

WAR IN THE NORTH

Memories of a Chaplain

by

Reverend Arch Grant

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At the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940 in Tennant Creek the war was far off and communications limited. We had the telegraph but no telephone. Radio was limited to short wave but few people had receivers. There was a track south to the Alice that allowed a weekly mail delivery and the delivery of stores, provided the railway was not blocked by sand or washed out by rain. There was an air service by Guinea Airways using small Lockheed 10s, which took two long days to travel from Adelaide to Darwin. To the north communication was limited to the air service and the telegraph. To travel north was difficult during the Dry and impossible during the Wet. In other words we were isolated!

I used to listen to the short wave news and my wife would type up a summary, which we would post on a wall newspaper for all to read. She managed to do better than she realised. She had a ship of 100,000 tons sunk in the Atlantic; until the schoolmaster came during the lunch hour to read the news and made the comment that he did not know we had such large ships. My wife had increased the tonnage by the simple process of typing an extra zero.

Among our residents was one Major Clerk, a retired officer from the First World War. He had been badly affected by mustard gas and later had been in a serious road accident in Britain. He was a real sabre rattler and above all he wanted to get to the front. His one really great day was when the then Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, paid the Tennant a visit. Clerk had been a company commander in the Infantry battalion of which Gowrie had been the commanding officer. Clerk was also President of the RSL and the unofficial recruiting officer for the Armed Services in Tennant Creek.

Despite these things, the war was far away and seemed to be the last thing likely to affect the tempo of our life. In June of 1940, in company with other members of the staff of the Inland Mission, I went to Darwin for the opening of the Inter-Church Club. This was a joint venture of the Congregationist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches to provide an alternative to the pubs and gambling dens of the town, which was then bursting with newcomers, as Darwin's defences were strengthened. The opening of the Club was a great occasion. Everyone from the Administrator, service chiefs and government employees, plus hundreds of the rest of the population, both old residents and newcomers, were present. From the south had come the bigwigs of the church as well as representatives of the field staff of the church in the Territory. The Reverend Chris Goy was the dynamo and organiser. He was one of the really great charismatic characters that each generation produces. Nothing was too big for him to tackle. As the great day neared a crisis loomed. The opening ceremony of the Club was to be performed by the Reverend Dr John Flynn, known as Flynn of the Inland. He was the Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church. He was booked to fly from Sydney on the Qantas flying boat but Italy had entered the war and Qantas

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flights were suspended. The local officer in command of Civil Aviation assured Goy that Flynn would be able to come on the KNILM plane; all that was needed was the OK from the senior officer of Civil Aviation in Sydney. 'If it was a question of him going from here I would be the one to approve, there would be no difficulty.' However, there was a difficulty: the Sydney man said no. Goy was non-plussed for a moment then decided on action. He sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, stating that the morale of the troops in Darwin was at stake. Menzies gave the OK and Flynn came on the Dutch plane. Later Goy was asked 'What if the Prime Minister had knocked you back? What would you have done?' Without a moment's hesitation came the reply: 'I would have gone straight to the King.'

The days in Darwin and the visible presence of such a galaxy of navy, army and air force personnel had had some impact on us but returning to the quiet of Tennant Creek was for a while our lot, until came September 1940 when we were confronted with the sight of an army utility truck in Tennant Creek. This was the token of coming change. The utility brought Lieutenant Potter and his driver. They were doing an advance reconnaissance north of Alice Springs. The locals were intrigued and were not slow to ask the meaning of the visit. Potter told them that there were plans to construct an all-weather road to Birdum and that it would be completed in 90 days. We were most sceptical and many assumed the attitude 'we know it can't be done'. At the time the Northern Territory had only one patrol grader, which was working with a driver, cook, maintenance man all rolled into one. It was working north of Tennant Creek.

Soon our peace was shattered. Three State teams of road builders, from South Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland, built the road. They were supported by DOMF, the army unit, providing supplies of fuel and food, medical services and communications. It was completed in 89 days and put into immediate use for convoy transportation.

