

CHRISTMAS OVERSEAS

By GORDON WALSH (B.H.Q., 2/1)

Often I let my mind wander back over the years and recall some of the really funny happenings or those that were to my mind extraordinary. One of these was very definitely our first Christmas overseas. I don't think I'll ever forget it.

Just before Christmas the 11th Ptn., B Coy., was engaged in "supervising" the construction of a camp at Dimyra and we had a fantastic situation with coves like myself, Snow Wiseman, Joe Leis, Mick Reilly and many others telling a great bunch of Jews and Arabs how to do their work.

We did it so well that they even poured concrete without cement and many other sly methods of putting one over. Anyhow, we at least got on friendly terms with them, so much so that we received one dozen prime turkeys. Real beauties, and promptly we had to put a guard on them. I can still see my very great friend, Harry Spreadborough, mounting the guard, one private, generally "Baby" Crane or Billy Fleming. It would have been suicide to have tried and got away with one of the turkeys.

What a Christmas we had planned! Unfortunately, the platoon was recalled a few days before the great event, so Bob Wilson agreed that we should eat them at once. How I recall the execution and cleaning of those birds and finally the cooking by old Bob Butler.

Who could forget the scene the following morning when at least eight or nine big turkeys, together with great pots of giblet soup, were served up to a joyful bunch of troops. Lord, could some of them eat!

The mystery of what happened to the other turkeys was never really solved, but I have a feeling that the then Major Neal may have known something of them.

CHRISTMAS DINNER INCIDENT

Well, back to camp and finally Christmas. Dinner served by the officers and quite a spread. I can recall one incident which fortunately ended all right thanks to it being Christmas.

The parade was filing through for their munter and I was standing with Jack Westwood. A huge giant of a Nubian in his flowing "white" gown came up and was gazing hungrily at the mess room. I said to Jack: "Blimey, Jack, there's the Ace of Spades himself."

Unluckily, just at that moment, Wally Thompson passed in the queue. Remember Wally—tiny little great-hearted darkey, well liked by everyone. But what a temper that boy had.

Immediately he jumped out of the line, glared round, and waltzed straight up to the late Col. Brown. Up went the dukes and he danced round like a terrier around a mastiff.

"Don't you call me the ace of spades, you b—— b——. Put 'em up and I'll show you."

Brownie didn't know what it was all about and tried to shoo him away, but

Wally kept going till finally someone grabbed him and pushed him back into the line.

"Holy Joe" and I were in absolute fits of laughter and nearly stifled from trying to hold them in. Of course, it wasn't long before we felt a couple of eagle eyes turned our way and we decided retreat was the best move and promptly did so.

Then the festivities began. That canteen! I wonder how much beer was stored there. I know it kept open for a couple of days and my tent alone accounted for approximately 182 bottles.

My team mates as I recall then, were Jack McGahey, Cliff Barrett, Mick Anselem, Johnny Dologan, Jim Smith and Jim Robertson.

TWO-UP BEFORE BEER!

We had just about reached the end of our finances and sent Jim Smith and Mick to get the final few bottles.

In about five minutes they were back with no beer. The fateful step had been taken with Lady Luck by way of the old two-up.

They were promptly ordered out of the tent and by a stroke of fortune, Mick spotted someone who owed him 200 mils. Got it and straight back to the game, won 500, and arrived back at the tent with a chaff bag of beer. Very warmly received as you can imagine.

And that guard on Christmas afternoon. I can still see it marching on led by Jack Trevithick — it looked like a guard of first week rookies.

But what a wonderful time it was. I hope that these few recollections will encourage someone else to put his memories on paper and thus start what could almost be set up in bank form as a record of the Pioneers overseas.

SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

The administration costs of this Association are steadily increasing, and the only avenue to recoup these costs, is from subscriptions sent in.

The local lads will be digging deep on Anzac Day, so it is up to those who do not attend the march to send in their subscriptions promptly.

A good intake of subscriptions, plus a roll up of mail, is ample reward to the hard-working band of Committeemen for their year's labour of love.

So, how about doing the right thing by your mates who are doing the right thing by you.

All we ask is five shillings per year, and if you are five years behind, well just send along twenty-five shillings and we will guarantee your receipt of the "Pioneer News."

TREASURER TOURS NORTH

Dear Editors,

Just after Christmas the Shearston family had the pleasure of spending a couple of weeks at Ballina on the North Coast and I can quite see why the Pioneers who live up that way are so proud of it, though I will say the weather is somewhat reminiscent of New Guinea in the rainy season. At least, that's the sort of weather they turned on when we were there. Most of the fish had gone five miles out to sea to find some salt water.

While there we spent two very happy afternoons with Nev. O'Connor (ex-2/2 Pnr.), and family. Nev. has a sugar plantation at Empire Vale and what he doesn't know about sugar farming you could write on the back of a postage stamp.

We "city slickers" were amazed by the magnitude of the farm as we sat on a trailer towed by a tractor driven by two of Nev's young sons, around the many acres that the farm comprises.

Unfortunately, the rain had spoiled the young came to a certain extent, but we were able to gauge why Nev. is so proud of his farm — he has reason to be.

He has more reason to be proud of his family, it would be hard to find a nicer person than Mary, his wife, and what man wouldn't be proud of four typical Australian boys and a daughter with eyes that are sure to start many a lad's heart thumping up that way in a few years time.

I had planned to see many Pioneers on the way up, but unfortunately I had to keep going so that we would not be wasting any precious hours of the long-awaited holiday.

Naturally, being an ex-sig., I made a point of calling at Port Macquarie to see Les. Denham, and Alan Crute at Woolgoolga. Unfortunately, I missed Les, as at that time he was very sick and consequently he spent several weeks at Concord, where I finally visited him after I arrived home.

Alan Crute, his wife, Beulah, and young son, made us very welcome with cups of tea and I was rather sorry that the clock wouldn't let us stay longer. Being a banana farmer, Alan wouldn't let us go on our way without taking a few dozen of his choicest. They were so big, one was a feed, two would have been sheer gluttony.

I looked for Alex. Cameron, on the Harewood Ferry, particularly so, for as Treasurer, I wanted personally to hand him his receipt for a very nice donation to the Association, but according to one of his workmates he had gone fishing. I hope he had more luck than I did. At least he should know where they usually are to be found.

I hope next time I am up that way I shall meet some of the chaps I missed, but there are so many Pioneers on the North Coast one would need more time than I could afford to visit them all, so I shall content myself by wishing each and everyone of them the very best for 1962.

DOUG. SHEARSTON.