 10 day trip to South Africa, others 14 days, others 16 days. Other lads were trying to work out our course. After 2 days one bright lad estimated that we were nearing the Tropic of Capricorn, but actually we hadn't crossed the Equator. Anyway, the heat was becoming terrific, and most of the time was spent on deck. The blackout had to be strictly observed during the hours of darkness, but we did have a break from this in Freetown.

The R.A.F were beginning to become organised. Various jobs were being allotted. There were guards for night duty and porthole guards during the day. There were also "sweepers up" and cookhouse duties. I was caught for the latter, and it turned out to be a permanent job for the remainder of the voyage.

There were six of us detailed for the job, which consisted of scrubbing potatoes, peeling and slicing pumpkins, peeling potatoes and cutting cabbage. We did not raise any objections to the job at all, because it occupied a part of our time. Furthermore we were excused guard and porthole duties and even the duties of mess orderlies. We managed to meet the ship's butcher who was one of our best friends. This gentleman was in charge of the refrigerators where both the meat and fruit were stored. Hence, at dusk each evening he gave us the job of depositing empty crates and boxes over the side. Of course these were not always empty, and after filling our topee covers with oranges and apples we smuggled them down to the quarters to distribute among our

various pals. On several occasions we were given large lumps of cheese, which made a very good breakfast in lieu of the liver or porridge. The last night we were on board ship the butcher gave two of us half a shoulder of freshly cooked lamb. This was soon torn apart in the quarters and enjoyed by the lads especially after the food we had been experiencing.

The chief cook wasn't a bad fellow, but we couldn't get much from him except a daily can of tea. His job was not one of the best – as the cookhouse was like hell itself with the heat of the ovens and also the tropical heat as well. He had some army cooks to assist him, but these dodged the work when we were around.

For almost three weeks of the voyage there was daily issue of 2 bottles of minerals to each man. These consisted of ginger ale, lemonade or quinine tonic. The latter was bitter and consequently if you didn't grab your ration at first then "you'd had it" – and were left with these.

After three weeks of voyage the entertainments officer suddenly woke up. He picked out some of the talent, chiefly from the army, and put on a grand concert. In fact it was very popular among the lads, and gave us food for thought.

A church service was held on each Sunday morning, and I attended, not only from the religious point of view but to relieve the monotony quite a bit. The days slowly passed, and the weather began to become cooler and the sea much rougher. It was rumoured that we were now passing through the "Roaring Forties" which I think most geography books elucidate quite fully.

In the meantime a sports meeting was held between the R.A.F and the Army. The former being rather lazy and lacking in discipline were easily beaten by the army. In fact it was a poor show put up by the R.A.F, and the army had scored quite a big point.

The voyage was nearing its end, and spirits began to rise at the possibility of setting foot on land again. The officer came to lecture us on the usual subject and the precautions. The native type was also discussed as an addition after that, we knew that land was not far away and the next morning we awakened to see Durban in front of us and there were loud cheers from everyone. We collected all our kit together, and by 3pm, we were all safe on land giving the SS Mataroa a soldiers farewell.



Monitor Exercise Book – Book Number 2, CHPT IV

DUNN F. T. R.A.F

We soon boarded the train in Durban Docks, and were transported to Clairwood where a so called "Rest Camp" was in existence, and also a racecourse nearby. After being sorted out we were pushed into tents, with a very sandy base. Indeed it did not take long for our clothes and utensils to be full of it. The next procedure was the issue of bedding. Lomes of hay were dumped together with canvas bags. These were filled individually with hay which was rather damp. However after generally falling over one another and pushing hay down one another's backs we retired to our tents with 2 blankets each and a dirty pillowcase.

The next morning we were up at 6.30am and by 7am we were enjoying a breakfast of porridge, boiled egg, bread and jam and tea. It is a welcome change after the food on the "Matoroa."

There was very little action during the next few days as far as the camp was concerned. We took full advantage of the fresh water showers and became quite clean again. Of course we visited Durban regularly – it was just a matter of a 6d return ticket by train, or hitch-hiking by road. We visited the swimming baths which however were very salty. The Y.M.C.A canteen provided what meals we required at a price which made little or no profit. For example if we felt rather hungry then a tea of 2 eggs and chips, bread and butter, fruit salad and ice cream and coffee would cost 8d only. Indeed it was absolutely thrown at us.