The women of Tennant Creek did a magnificent job by providing a rest stop for the soldiers driving the convoys. They gave each man a bread roll filled with meat, a cake or scone and a mug of tea. At first the numbers were limited to drivers of supply trucks. Perhaps, at most, there were between 50 to 75 men per day. That was during the construction. Later, after the road was finished and troops began to be moved through, the numbers sometimes reached over 1,000 a day. The women worked only with voluntary labour. They raised the money and continued until March 1942 when orders came that convoys were not to halt in the town. This was following the first air raids on the north. There were two or three men who assisted the women. I was one and the local doctor another. We generally boiled the water and made the tea. We used four-gallon kerosene tins over an open fire.

I patrolled the camps during construction and up to late 1941 when I became a full-time chaplain and was ordered to Darwin. In late February and March of 1941 the army decided to move a large body of troops to Darwin from camps in New South Wales. I think they were mainly from around Cowra. The idea was that they would embark from Darwin for overseas. That year the Wet Season was late. Some of the New South Wales Main Roads Department people did not realize how much rain could fall during the Wet and, in any case, thought the Wet was over. The first column of this vast movement reached Wauchope when the heavens opened. The new road

was not consolidated and at best had only a thin coating of gravel. I was on the road with others held up by a swollen Attack Creek. As the creek subsided a grader was used to pull trucks through the crossing as the causeway was not yet constructed, and the convoys continued. The day we were there the convoy had 2/3 Pioneers on board and I counted 20 three-ton trucks bogged between Banka and Lubra's Lookout. All movement was halted for 24 hours. Trucks stopped where they were. The troops south of Quorn were diverted to the West for embarkation and only those already on the railway or north of the Alice finished up in Darwin. The Newcastle Waters Causeway was under water to a depth of about 18 inches for a mile. White markers showed where the road was but the heavy trucks caused some serious damage to the surface requiring urgent repair. Sandbags were flown from Darwin to fill holes until the water level dropped.

I camped on that patrol at the Larrimah camp and shared a tent with a company commander of the 2/3 Pioneers. In the morning my tent mate was ill with a raging sore throat. The Regional Medical Officer was concerned that he might have diphtheria and wanted advice on what he should do. The camp had radio transmitters but the frequency being used only allowed communication within a limited range. The need was for a conference with the Senior Medical Officer in Alice Springs. I suggested that I could use my radio transceiver and call Alice Springs. The response was, 'If we can't get through with our big sets how do you think you can get through on that little set?' 'Let me try,' I replied. I set up my set on the mudguard of my truck, threw an aerial wire over a nearby tree and called the Royal Flying Doctor base in the Alice and had an immediate reply. I asked that they bring the Senior Medical Officer to their studio for a consultation. In about half an hour the Medical Officer was there and advised that the officer be isolated, along with any others who had had close contact, and a swab be flown to Darwin for pathology testing. As a result, the officer, his driver and I were isolated for about three days while the swab was sent and reported on. It was not diphtheria.

I had left Tennant Creek a day or so after the birth of our first baby. The idea was that while my wife was in hospital I would do a quick patrol up and back and be home to give her assistance when she and baby were discharged. I was several days late but there was no serious aftermath.

In December, with the bombing of Pearl Harbour, Japan entered the war and this brought new threats and problems to Australia. We in the Territory perceived this in a special light, as we anticipated that our north would be attacked. News soon came that women and children being encouraged to leave Darwin and the whole atmosphere was one where trouble was expected. I became concerned with this change in the situation and after some personal soul searching, offered to become a full-time chaplain. I was accepted and instructed to report as soon as possible. After a brief period of leave in Sydney I reported to the army and was posted to Darwin.

There was a tense atmosphere in Darwin. Chaplain Chris Goy was the senior Presbyterian Chaplain and I spent a week or two with him until it was decided where I was to serve. One important matter in need of attention was the provision of an air-raid shelter in the grounds of the Inter-Church Club. Several of us got to work digging a deep trench and covering it with sandbags ready for any future need. I recall that John Marshall, a naval chaplain, was with us on this. He was unused to the heat and

worked without a shirt, with the result that he became a victim of a bad dose of sunburn.

