

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

PART ONE

THE EARLY YEARS

PAGE 1	Introduction.	
PAGE 8.	Chapter I.	Early days in Canada.
PAGE 22.	Chapter II.	Introduction to canoeing.
PAGE 30.	Chapter III.	Post war Adventures in Italy.
PAGE 36.	Chapter IV	The Phoney War.
PAGE 41..	Chapter V.	Life with the Commandos..
PAGE 50	Chapter VI	An Officer and a Gentleman.
PAGE 54.	Chapter VII.	Round the Cape to India.
PAGE 61.	Chapter VIII	Afghanistan and the North West Frontier.
PAGE 75.	Chapter IX.	North Africa.
PAGE 95.	Chapter X	Sicily and Italy.
PAGE 100	Chapter XI	Cloak and Dagger
PAGE 115	Chapter XII	Postwar in England.

PART TWO

C A N A D A

Page 2	Chapter I	Getting Settled In
Page 16	Chapter II	The Downhill Ethic
Page 31	Chapter III	Courers du Bois
Page 46	Chapter IV	Churchill River
Page 62	Chapter V	Back Country Skiing
Page 71	Chapter VI	Five Winds
Page 82	Chapter VII	New Hampshire
Page 95	Chapter VIII	The Karakorams.
Page 136	Chapter IX	A Retrograde Step.

INTRODUCTION

Back in the crepuscolo of the so called Great War when many young people were giving their lives willingly that their country should live on, a red faced bawling scrap of humanity made its bow to the world, though it is doubtful that its appearance was marked by many fireworks. In later days it became known as Mike Naughton whose eventual passing would be mourned by few and soon forgotten by all. This speck of dust in the cosmos, this grain of sand in the deserts of time, soon to become indistinguishable from others of his ilk. And in the passage of time, some traveller in Canada's back country will perhaps come across a pile of rocks and wonder what purpose it served and who it was that constructed it.

The story of a man's life, unless it encompasses events outside the normal span of contemporary experience is not likely to excite the interest of many except those have shared or encountered similar experiences. It is to be expected however that such shared experience would not cover more than a relatively short period common to the lives of two or more people even if the companions have lived together through harrowing or stimulating events. The chronicling of those events as a small part of a major publication would certainly be of interest to the participants but not enough to hold that interest from birth through death. Ergo, while I will no doubt be drawn to the esoteric approach, I will have to, and indeed I will try to give priority to the general interest.

A number of my friends, with whom I have shared wilderness experiences in many parts of the world, suggested that I should write something about my outdoor experiences in Canada. Of the eighty two years I have been around, close on forty of them were spent exploring the country around the Gibson River in Ontario - of which more later - but much less than that period with those friends who thought I should record my mishaps, misdemeanors and misadventures for the doubtful benefit of posterity. Thinking about this I began to realize that it was going to be difficult to concentrate on Ontario without overlapping into other provinces and countries and activities and cultures, to say nothing of the time continuum which rules the span of my existence. The other forty years could not be ignored, nor could their influence on the rest of my life. So it had to be the story of my life or nothing at all, and if you begin to lose patience with it I hope you will, nevertheless, persevere to the end.

Looking back on a life that has not been totally without event I know for sure that there are very many people including those friends of mine, whose lives and accomplishments outshine anything I have ever set my hand to. The only difference perhaps is that I am writing of my own life even though bits and pieces of it have been shared with others, few of whom have got around to writing of their own lives. A number of successful authors claim that a good story can

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

always stand a bit of embellishment. Whether or not that means that one can't believe everything that appears in print, though I certainly subscribe to the premise, there is no doubt that while truth is often stranger than fiction it mostly makes dull reading. How to embellish the truth without taking too many liberties with it, and yet hold the attention of the reader, needs some thought and imagination. I think that the answer to the question is that a good story needs a bit of variation in style.

Embellishment is OK provided it is offset by a bit of modesty at the other end of the spectrum. Not too much of the latter in case, to quote the great man, somebody comments that he has much to be modest about! And while I am not going to be too modest about my penmanship, I would like to paraphrase Rider Haggard, a prolific writer who used to claim to be better with a rifle than with a pen. Having read many of his stories with much enjoyment I came to the conclusion that I would be well advised to keep my head down if he ever had me in his sights. Further, if anybody should ever read these lines, with RH's comments in mind, they might conclude that my efforts as an author were no commendation on my marksmanship.