The scene at Durban station on our first night was one which I'll never forget. The army lads were there too, and they had decided to go celebrating after leaving the "Altmark," hence the result was that quite a few of them were blind drunk, and absolutely paralytic. Their pals managed to drag them (and themselves) on to the platform where they were dumped in a horizontal position on the concrete surface to await the train. They were kicked, stepped on, but it had no effect on them – they were out to the wide. At last the train came in and they were either pitched head-first or thrown into the compartment. I must mention here that the R.A.F were behaving themselves as R.A.F should. At Clairwood station the same thing happened. The drunks were pitched on to the platform and dragged along by the heels to the camp. Apparently these lads did not know that whisky is at its full strength in Durban, and consequently they "Had it."

It so happened that we arrived in Durban exactly a week before Christmas. There had been fears of spending Christmas on the boat, but we were glad to be off it.

As usual the last-minute Christmas shopping was being done, but this time it had no worries for us. Some of the lads were already being invited to private homes and taken for drives in their (very up to date) American cars. Such 1942 models as the Chevrolet, the Terraplane, the Studebaker and

the Ford were always to be seen on the road passing the camp. They were very useful for obtaining lifts into Durban.

Christmas day was fast approaching. The Y.M.C.A canteen was gaily decorated and also the "All Ranbo Club." The weather was very hot and quite a contrast to our usual Christmases. There was good promise of an excellent dinner in on Christmas day in the camp.

On Christmas morning, after a short "lay-in," we were all marched down to the camp gates where many cars awaited us to take us to private homes for the day. Well, this was true hospitality all night, and quite a change from the usual mode of life where every man looks out for himself no matter what happens to the others. Anyway it is straying from the point.

My pal and I were taken by car to a place 15 miles the other side of Durban. It happened to be a sugar plantation. As the owner and his wife did not see the service men very often they made us more than welcome. First we had tea and cakes, then a walk around the place accompanied by the daughter who unfortunately was too old for our tastes. Lunch came next, when we were joined by friends and relatives of the family. Apparently this was an open house similar to one I know in Gloucester. After lunch we played darts and rounders, and then went for a drive in the car along the coast north of Durban. On return we hastily washed, and then sat down to a perfect Christmas Dinner. As usual the host carved the turkey. By the time the first course had finished even I was full up, and I am reputed to have a large stomach capacity. The first course consisted of turkey, sweet potatoes, baked potatoes, beans, peas and other vegetables peculiar to South Africa only. The next course was Christmas pudding, then fruit salad, ice cream and coffee. After all this we literally could not move. It was just a matter of flopping back in an easy chair and staying there. At 11pm after having more Christmas cake and coffee we were finally transported back by car to camp. We had a grand day; it had taken off the homesickness, and I can only express my thanks to those people for having such a grand time.

Some of the lads were in rather a merry mood on Christmas night – which was only to be expected. However the next day we were told that we had to be in by 22:30 instead of 23:59. This was due to the noise made on Christmas night, and under the circumstances I thought it quite unfair. Still this only lasted for a few days.

To go back a little – On the Tuesday before Xmas one hundred of the lads were invited to a dinner and dance at the King Edward VIII hospital in Durban and I was fortunate to be one of the hundred. The dinner was perfect, plenty of liquid refreshment, and the Xmas pudding. A professional dance band had been engaged, also some females invited which counterbalanced the number of males. It was a perfect y. too, and we were sorry to leave at midnight. On Boxing Day my pal and I were again invited out, but the place was not a patch on the previous day. In fact it was rather second class, and was just a case of a woman trying to swank to her neighbours

how many R.A.F she could entertain in one day. We didn't like it, despite the fact that she had rather a charming daughter. We were really glad for once that we had to be in by 10.30pm, and hence had to leave Durban quite early.

I had now experienced quite a series of late nights. It was usually 12.30pm before I pushed myself into bed. I know my mother would say "too many late nights are not good for any man," but on the contrary I felt fine (taking the climate into consideration as well).

I was having a hectic time, going to dances to the cinema etc. Then came New Years Eve. My pal and I were in the Durban Town Stall Gardens listening to the municipal orchestra when a gentleman asked us to come to his house for New Years Eve. We were then whisked away by car to his home after calling in to have a beer shandy etc. He happened to own a dairy farm on the outskirts of Durban. We walked around, had a look at the cows, and noticed they were still being milked totally by hand. Those pals of mine who consider me as a typical Gloucestershire bumpkin will realise that I was now more at home with cows and calves.