By January 1942 it had been decided that I was to become the Area Chaplain at Adelaide River, about 100 km south of Darwin. This was a major supply depot for the services operating in the north. At the beginning I was expected to provide pastoral care of the troops between Manton Dam, to the north (where there was a small detachment to protect the dam and so the water supply for Darwin), and Katherine another 200 km further south. The Area Commandant at Adelaide River was Captain (later Major) Victor Levitt. He was an experienced soldier having served in the infantry in the First World War. I found him to be most cooperative and while he could be a strict disciplinarian he was also very understanding of the needs of people for whom he was responsible. For my part I very soon found more than I required keep me very busy.

During the morning of 19 February 1942 word came that Darwin had been bombed and we now knew that there would soon be demands upon us, even if we did not have air raids in our vicinity. Within a few hours civilian refugees began arriving in all kinds of transport. Levitt realised that, in the interests of security, if for no other reason, he would need to take quick action. There was no way these people could go further south except on a train, as the rains had made the track beyond Adelaide River totally impassable. We had news that the raids on Darwin had done serious damage to the railway and had caused the loss of some locomotive. That meant that evacuation by rail would be limited. Levitt quickly decided on a course of action designed to protect the security of the installations, the health of the camp and that of the refugees. He first placed a piquet on the bridge over Snake Creek, just north of the camp area. His order was that no civilian traffic was to be allowed over the bridge without his sanction. Then he organised an area on the south side of the river to become a reception area for the refugees. Troops were set to digging deep trench latrines, others to erect tents, lay water pipes and construct shower cubicles. Hessian was used to provide screens for these amenities. A mobile Wyles Cooker and food was provided to supply meals for those who were expected to supervise and maintain order. There was a convalescent depot in the area with medical officers and other staff. They were detailed to provide for medical services to both civilian and military requirements. As soon as these preparations were complete, the civilians were allowed in. Most recognised the difficulty facing them in getting south and one couple tried to drive a truck along the railway. Their venture was a failure and they were dealt with swiftly.

There were very few trains available to transport people south so the people were sorted into various categories. The top priority for evacuation south was for women, children and elderly men. They would be sent off as soon as possible. The apparently fit men were assembled by Lieutenant Emmanuel, who was the officer in command of a small detention unit within the camp. Captain Roy Campling, a doctor with the convalescent depot, gave them a quick but expert medical examination. Those who were fit were drafted either to join the Army or a civilian construction unit. It fell to me to complete the formalities for those entering the army; have them attested and added to a labour company already in the camp.

Many of the people had arrived in motor vehicle but these had to be abandoned. They were all placed in a pool and some were impressed for use by the armed forces but all

the owners were paid the value of the vehicles after the war ended. Among the civilian refugees were the Administrator, Mr C L A Abbott and his wife Hilda. Levitt gave Mrs Abbott special consideration. She was given use of a tent that was part of a small camp hospital and she was included in the first group to go south. In later days, when there was an enquiry into the events in the north at the time, she complained about her treatment. This was unfair. She was given priority in the evacuation, and travelled in the front of a utility from Larrimah to Alice Springs, while most other women travelled in the back of three-ton trucks.

There had been some problems in the period of the raids on Darwin and in the next few days men, Army and Air Force personnel, who were absent from their units began to arrive.

Technically these men could have been charged with being absent without leave, or even of desertion. Levitt was a man with understanding and assisted all to get back to their units without further delay.

A day or so after the first raid Levitt said to me, 'Padre, we are going to have casualties and we are supposed to have a cemetery but there is none. I want you to take Sergeant McEwan and select a site down river a bit. Make sure it is soft digging. When you decide on the site put in some stakes to mark it. I will arrange for a grader to outline it and clear the surface.' We did this and it was my sad duty to conduct a number of burials there in the weeks following. Many of the United States servicemen killed in the area were buried in this cemetery but in accordance with their nation's policy, all were exhumed and returned to the States after the war. This is the cemetery that is today the Adelaide River War Cemetery, sacred to the memory of those who died in those dark days. It is beautifully maintained by the War Graves Commission and has become a regular stop for tourists visiting the Top End.