Life begins at the beginning and goes on until the end and then stops, but in dealing with my life's history I can see no reason why this account should be presented chronologically, in fact I can see many arguments against it. Nevertheless I hope that it will not look too much like a game of hopscotch, but if my reader detects too much laxity in this respect may he remember that when in a minefield, it behooves one to tread warily.

And then there is the question of syntax, or the lack of it. Though I have never been quite sure of the meaning of the word, friends who have been kind enough to proof read some of my earlier efforts, though producing diversities in their comments, were always in complete agreement on one thing. They didn't like my syntax. To draw what seems to be an apt parallel, it has something in common with my downhill skiing which occupied many years of my leisure time when I used to live in Canada. Many of the downhill crowd used to go in for this wriggling, or weddling or whatever it was called. I never got very enthused about it for it seriously impeded the enjoyment of sliding down the hill and greatly reduced the number of runs in a day. On one occasion I nipped under the arm of a lady skier and got to the bottom in record time. Presently she caught up with me in the line up and with a very dirty look says, "The only reason you always go straight down is because you don't know how to turn!" No doubt there's some truth in that it also seems to say something about my syntax. Anyway I am not going to apologise for my little peccadilloes, in fact I feel quite fond of them and they keep me warm at night.

Before getting started on the meat of the matter, though it might seem a bit lean at times, I hope I may be forgiven for dwelling upon a small problem faced by most

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

autobiographers, and that is, *when to stop*. I say most autobiographers because I don't include those who go on writing until they drop dead, dieing with their boots on, so to speak though it would be nice to be able to write 'Finis', seconds before being moved on, hopefully, to more comfortable quarters. My only prayer is that when I do go I shall beat the bailiffs to it and that I will have managed to inflict some pearls of wisdom on at least a few of my coparticipants.

Having wished all my wishes and hoped a similar number of hopes, the least of which, and one undoubtedly shared by all my survivors, is that I will never, on the basis that you cant keep a good man down, take up my pen again and start writing : "It is now twenty years since the publication of my memoirs - - - - -." !

Always with the thought that fate is standing at my elbow I try never to be too presumptuous about what might be waiting for me around the corner. If I expect my luck to be out, generally someone up there will conclude that it is only what I deserve and quietly turn his back on me and allow matters to take their course. If on the other hand I am waiting on a stroke of good fortune I crosss my fingers and keep quiet about it, like Brer Rabbit. Sometimes however it is not possible to avoid, verbally or mentally, making a comittment or arrangement for the near future, but I always make it known to the appropriate authority that I am dependent upon his good will, by adding the rider ' God Willing'. Following that reasoning I decided that in writing of my life, my early years might not make a gripping initiation, while starting when the game was coming to the end might be taken that that was a good place to stop. So I came back to about half time by effecting a sort of time warp in the hope He would leave me alone in my 'middle ages' and get on with something more productive..

At eighty two years of age I hope that some expectation of reaching ninety and still be vertical and fairly mobile may not be considered too presumptuous. Going back to about half time and equating it to my fiftyeth year would seem to be in expectation of reaching one hundred and I hasten to assure whoever it is that's standing there counting the score, that these figures are approximate only and should not be taken as an expression of intent and entirely dependent upon the good will of 'my friend up there'.

So, before getting started I would like to conduct my readers on a short guided tour through the convolutions of my life experience.