This gentleman had a rather charming wife and two children. His house overlooked Durban bay - a wonderful view, and quite my idea of a home. He employed about 50 natives for milking and delivery purposes who entertained us with their own songs and dances during the evening. The guests arrived at 7.30pm and included some of Durban society - a doctor a member of the Durban municipal council and their wives and daughters - and also a Naval Officer. The dinner was of the cold type and much more suitable to the climate. Salad, fruit salad, and other special dishes were very much in evidence. There was also champagne and lemonade to help down the food. After dinner and smokes, and also stories the party split up into two. One section played Bridge, while those wouldn't or couldn't play this game resorted to Rummie. Time passed by, and it was almost midnight. The wireless was turned on, and we sang "Auld Lang Syne" around the table. In fact every member of the party had become quite merry. Of course "we two" were rather shy especially with this rather high class company but we kept up our end very well.

The party broke up soon after midnight, and we were taken back again to camp after being offered the opportunity to come again whenever we wished. Unfortunately we did not or could not take advantage of the offer.

On another evening I took the opportunity of going to a dance at the Y.M.C.A. The hall was a large one, and the floor perfect. There were plenty of partners and I quite enjoyed myself. In fact one of the best dances I have attended. It seems that we were having all play and no work. However the trench digging scene began. 2 lines of tents were detailed each day to dig trenches in various parts of the camp. The ground was all sand, and needed little effort, but the effect of the sun was very tiring. When the trenches had all been dug the sandbags were filled and built up around the sides of the trench. There was much swearing and such irrelevant threats as "I should

like to bury some g\_\_\_ b\_\_\_s. (thought to mean Boshe Bastards) " Others were detailed for the usual cookhouse work, as the native staff was either inefficient or insufficient. Then there came the fire **craze**. About 12 men were detailed and confined to the camp. In fact it seemed that they were trying to keep us in camp all the time. Meanwhile the army had left only leaving the R.A.F in camp. Actually the majority left after only 2 or 3 days stay and consequently spent Christmas elsewhere. We were beginning to wonder when we should move, and the rumours began to circulate as to the anticipated date of departure. Although the majority of the lads were confined to camp one day in 3 they still managed to enjoy themselves when they did go out.

On New Years Day about 100 of us were invited to Pinetown (a matter of 15 miles from Durban. They paid our railway fare, gave us tea, sandwiches, and cakes when we arrived, and took us to their local cinema because the wet weather had curbed the outside activities. After pictures – the dinner – an excellent one with beer and lemonade, then a dance, and a few of the usual games. Females were rather scarce in this place, but we had a very good time. At 11pm they took us back to the station, and hence back to Clairwood.

It happened by chance that I became acquainted with two sisters one of whom was busily courting a South African soldier. I met them at another dance held at the Navy League Club. They were a sporting two and consequently I was invited to their abode for dinner on quite a few occasions. The elder sister whom I assumed was unattached was rather amusing. She had rather a habit of criticising people, and passing remarks. of course this is a general fault among females I believe, but she was a little above the average. Of course it was quite harmless, but amusing. Anyway they were all very kind to me. The South African soldier (Gerald by name) had been through the Abyssinian campaign, and he related some of his experiences. After this I thought "Freddy, your misfortunes are negligible after his." Indeed he stated that it was even unsafe to go out at night for fear of being "bumped off" by either Italian or Abyssinian. No toilet requisites could be bought, and consequently they were issued by the authorities. He stuck 18 months of this life until the campaign was over, and he came home for a well earned months leave.

I had a very good time in their company. We went bathing in the warm but salty waters of the Indian Ocean, we went to a few dances and also to some of their favourite rendezvous, plus many visits to their home.