One development, which involved us at the camp, was the arrival of the 8th Pursuit Squadron of the US Army Air Force. This unit was equipped with P40 fighter aircraft. They had at first been stationed on the old civil aerodrome in Darwin but found that they could not gain sufficient altitude to effectively engage the attackers from so close to the enemy's target. They now made a clay-pan near Mount Bundy their operational field and the crews and support personnel were camped with us at Adelaide River. These men, mounting dawn patrols high over the Darwin area, were the first to successfully turn the tide of battle here in our favour. In the meantime, roadside strips were being prepared between Adelaide River and Darwin and these were named 'Livingstone', 'Strauss' and 'Pell', they later became the operational bases for the US men and those who followed including the RAF Spitfire squadrons.

We shared the victories and the sorrows of these Americans while at times wondering why, at around 4 o'clock each morning, they should find it necessary to make such a noise with their shouts to one another, the banging of vehicle doors and the revving of motors as they set off for the clay-pan to commence the day's operation.

One problem in service life is boredom. There could be periods of frantic activity but to maintain morale there was a need for relaxation and perhaps entertainment. Troops are capable of providing their own kinds of fun; 'Two up', 'Crown and Anchor' and similar pastimes are well known. Levitt, as an old soldier who had served in the ranks, recognised this need. He set aside an area where some games were permitted. He even

provided tables and electric light. Some visiting senior officers were not impressed and wanted him to remove the facilities. Levitt argued successfully that if he removed what was now sanctioned the men would find somewhere else not approved. As it was, should he need men for any emergency, he knew where they were and he had found that they at all times cheerfully responded.

On one occasion a portable movie plant was brought to the camp and provided a night's entertainment. I was most interested in this as I had been a projectionist in earlier years when my father had operated picture theatres. My experience had been limited to the 'silent era' but I had experience in using the standard projector, the safety procedures in handling the flammable films, as well as use of arc lighting and the electrical appliances used in association with the projector. My one area where I had no experience was in relation to the sound system.

Now there was presented the chance to set up an open-air theatre. The proposal was that plant from the Star Theatre in Darwin, would be brought to Adelaide River. The Darwin Theatre was open-air and in a vulnerable location. I was ready to personally run this amenity at Adelaide River pending the recruitment of some professional staff. An area was selected on the eastern edge of the main campsite, a projection box was constructed with the framework for a screen and soon we were ready. I found a lad from a signal unit who understood amplifiers and he was detailed to work with me. Soon we were screening double feature programs with a change of program twice a week. I became a 'pest' for some of the units as I requested work parties to improve the area for the audiences. Parties from the various Units constructed seating made from bush timber and split bamboo. Sometimes our audiences, drawn from camps near and far, were estimated to reach 4,000. The work made heavy demands on my time as we usually had screenings six nights a week.

One night, as we were about to commence the program there was a knock on the door of the projection box. I found a soldier, in full webbing and with rifle, covered in dust from travel, asking if he could come in. 'I just want to smell the carbons burning again' he said. I let him in with the comment, 'You must be a projectionist'. I discovered that he had been a technician with Western Electric and was abreast of all current developments in the industry. He was a member of a signals unit a few miles 'up the track'. I managed to have him transferred and given sergeants stripes in recognition of his skill following which he took over the day-to-day running of the theatre. I had been without such help for about four months. His name was Bruce Higgenbotham.