Born in England at the end of the first world war I spent most of my boyhood sponging on my parents not far from London and my deeds and misdeeds did not differ significantly from that of other young males of my own age. When I was twelve I went to a boarding school in London and after two terms contracted pneumonia and pleurisy from which, contrary to expectations I recovered. But, as the Duke of Wellington said, it was a close run thing. The whole thing cost me the better part of a year's schooling, but I came out of it in one piece, a bit wiser about some things and more knowledgeable about things I wasn't supposed to know

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

about and went to another boarding school in Highgate, where I stayed until my matriculation

During this period though I never excelled in team sports, in the individual activities such as tree and drainpipe climbing, the illicit manufacture and use of explosives – the ingredients of which were purloined from the chemical lab, and various other athletic exercises, I managed to give a reasonable account of myself. Also, in the regular, though covert, pissing and spitting competitions (height and distance) I had no peer. On the top of the main building was a twenty foot flag post and I earned the approbation of my class mates by climbing up and attaching a *pisspot* to the U bolt at the top

My most outstanding, though involuntary, accomplishment at school was that which earned me the nickname of Bomber. After a large helping of baked beans for lunch, while sitting at my desk in the classroom I sensed a build up of pressure in the nether regions. By pulling myself against the oak seat, my detractors called it a sounding board, I was unable for long to postpone the moment when the forces of nature overcame my efforts at concealment. There issued forth such a high pitched wave of sound, rather like a Doppler Effect, that all other preoccupations in the classroom came to a halt.

The master turned round and faced me, “That will be enough from you, Flight Lieutenant Naughton,” he said. So they called me Bomber, and the name stuck for ever. I remember running into an old classmate of mine some years later and he greeted me with “Well! Hello, If it isn’t Bomber Naughton himself!”

Much of my boyhood years was spent on my maternal grandfather’s estate close to a little village called Wrotham. And they were perhaps the most influential in my life. When I was nine I had my first love affair. It was with an Alsation dog named Streak. When he died, I was sixteen at the time, I thought my world had come to an end, as it had for a while. The two of us were inseparable. Wherever I went, he was there with me. In the afternoons we went out for a walk, always one of three routes and when we came to the point he would stop and look at me. “Which way are we going?” he would ask. I would say, perhaps, “Up the hill, Boy.” And he would go, like a shot. Only once did he vary the routine. I had decided to borrow my grandfather’s shot gun and walked out of the front door to the other side of the garden and then I realized that Streak was not with me. He was sitting outside the front door, immovable! He absolutely refused to come. It was the gun! So I had to take it back to the gun room after which all was forgiven! I could fill a book with stories about him, but then, most dog owners could do the same. Once we had a baby chick with a bad leg that got lost so we sent Streak to look for it. It took him no more than a few minutes before he brought it back in his mouth like a hot potato – a little ball of fluff, slightly wet!

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MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

The war broke out in September 1939, and three years later when, having joined the Territorial Army earlier, I stopped playing at soldiers and braced myself for action. However not very much seemed to be happening in my battalion, and though some of us volunteered for the parachutists, we all - those of us who volunteered, that is - ended up in the Commandos doing some rather unusual training. In 1941 I was commissioned, and there hangs a story, into the Indian Army, spent nine months on the North West Frontier being sniped at by 'friendly' Pathans and discovered that being shot at was quite a lot of fun so long as one didn't get hit. Later, in 1942, I took a draft of Sikhs to North Africa just in time for Alamein where my conclusions about the enjoyment of being fired at underwent a certain amount of modification.

Next came Sicily, where the business of getting shot at was definitely losing some of its attraction. Fortunately the campaign was not a long one and in the lull before stepping over the gap into Italy I was introduced to the language and some of the customs of the Sicilian peoples who had scratched a living for centuries out of the poor soil and under the unrelenting thumb of the Mafia for many centuries. My accomplice in this endeavour was a young lady who taught me much more than I could ever have learned from a book. My only regret was that I found myself entangled with the 'conditional' mood having unfortunately skipped the 'indicative' at an early stage, before being dragged away from the trough by an unsympathetic army which thought I should involve myself elsewhere in the prosecution of the war.

Italy, a land of extremes and contradictions, of poverty and corruption. A mozaic of art and music overlaid upon a patchwork quilt of languages in which the influences of other ethnic cultures such as Moorish, Greek, Romonsch¹, Arabic and others is strong. I spent five years in that country, half of that time dodging bullets and the other half, mostly after the war but not necessarily after the shooting part of it, learning how to survive in a political and social system where nothing is straightforward or predictable or even practical. And that of course applies to the women of whom it may be said I learned less than I thought I did!