Back in camp we were now being inspected each morning, and taken for a route march. This usually consisted of a march out of camp until out of sight, then a smoke and much orange sucking brought about by the business like Indian kids selling their wares. These Indians seem to have a fairly strong influence in Durban. They own about 1/6 of it, are multiplying exceeding in numbers and now equal the white population there. In fact the white people are becoming rather alarmed and no wonder. The Indians are trying to abolish the colour distinction whereby

only European people are able to use the greater part of a bus and is banned to other nationalities. I suppose this will be another headache for the Government similar to the Jewish and Arab problem (so prominent before this war)

Our stay in Durban was drawing to a close. Besides the R.A.F had the monopoly for 3 weeks, and the arrival of another convoy put us in the background. Of course most of the lads had now definite connections with some of the Durban people. They had their female acquaintances, and some went a little further than this. In fact, one lad became engaged – trying to keep up with the tradition that the R.A.f are fast workers. Things began to shape up after some delay. The S. Ldr (in charge of us) admitted that he had no idea when or where we were going. Anyway on Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, 200 volunteers were called for to start the journey North somewhere. We weren't even detailed, and those who wished to stay in Durban for a further 2 days could do so. Anyway I personally thought that there may be the possibility of "getting on with the job" hence after bidding farewell to my friends in Durban and collecting up kit, I boarded the train bound for the North. We were sorry to leave, - we had been treated like Lords – and it will stand out vividly in our service careers – still we were hoping that this hospitality would continue wherever we went, but we were mistaken.

Anyway Durban was left behind, and the train began to climb the mountains from 0 to almost 5,000 ft. The scenery was grand at this stage of the journey. Naturally the train was a long one as it included a restaurant car. The actual compartments were very roomy, and each could produce 6 bunks (3 on each side) The seat formed one bunk, the seat back pulled out and produces a second bunk, whilst the third was pulled out from the top of the compartment. Blankets and sheets were provided and we spent a very comfortable night.

The train gradually moved into more even ground – the wide open spaces containing nothing but dry grass and a few thorn bushes. It passed over a small bridge which had previously been blown up and was now in process of repair. This act of sabotage was presumed to have been carried out by the O.Bs. (?) This particular section of the South African community were more Nazi than British. There is no love lost between them and General Smuts, and they are in favour of a split between the South African people and the English. Still, as long as the good old General is still Prime Minister I don't think they'll have much influence in these matters.

I actually read an account of a debate in the South African Parliament (in the local newspaper) in which a definite split between South Africa and Britain was being suggested by the minority. Well I don't know why this should happen. After all South Africa has the privilege of Dominion Status and is thus quite independent in many ways. I suppose it will be another post-war problem as with the Indians.

It was early morning when we arrived at Lyttelton railway station between Johannesburg and Pretoria. The slag heaps from the gold mines rose up like mountains in the vicinity of Jo'burg and were white in colour. It actually gave the impression of snow, but that's hardly possible in that district. Anyway we were met by members of the South African Air Force, and we began to wonder immediately. Anyway after a 2 mile march with full packs we finally arrived at a South African I.T.W camp. This place was perfectly organised, and consequently there was more than the extra red tape with it. There is another word for "red tape", but it is a bit too crude to put in black and white. Anyway the Corporal in charge started to shout "left right," "stop talking in ranks," threats of charges etc. Well we couldn't digest this at all but there was more to come.

The accommodation was good, bricks huts with the usual corrugated iron roofs. I can't understand why so much of the latter material is used in South Africa. I can remember my father stating that this is the worst material to conduct the heat and his statements were not usually far wrong. Anyway there were single beds with mattresses which of course were very comfortable. We were even issued with washing soap. We gave the South Africans the impression that we were "scruffy" especially where the Khaki kit was concerned. If we had stayed any length of time we should have had more kit at the S.A.A.F expense.

After drinking plenty of tea, having lunch etc we were inspected by the C.O of the camp. One poor bloke had his name taken for having his cigarette packet showing from his hip pocket. This aroused great indignation among the lads, but no action was taken from the incident.

They paid us all £2 each which was the main consideration. Since being in Durban, we had been paid at the transit rate of 10/= per week, and consequently the majority of us were financially weak.

Nothing of importance happened that day except for the fact that a dance was held during the evening in two of the lecture rooms. The females were chiefly imported from Pretoria, and a very poor lot too. Still this even aroused competition between the South Africans and the R.A.F. In fact the former went to great trouble in order that they should have preference where the women were concerned. Well they were very welcome to them, and the majority of the R.A.F went back to bed.

The next morning we were up before 5.30am and on the parade ground for roll call at 5.45am, and then we were reprimanded for being late. Well this was discipline in the flesh, and there was more to come.