Bruce proved to be a man of many parts and his ability was soon being put to good use. I discovered that he was a good musician and had a clarinet with him. He was a good yarn spinner too and we enjoyed his stories. His father, we learned, was a teacher of the violin at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. When Bruce was young his father had him singing in the choir at St Mark's Church Darling Point, Sydney. Bruce did not like this form of discipline and sought some way to freedom. He knew his father would not agree to his leaving the choir so his only alternative was to be expelled. How this was to be achieved was a matter of judgment. Bruce hit upon his answer. Armed with a quantity of clay marbles, he went to choir practice early and dropped a marble in each of several of the organ pipes within reach. One can imagine the result in the performance of the instrument, but the tactic was successful and

Bruce was expelled. His skill and knowledge of sound systems was soon widely known. He began to have approaches from US officers with 16mm projectors that had faults. Bruce would have a look at the machines, say he would fix them but as he had no 16mm film to test with, could he be lent some? The result was that he soon had a supply of copies of the latest feature films, many of which had not yet been released to civilian audiences in Australia.

Bruce shared a tent with some other fellows whose duties kept them at work during the night hours. One or two were employed in the bakery where they brought out fresh bread each morning. Sometimes Bruce would say to me after the evening film program, 'Come and have a cup of coffee Padre, I have a new film for you to see'. At times I would fall into the trap and so, while viewing one of the latest releases from Hollywood, would lose my 'beauty sleep'.

Around this time, one Sunday evening when I was getting ready for an evening church service in the recreation hut, I heard someone playing the piano. The music was from the 'Messiah' and played with professional skill. I discovered that the pianist was Tom Martin who was known to me from my days in the Presbyterian Fellowship camps. Tom had been the organist a Church in Marrickville, a Sydney suburb. His presence in the camp was most welcome. Also, around that time, I found that there was a euphonium in the camp 'Q' store. How or why it was there I never knew but I took charge of it. I had been a bandsman in earlier years so now I felt it might be of use. The upshot was that we were able to form a small music group. We had two clarinets, a trumpet and a violin with the piano and my euphonium. In our early trials our problem was a shortage of sheet music. We did have some copies of popular songs but this gave only a piano score and words. The clarinets, trumpet and euphonium were all 'B flat' instruments and to play in harmony we needed to transpose the score each was to play. In facing this problem I asked Bruce if he had any music manuscript with him. This was a wild question, but with his musical bent I felt he might just be able to say 'yes'. However, he seemed surprised at my query and answered that he had none. Then, almost as an afterthought, said: 'Padre I do have a tuning hammer with me'. I was amazed and asked how it was that he had brought such a thing with him to the war. 'Oh I thought that it might come in handy' was his response. Handy!! We set about lowering the pitch of the piano by one tone so that the 'B flat' instruments could tune to middle 'C' rather than 'B Flat'. This proved to be a great success as now we could all play from the sheet music, the violin and trumpet taking the melody with the others picking up from the alto, tenor or bass lines as they felt appropriate. The result was excellent. We were able to have musical items before the beginning of the film shows, musical accompaniment for church services and to give a lead in community singing, which was very popular.

Following the severe air raids on Darwin it became essential to move the 119th Australian General Hospital to a safer and more strategic position. It was operating from three locations in and near Darwin and it was necessary for efficiency and safety for it to be brought into one location where it could function in a desirable manner and be in a position to fulfil its proper role. It was decided in March 1942 that the hospital should be moved to Adelaide River. There were some Sidney Williams huts available and in the first instance these were to be used. A signal came to Levitt that he was to prepare to receive a number of Army nurses from the hospital and to have accommodation ready. He decided that one building being used as sisters' quarters

and lounge room for four nurses with the camp hospital and another next to it should be used for the purpose. He was very busy with a multitude of concerns so instructed have the huts ready by the time the women were expected to arrive. I secured sufficient wire stretchers by taking these from men in the convalescent depot and supplying them with straw palliasses. I secured a supply of blankets from the ordnance depot and this met the immediate requirements. The sisters arrived and were installed in their quarters and they were directed to where they were to eat, the location of showers and other facilities. All seemed to be well. There were, however, some complications. The first became evident soon after nightfall. The hut that had been used by the camp hospital had been given a measure of privacy by the erection of a bamboo screen around the outside. The other building did not have this facility with the result that at night, in the darkness around the hut, crowds of men were found to be assembling to have a vision of the female form so long denied them. This was soon rectified by the Camp Commandment.