In the northern part of what was then known as Yugoslavia, the three dominant states were, and still are Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. In Slovenia of which I had some small experience there was still a lot of shooting going on, in fact it would be more accurate to say that there were occasional periods when peace reigned supreme, sometimes as much as a whole day. The people were as different from the Italians as chalk is from cheese. They tended to shoot first and ask questions later and of the women it was said, though I cannot subscribe to the premise, that they would bed a man first and shoot him afterwards. Much like the Praying

¹ Originally the official language of Lithuania. Romonsch or Romansch, one of the many Romance languages to be found over Europe is closely related to Ladin and Friulan, still spoken in many parts of Northeast Italy.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

Mantis. However, being married to a Croat who also shared the cultures and languages of Slovenia and Italy, the question of any further comment might invoke the Fifth Amendment!

In those days after the cessation of hostilities, Ha, Ha, I was never quite sure who was footing the bill for me. The Brits were giving me some spending money, the Americans provided medical service and various other goodies. The Italians, willi nilli gave us lodging and some transport, and I was once even arrested by the Americans who thought I was a member of OZNA - the Yugoslav Secret Police! Anyway, by the Fall of 1947 they all conspired to get rid of me and I said goodbye to that convoluted existence and stepped out of the train at Victoria Station to face the dense sooty fog of London. Oh for sunny Italy.

After five years in post war England - I had a wife, Bozena whom I met in the northeast corner of Italy, and three year old daughter by that time - we emigrated to Canada where the streets were paved with gold and cigarettes were wrapped up in ten dollar bills. It was heaven after drab Britain, and I soon got a job with Dunlop Canada at the princely sum of \$375 a month. What more could one ask? I loved the country, and so did my wife at first. I soon left Dunlop and started a small engineering business which prospered and got involved in a lot of recreational activities and made many friends. In 1996 we came back to England. End of story. Well, not quite.

Not surprisingly the most active though not always the most enjoyable period of my life was during the third, fourth and fifth and sixth decades. The third accounted for the war years including an extra bit at each end, the fourth my early years in Canada, and the fifth and sixth together, also in Canada, when I embarked upon a recreational project that occupied my energies for many years. At this point, at forty years of age, I am standing with one foot on the threshold of my fifth decade. A period that saw many changes in my personal life which deeply affected my business and recreational activities, and in some ways, my domestic situation.

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS IN CANADA

I mentioned earlier that I had done a lot of downhill skiing through the fifties and sixties in Canada, mostly in the Collingwood area of Ontario with extracurricular trips to New Hampshire and New York State and occasionally to Alberta and British Columbia. It was in the latter decade that many of my companions on the 'hill' were beginning to tire of the crowded slopes and endless lineups, to say nothing of the escalating expense of the downhill philosophy, and started looking for some more relaxing skiing in the bush. At the time I and some friends had become almost permanent guests of the Podborski family who were, still are I think, members of the Craighleith Ski Club, and most Saturdays we would ski with them and on the Sunday would go off and do our cross country. You might say I had dual allegiance with the two philosophies and I certainly enjoyed them both to the full. Nevertheless, though I still had one foot firmly in the downhill camp it was the wilderness skiing that eventually was going to lay claim on most of my winter activities.

Ontario has three seasons, Winter, Summer and Fall. Sandwiched between Winter and Summer is a very short period when Winter wends its wet and windy way out, when lakes can neither be skied on nor swum in, where the bush is wet and muddy and the rivers mostly unnavigable and too fast flowing for small river craft. It is cold and damp and unattractive and is the time when outdoors people ask themselves, "Is there life after skiing?". At the end of this period people go to bed one evening praying for surcease and wake up in the morning with that cloying heavy atmosphere that portends a hot and humid day and the blackfly in the bush is having its first mouthful of human flesh. It is early in May and Summer has come, but as usual nobody is ready for it. That period, barely a month, between the two seasons, is Ontario's Spring. Unwanted unloved, and a good time to go south.