After hastily washing, shaving, breakfasting and cleaning we were on parade again by 7.30am for an hour on the square. The South Africans "square bashing" was quite different from ours, and consequently there was a bit of a mess. The Corporal in charge became impatient - so did we -

and there was a general murmuring amongst all present. Finally we were dismissed, and sent back to the quarters. The squadron leader on the camp and the only English officer there started to work. He soon found out that we should not have been sent to this camp but to Rhodesia hence he collected us altogether and informed us that we should be on the move that evening. There were loud cheers, and naturally the South Africans didn't take it too kindly. The S/L slightly encouraged us, which I think was not the correct method for an officer.

Anyway we again collected up our kit and prepared to leave. At 6pm that day we left Lyttleton Camp leaving some rather bewildered South African N.C.Os who wondered what kind of discipline we experienced in the R.A.F. they were accustomed to it all the way; and not to the fluctuating standard of that of the R.A.F. In fact I don't think we made a very good impression at Lyttleton. The train mixed with civilians and R.A.F in full pack was very much overcrowded. However it conveyed us to a small station in Johannesburg, where we alighted, and were formed into some kind of order. After marching for quite a distance we eventually arrived at another S.A.A.F camp pitched on the site where in pre-war days the miniature Worlds Fair was held. Actually it was used to train apprentices, and consequently it contained lads between 14 and 18 years of age. Let me emphasise first that the officers on this camp were some of the best. They gave us a good supper – more than we could manage – and then forked out some beer from their canteen for those who required it. Then a short sing-song followed, and a South African W.O was M.C. We retired to bed quite happy, and again we were in tents. I can distinctly remember that we had a violent thunderstorm that night, but this did not deter us from our slumbers.

The next morning we had a good breakfast, packed our kit again, and moved down to the station where the train awaited us. On it was the second draft from Durban, and hence we were now all in one piece again. Of course there were many remarks passed. We felt rather crestfallen, because they had an extra 2 days in Durban whilst we had been pushed around South Africa. Anyway we soon made ourselves at home on the train ready for another complete day's journey. The small canteen on the train was well patronised but as usual (on trains) the prices were increased by about 50%. There was a shortage of staff too, and hence some of the lads acted as stewards and provided us with our meals.

Meanwhile the countryside was becoming fairly barren, with plenty of dry grass. The weather was fine and at each place where the engine stopped to refuel, we alighted, had a talk with the people there, and took photographs. Cameras were becoming very popular, due to the abundance of films which could be bought in South Africa.

At one place the local ladies came out to greet us with grapes oranges and cigarettes. The next stop was Mafeking (Mahikeng) at about 5pm. Here the local inhabitants had found out by some means that we were passing through, hence they had tea waiting for us, with plenty of eats, fags



and fruit. In fact they welcomed us in the proper style, and it's a pity that this attitude cannot be more universally adopted. I don't think that wars would be fashionable if that happened.

After a bit of a sing-song, and saying goodbye, and giving three cheers we continued our journey northwards. We had another comfortable night's sleep on the train. The journey was becoming monotonous for some of the lads, and hence they decided to take a ride on the roofs of the carriages. This was quite safe as there was no possibility of low overhanging bridges over the railway track. By 3.30pm that day we had arrived at Bulawayo Railway Station. After much arrangement of kit, getting on packs, and leaving articles such as ties, toilet requisites and forage caps on the train we emerged on to the platform where we were met by various N.C.Os from the I.T.W camp at Hillside. What was this? Going back to I.T.W we thought we should at least go to EFTS for a start. Anyway we had been to I.T.W for 3 weeks in England. Still, personally, I am glad we did have a chance to start I.T.W again – to rake up the stuff we had forgotten and also to get a good idea of the more elementary principles of Navigation which seems to be the most important subject.

Anyway we landed at the I.T.W Camp, Hillside Bulawayo, and hoped we should now start in earnest after all our wanderings.

#### Book number 3 - CHPT V

The Hillside I.T.W camp is situated on the Southern outskirts of Bulawayo. To this camp we were conducted by various Corporals of the permanent staff who gave us some information on the way. The usual questions were asked – Is there much rep-tape? Do we start I.T.W again? What is Bulawayo like? Are there any women? What are the Rhodesians like? All the questions were soon to be answered in a way which we didn't really anticipate.