In the days that followed, the nurses had to walk some distance from their sleeping quarters to the new location of the wards. The way led through an area where there were shower blocks and latrines for the men of other units and some embarrassing encounters resulted. It became necessary to grade a walking track from the nurses' quarters to the wards that skirted the other buildings. There was, however, a bigger problem that was soon very clear. The location of the huts being used as wards was not satisfactory. It did not meet the requirements of the International Red Cross as they were located in an area where there were military stores and, to add to the problem, a troop of 25 pounder guns to defend the area was set up quite close by. The long range planning had been for the hospital to be in an isolated location on the south the river and soon the whole of the establishment came together there. Much of the hospital was tented at first but more substantial buildings for such things as operating theatres, were provided.

This hospital, designed to have 1,200 beds, provided an outstanding service in the months that followed. Casualties from air operations to the north of Australia, from air raids around the Territory and accidents in the day to day life of the thousands of troops were dealt with efficiently and with the tender loving care which was so much a part of Australian hospital tradition. There were cases where refugees from the islands to the north were brought in for treatment. The medical knowledge in the care of tropical diseases and skin complaints was enhanced and new procedures were developed in the care of badly burned patients. It was in this service that the hospital gained recognition with its innovative treatment and care of three badly burned soldiers who had been defending the oil installations in Darwin. With limited facilities and showing great resourcefulness they saved the lives of those men and this was given wide publicity and due recognition later.

Soon after the early raids on Darwin I had a visit from a chaplain of the US forces then in Darwin. This was Chaplain Praed from San Francisco. The artillery unit to which he was posted had embarked from the US with the intention of going to the Philippines. While the unit was at sea the Philippines fell and their orders were to proceed to Darwin. In February they were embarked to go to Indonesia but while at sea the convoy in which they were sailing, which also included Australian ships, was attacked. The USS Houston drove off the attackers successfully but the convoy was ordered back to Darwin because the area to which they were proceeding had also

come under Japanese control. They arrived back in Darwin on 18 February 1942. The personnel were disembarked but their guns and other equipment were still on the ship. Next day, the fateful 19 February 1942, in the Japanese raids on the port the ship was sunk and their equipment lost. Praed came to me with a problem with which he needed help. Because of the changes to their destination, their mail was not being delivered and the morale of his men was low with no news from home. He wanted to send cables from numbers of his troops to their families at home, assuring their loved ones that they were well and giving the new code for the direction of mail. Praed had tried to send cables from the Australian Army Post Offices but had been informed that it would be necessary to lodge them at a civilian office. He understood that I knew the Territory, so he came to ask me where the nearest civilian post office was located. I informed him that this would be at Katherine, about 200 km south. He then asked me if I would accompany him to act as a guide and liaison with the Australian authorities. There was no proper road and the track was still hazardous following the Wet. I agreed to the proposition subject to Captain Levitt raising no barrier. He suggested that we set off the following day. He would provide the transport and rations. For me the exercise was interesting as it gave me an insight into the US army away from Australian influence. The food was magnificent. Our rations had been very monotonous as supplies had been short. I recall the wonder of a can of new potatoes with mint, and delicious applesauce. The one thing missing was tea. This was not available. Coffee, black and thick...but no tea. Chaplain Praed assured me that as soon as we arrived in Katherine he would see that I was given as much tea as I wished. Praed kept his word. As soon as we arrived in the town he sought out an American camp, found the camp cook and told him that he had an Australian chaplain who needed a drink of tea. Could the cook fix this? Sure. The cook filled a large pan with cold water and put it on the stove to heat. He then opened a half-pound packet of tea and sprinkled the contents liberally on the tepid water and gave the brew a good stirring. I drank the product in the interests of international relations but as soon as I could I found an Aussie camp and procured a cup of the real thing which, after a two days drought, tasted like nectar.