So, having accounted for the Winter, I can now talk about the other two seasons, Summer and Fall, which offer their blandishments to hiker and canoeist alike. It was early in the fifties when I was introduced to canoeing by a Norwegian friend, Hans Martinsen, who took me up to Algonquin Park for a long weekend and I thought I'd found Heaven. Later I discovered that Heaven embraced most of Ontario's North Country and that the canoe was the time honoured way to get around up there, by river and portaging from lake to lake. For open water however, travelling from island to island, the kayak is a much better, and safer proposition and it was after canoeing around in Algonquin Park for several years, that the same Hans Martinsen produced, out of his hat almost, a seventeen foot folding double kayak that could when disassembled, be carried by one person to

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

the nearest water and reassembled in less than half an hour. It turned out to be the identical 'Tyneboat' with which I was familiar and had been used by the Commandoes and Independent Companies during the war for raiding along the Norwegian coast and sticking limpet mines on the hulls of German battleships.

It was with this boat that on one beautiful day in late May of 1959 we paddled out of Honey Harbour and camped among the thousands of little islands to the North. I'll always remember the shimmering light on the still cold waters of Georgian Bay and the dive bombing sea gulls from Espabekong Island which always at that time of the year is covered with the ugly little grey birds emerging from their shells. On towards the horizon the two aptly named islands, the Squaw's Tits and beyond them Split Rock where we were to camp.

That night as we were lying in our sleeping bags a Whippoorwill landed on a nearby branch and commenced its mournful and beautiful though endlessly repetitive song; from which its onomatopoeic name is derived. Hans cocked an ear, "What a lovely sound." he said. The song continued unabated and we enjoyed its call. After about fifteen minutes we decided that enough was enough, but the bird did not seem to get the message. Shouting and banging on the roof of the tent had no effect and finally Hans got up and went outside waving his arms and shouting the most unprintable things. Finally blessed silence descended upon the scene and we returned to our slumbers. Hans said something, sleepily, about peace and content, but he spoke too soon. Whippoorwill, whippoorwill, whippoorwill, - - - - and so it went on, and on, and on. We closed our eyes resolutely and slept despite our vociferous little companion above the tent!

It was my introduction to Georgian Bay, and though I have since paddled its waters for many miles through the years, the vivid memory of that first weekend in God's country lives forever in my mind. It was also the precursor of forty years of paddling around in various parts of Canada, mostly Ontario. Sometimes it was cold or wet, occasionally we got lost, more than once we got tipped out with all our impedimenta floating down the rapids, and a lot of the time in shoaling waters with steep curling waves that rolled over the deck and around our waists. Somehow we made our peace with the elements and there was never a day that we would have preferred to be elsewhere and more comfortable. I sometimes think that if there is a heaven it could be no more heavenly than those years we spent in that country.

So much for the Summer and Fall and more of that later. Winter in Canada has its own attractions, and the first thing it did for me was to draw me to the hills of Collingwood, a couple of hours drive from Toronto. If you skied in the Rockies, Collingwood would seem like the run-out at the bottom of ²Whistler. Nevertheless the hills there, though none much higher than eight hundred feet or so, are not to

² A ski resort in the mountains of the Coastal Range a couple of hours drive north of Vancouver. If you are a skier, see Whistler and die!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

be belittled. Some of them like the Rogers Run at the Peaks or the Kandahar at Blue Mountain are no less difficult than many of the big runs in other parts of the world.

For many years, even before the war, I had listened enviously to tales of derring do about Klosters and Murren, and Chamonix and that wonderful Matterhorn run from Testa Grigia but it wasn't until the Winter of '46 at the age of twenty eight that I ever put on a pair of skis. And that was a blessed piece of luck if anything was. I was in Gorizia, a small town not far from Trieste and hanging over the border of Jugoslavia. I was dancing with a pretty Italian girl at midnight and looking forward hopefully to some romantic interlude later on, when she looks at her watch! If there is one thing I know for sure in such a situation, when a girl looks at her watch, the last thing she is thinking about is romance. And how right I was!

"Mama mia" she says, "Midnight already! I have to go." Well, one doesn't give up right away, but despite my remonstrations she was adamant and started heading for the door. Suddenly she turned back and faced me, "I am going skiing in the mountains up near the Austrian border. We don't leave until four in the morning. Why not come along too?"