On arrival at the camp, we were greeted by some of the lads already in residence. They gave us rather a pessimistic view of the camp. They had been there for over a month and hadn't even started their I.T.W. "Oh yes" said they "you'll have to do some waiting. We don't know when you'll leave this place – not for months at any rate." This was bad news and shook us a bit. We had expected to do a quick I.T.W course and then the flying.

This was not to be, as there were already many lads before us who had the right to go through before we did. Thus the "browned off" state began to develop again.

After being registered in the camp we took up sleeping quarters in the gymnasium as the camp was already full. This was Saturday and of course, in the evening, we visited Bulawayo and were not very impressed. The majority of the local inhabitants were apparently browned off with us too

- and there weren't many "car lifts." It was a hell of a difference from Durban. Sunday passed with a visit to the Bulawayo swimming Baths which was one of the highlights of the place. Indeed these baths were boasted to be the finest in the Southern Hemisphere. Anyway we all enjoyed a swim under the sweltering African sun which was never dulled or dimmed during the day. In fact the heat was terrific, and it was a pleasure for night to fall.

On Monday we did little. Apparently the staff was sorting out our fate, and in the afternoon we were addressed by the Chief Ground Instructor or second in command to the C.O. He was quite straight about didn't exactly mince his words. A man as this is to be admired and is first the kind to be an officer. The news he gave us was not of an enthusiastic nature. The draft was to be split into two parts. Those who had the longest service were to start their I.T.W course at once, whilst the others were to be put into Receiving Depot for five weeks. This was fair enough and consequently being quite a "rookie" I was in the Receiving Depot. The next day was heralded with a 5 mile route march in the Rhodesian countryside which was not very impressive. A certain Flight Lieut marched in front and he kept up the pace. Incidentally this officer was to be the C.O of the Receiving Depot. I need not describe yet the Rhodesian countryside around Bulawayo as during the next few weeks we were tramping across it on Compass Work.

There were also a few Swimming Parades and plenty of Drill, Maths and Signals. The only real love was Maths as we had already taken 2 maths exams in England. The B s- began to show itself, inspection of ourselves each morning, and then an inspection of our quarters. We were all given a lecture by the Flt Lieut on the general discipline in camp. He must have imagined we were fed up with the continual waiting, but he need not have gone so far as to read out the Military Act in detail and the punishment thereof.

This officer was not really liked because of his continual adherence to strict discipline and b- s- in general. Station Standing Orders laid down that topee chin straps should be worn under the chin and not over the topee. This law had to be obeyed by us whilst other sections of the camp could please themselves. Indignation reigned among our section especially when we heard jeers from the surging crowds. By this time it was necessary for us to move our sleeping quarters from the gymnasium to the lines. Apparently the former was required for the rightful purpose of P.T and also badminton for the H.C.Os. The lines consist of rows of corrugated iron sheds. To be quite accurate these had been used in pre-war days for showing prize pigs and other cattle. Well, we were now keeping up the tradition but whether the adjective "prize" is appropriate is another matter. The beds first consisted of boards a mattress of hay, and blankets and sheets. The mattress was accustomed to reduce. Its load just to give the O.O. a reasonable excuse for a complaint. However after some time the mattresses were replaced - genuine specimens being substituted. Spring Beds were also introduced. As usual they were obtained with difficulty, many queues

having to be formed before we actually received the goods. There was quite a good canteen on the camp, although lacking in entertainment, literature, (D.R.Os excepted) and games gear. Still this has now been slightly improved by the installation of a radiogram which however only functions during the morning break. Of course there was tea, lemonade and cakes at a reasonable cost whilst beer was also sold in the bar which was adequately situated in an obscure part of the canteen.

The chief barman is well known in camp. It has been stated that he was the second hangman in the Union of South Africa at one time, but as this job was a bit soft he has reverted to the task of serving beer to airmen, and cutting their hair. According to the local magazine he has earned the title of the "demon barber." When he first cut my hair it brought back memories of the time when my own father liked to operate on my hair ("yes and mine - Alf" - a message left by Freddy's brother in the margin years later) It first left me with a tuft on the top hacked about in various shapes.

During our stay in Receiving Depot the Padre gave us a lecture, and persuaded some of us to join the choir. Having little to do in the evenings I thought it a good idea. Besides it was a change from the bickerings and half-hearted efforts of the organist- choir mistress at home.