When we went to the Post Office Praed produced the cables to be sent. These had been typed out on long sheets of paper and he expected that the office would accept them in that form. There were about 300 messages on sheets. To our dismay the Postmaster told us that each message should be written out on the proper telegram form and each one censored, stamped, and signed by an authorised censor. So we two, perforce, had to sit down and write out each of the messages, make sure that security was not being breached, then stamp them with a censor's stamp and sign them. It was a long process and at the end a sum well in excess of 300 pounds was paid over. The result was that the US troops received their Christmas mail the following Easter. After the war was over and I was serving as a civilian minister in the area, I called at the Post Office at Katherine and told the current postmaster of the occasion. I ventured the opinion that the transaction would have been some kind of a record. He agreed. He said that only a few days earlier he had noticed the transaction in the office records. He considered that it was a record for overseas cables that would stand for many years. In 1964 my wife and I were visiting San Francisco and visited the Grace Cathedral where we had learned Praed was now a Canon. We discovered that he had been seriously ill and had major surgery but was at home. We visited him and yarned about the time we had spent together. He commented to Erla, 'Mrs Grant, when I

knew your husband in Darwin, I consider he was the thinnest man in the Australian armed forces'. Perhaps not the thinnest but I was only 51 kg.

There was another amusing incident worth telling. In the period following the first air raid I paid several visits to Katherine. On one visit the only means of transport was on a train, sitting on a flattop truck loaded with iron reinforcement rods. These left me with an impression, especially on my rear anatomy. On this occasion I visited the recently 121 AGH and paid my respects and reported my presence to the commanding officer Colonel William Morrow. I was astounded at his reception. He berated me for several minutes on the failures of the Australian Army Chaplains Department. He had on his manning table provision for three Chaplains but up to that time had none. I was the first representative of the chaplains he had seen and so was the object of his displeasure. After a few minutes he stopped and apologised. He explained that his signals asking for chaplains had brought no results and my arrival was the first opportunity he had had of expressing his opinions. Then he proceeded to give me all the assistance and co-operation I could hope for. Some time later I paid another visit and again called on him. This time he welcomed me with open arms. He told how he now had a chaplain, a Roman Catholic priest. He said 'Do you know what he did when he first came into my office? He did not salute; he raised his hat to me. See if you can explain some of the things he should know'. I later learned more of this man's experience. He was a young Irish priest and had been stationed in a country area of South Australia. His Bishop had told him that he was to become a chaplain. Asked what he should do, the Bishop sent him to a tailor in Adelaide to get a chaplain's uniform and told him then to report to Keswick Barracks. Keswick informed him that he was to go to Katherine and put him into a draft of men going north. When he arrived by train in Alice Springs a Methodist chaplain named Milligan found him wearing his tailor-made walking-out uniform in the heat of the Centre. He was able to arrange for the issue of the standard khaki shorts and shirts, but could not supply badges of rank. The priest set off on the trip north in the convoy. The officer commanding the convoy knew who he was and what his rank was but many others did not know this. At Banka Banka staging camp the OC saw him with others in the kitchen area peeling potatoes. In answer to his question 'what are you doing there Padre?' he heard 'Sure and I am peeling spuds. The sergeant sent me here'. I suppose the poor man would finally master the mysteries of service life. I never did discover whether any advice I had offered him following the Colonel's request to me had been of any help.

At the end of August 1942 Captain Levitt informed me that he was sending me south on leave. I had been working for months at high pressure and he considered a break necessary. I flew south on a Qantas Empire flying boat. This was unsurpassed in my flying experience. These aircraft flew at about 100 knots, had plenty of space when compared to modern aircraft, and coming down the east coast of the continent we flew at between 1,500 and 2000 feet so our view of the landscape was superb, especially as we were blessed with sunny weather. Our departure was delayed because of a threatened air raid and the journey to Sydney took three days. The first day we had stops at Groote Eylandt and Karumba en route to Townsville, the next day to Brisbane with a stop at Gladstone, with the third day being a shorter hop to Sydney where we landed at the Flying Boat base at Rose Bay. I managed to catch the evening train Armidale where Erla was staying with my family. She did not expect me until the day

train but I arrived at 3 am and she was upset as she had her hair in curlers so that she would look her best when I arrived; as if I would have noticed!!

At the end of my leave I was anxious to get back to the North. I travelled by rail to Brisbane and waited at the General Details Depot for my movement orders to Darwin by air. Day after day I inspected the list of those who were to move but for a week my name did not appear. I was getting restive when to my delight my name appeared for movement the following day. Steps had been taken in Darwin to raise my priority and I was away. On the way to the airport next morning someone commented to the driver of the bus on how hard it was to get a seat on the aeroplanes going to Darwin. The driver laughed and said, 'Oh yes, there is a Padre at the depot who has been off-loaded each day this week to take on day old chicks for the army fan up there'. Little did he know that I was that Padre, now trying to assess my value in day old chicks.

Our flight was in a Lockheed 10 aeroplane being operated by Qantas. It had been privately owned pre-war. Our first day's flight was without incident. We stayed overnight at Cloncurry and on the way to the airport next morning I asked the captain if we would land at Mount Isa. He said we would not as the aerodrome there was not big enough. We were to fly direct to Daly Waters. The day was overcast with only one small patch of blue sky. We took off and climbed above the clouds. I was seated on the starboard side of the plane and after about fifteen minutes I noticed smoke coming from the starboard motor. Almost at once the cabin light came on requiring the fastening of seat belts and no smoking. It was obvious that the captain was struggling to maintain height with only one motor functioning. Our view below was of unbroken cloud. I knew what the country was like and was apprehensive of us having a forced landing. The tension among the passengers, all service men, was acute. Most were taking furtive looks at the engine that was now 'feathered'. In the midst of this an American colonel said 'You know fellers, we have nothing to worry about'. Perhaps his rank gave him hidden from lesser ranks, or perhaps he knew these aircraft. Someone ventured 'How do you make that out sir?' The answer was self-evident. 'What have we to worry about, after all it's Captain Howard's kite isn't it'. (Howard being the Captain of the 'plane.) As we lost height and came below the cloud, to my relief I saw the bitumen road linking Mount Isa with Camooweal. This was followed in to Mt Isa where we made a safe landing despite the smallness of the field. The pilot told us passengers that we could go into town and get some breakfast. It was now about 8 o'clock. We secured a lift and did as we had been told and then returned. Someone asked the pilot if he had fixed the problem. The reply 'I think it's OK', resulted in the immediate comment from the colonel 'Captain, don't you tell us you think it's OK, just tell us it is, we won't know any better'. We took off again and the problem returned some 15 minutes after take off. This time we landed at Camooweal where we stayed for three days until a relief aeroplane was found. This was a DH86, a bi-plane with four Gypsy Queen motors. In this we had a safe trip, landing at Batchelor field in the late, very hot, afternoon. Years later I learned that the particular type of motor which was in the Lockheed had a frequent problem such as we had had because of the failure of a scavenger oil pump which resulted in lubricating oil coming out through the sump's breather and burning on the hot exterior of the motor.

I continued my service in Adelaide River until the beginning of 1943 when I was sent south. For a short period I was posted to the 1/45th Battalion then camped near

Wollongong. This unit was only at cadre strength and used as a training unit. It was while there that news came of the sinking of the hospital ship *Centaur*. This was a tragedy, which was felt especially in the area near Wollongong. On board the ship had been the bulk of the complement of the 2/12th Field Ambulance. This unit had been in Darwin and had been replaced there. For a while they had been encamped near Corrimal and the men had made friends of the families in the area. Some had married local girls. There was great sadness. I had had some small contact with the 2/12th in the north and one of the medical officers, Captain Sharp, had also been one of the 119 AGH at Adelaide River. A memorial service was held at the Princess Theatre at Corrimal. The band from the 1/45th led a march from Towradgi Creek bridge to the Theatre where Chaplain Mutton and I conducted the service. Captain Sharp led a small detachment from the Field Ambulance rear party. They attended, and presented a wreath on behalf of the survivors.

A short time later I was ordered to report to the 2/1st Anti-Aircraft Regiment then encamped near Sydney and was on the way north to New Guinea.

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