The choir consisted of approximately 10 tenors, 10 bases and 20 melody. As it is not one of my hereditary characteristics to sing well, I was one of the melody.

Anyway we soon started in earnest- chiefly on an anthem for the Church Parade held on the first Sunday of each month. Of course this has been continued since and we sung quite a few parts from Handel's "Messiah."

On one Sunday being National Day of Prayer the choir sang at a combined service in the Bulawayo Town Hall. Much to our surprise it was very favourably received by the Bulawayo inhabitants. The Padre also preached a glorious sermon chiefly on our mistakes for the cause of the war and the difficulties to be overcome in post-war years. To use another R.A.F expression, he fairly shook 'em - in fact convinced his congregation that a war was being waged in other parts of the world if not Rhodesia.

During our six weeks in the Reception or Waiting Depot we had quite a few swimming parades, which were very welcome during the hot weather. We did much compass work which should benefit us if we ever fly and have to descend in to the "bundu." (the name given to the Rhodesian countryside. Anyway this work entailed a few trips into the bundu, and naturally we were able to form an opinion of it. The first trip was 5 miles long across thorn bushes, rocks, dry river beds and plenty of barbed wire fences to climb. We did manage to see some game including

buck, an ostrich, guinea fowl and some large birds whose wing span was estimated to be quite 4 feet.

The next trip (an 8 mile one) involved rising at 4.15am, having breakfast at 4.30am and away in the lorry at 5am. Parties of 3 or 4 were dropped off at various points with instructions to make a mile trek to a certain point (a railway junction) where we should be picked up at 11am. This was the finest part of the day, the sun was only just rising and it was very cool. However the sun soon resumed its fierce onslaught, and walking through the long grass was no pleasure. Some of the grass has a habit of growing thorns, which readily stick through one's stockings and make walking very unpleasant. However we did our trek in record time being the first to reach the chosen spot. The lorry was there with tea, and we sat and waited for the remainder of the flight.

It was on one of the short bundu trips around the camp that I met my first African snake. It was curled lazily under a thick bush, but slinked away when it heard me – I also did likewise

One of the R.A.F officers (a Rhodesian) gave us an interesting talk on Rhodesia and its animals, and how to treat them if any came our way. Meanwhile we were having plenty of fort drill, and even commenced rifle drill. I was (as usual) pretty clumsy with a rifle, and it was worse with a "binding" sergeant and a large toffee. However since that time I have had plenty of practice, complete with rifle and bayonet.

The magazine "Fledgling," issued appropriately at pay parade each fortnight at the cost of a tlicky (?), was well supported. Unfortunately just lately it has lacked its humour which I presume is due to the Editor leaving for Blighty (lucky B-) Still, we do manage to get a laugh, and I have managed to send some home.

Mentioning home too – the mail was coming through pretty well. In the first batch I had 14, which of course had accumulated since November. Since then the mail has been more gentle and evenly distributed. The old local rags have arrived periodically with news of the home district, and the various marriages taking place. It seems that marriages are quite infectious around Cirencester as quite a few of my old school acquaintances have since been hooked. I assume marriages are quite in order, where marriage allowance is concerned, but at the end of the war – who knows what will happen?

It was towards the end of march that I received a short note from my girl friend to the effect that she had also caught the complaint (note in margin form Alf – Mabel Organ used to live next door in Siddington) and had married in January. After all her vows and promises when I left England – this action shook me considerably. Anyway what can one expect from women, they have an uncertain mind, which changes according to the tune. Hence I wrote her a reply and told her to go to hell.

My pals were quite sympathetic about it, but sympathy has its snags as it only brings up the whole subject again. Still, I recovered from the shock, and continued to work up for the exams which were to take place on the following week. However, at the last moment, these exams were prolonged for another 4 weeks. Everyone became pretty fed up with this after already waiting for 12 weeks. Never have I heard so many moans, and some lads wanted to get back to their reserved jobs in England and do something instead of waiting and waiting and doing nothing. Still the general trend of thought was (and this had some consolation) "well I suppose they want to keep an extra nice piece of breeding stock for after the war."

The heat although oppressive was becoming cooler. The rain which was needed so badly did not materialise in any great quantities, and the water began to be cut down. Baths were closed, and the showers were fitted with hot water to do the extra work.

End.