I pointed out, reasonably I thought, that I didn't know the first thing about skiing. I protested that I had no skis or any suitable equipment and that with only four hours in the middle of the night to get equipped, accoutered and ready to go was rather cutting things a bit fine. "Oh, I'm sure you can manage," she says, "I'll keep a place for you on the truck.". Truck, I thought! And with that, she rubbed the lamp and disappeared.

When I tell you that at five minutes before the witching hour of four in the morning and ten degrees below zero, I was climbing aboard the truck - one of those nasty draughty things covered with flapping canvas - fully equipped and clothed for, I wotted not what, you will gather that my night had not been a restful one! I lost a few friends that night, all of whom had seemed much concerned as to whether I knew what time it was. And the strange thing was that when I told them the time they didn't even say thank you. In fact, just the reverse. One of them didn't speak to me for several weeks after, and I never found out why, for he very kindly opened his shop and provided me with various items of clothing. He seemed to have had something on his mind for he kept muttering to himself all the time, something about English lunatics and cutting off various parts of their anatomy. I didn't think that was a very friendly thing to say, particularly as he considered me to be English myself. However it didn't seem to be an appropriate time to complain so I kept my own counsel.

My companion of the previous evening, looking calm, collected and quietly competent, introduced me to the rest of the party, about fifteen in all, who welcomed me to their group and plied me with neat grappa to improve my skiing

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

until, four hours later, we arrived in a little town surrounded on all sides by snow covered mountains. Tarvisio! There was a scene of concentrated activity for about three minutes and then they were over the horizon and gone, leaving me with various pieces of unfamiliar equipment trying to figure out to which part of my anatomy they should be attached. That hurdle overcome I faced a huge barrier of snow thrown up by the plows, over which I would have to climb if I wanted to do any skiing. It did occur to me to take off the two planks of wood that were attached to my feet, but the thought of putting them on again in knee deep snow dissuaded me.

I wont weary you with what I went through in getting over that six foot snow bank. All I can say is that by the time I was over and vertical, I had gathered a about a dozen free loaders who were thoroughly enjoying the spectacle. Problem was I didn't have time to bow for I found myself on an arm waving trip down a track and heading, accelerating I should say, toward a rickety foot bridge, not more than two feet wide, crossing a stream fifteen feet below. Even if I had any idea of what to do it wouldn't have had any effect on the outcome for I was over the bridge an clear and just beginning to slide backwards when God took pity on me and tossed me into a snow drift.

Most of the morning was spent listening to my companions who deluged me with instructions such as: "Bend zee nees." "Lean forward." "Turn the shoulder to the left - or to the right." And so on. Nothing seemed to do much good until after lunch and half a litre of wine, when I skied perfectly - at least so I thought and I certainly wasn't feeling any pain! On the way back, with huge appetites, we stopped at a little restaurant and a quartet played polkas for ever to which we all clumped happily around in our ski boots and afterwards snored our way back to Gorizia!

That was my introduction to skiing and from then on I was first on the truck every weekend until the snow had gone. Unfortunately I only had two seasons before being demobilised and returned to England, but six years later I went to Canada with my family and was first on the rope tow at Collingwood! And that set the pattern for the coming years.

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If it seems, in those early years in Canada, that I did nothing but go on 'walkabout', nothing is farther from actuality. In 1953 when I came to Canada with my family, a very large project was underway to convert the electrical distribution system in the country to a higher frequency - 25hz to 60hz. At that time I took up employment with Dunlop Canada in Toronto and my first responsibility was for the electrical engineering involved in the conversion of plant equipment. At the same time plans for the relocation of the tire building and foam rubber operation to a new complex yet to be built were at the planning stage. I was deeply

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

involved in both these projects and initially had little spare time for anything other than my work

Our chief engineer at the time, Gordon Reid, was a man who knew his job and made sure his staff knew theirs. A bit of a martinet in many ways, a man I respected and admired, he never hesitated to speak his mind and to concentrate on the job in hand. He was a keen ice sailor and in the Winter it was not unusual to find him hobbling around the plant encased in plaster after a bone breaking crash out on the frozen lake somewhere. In 1956 I was taken into hospital one day late in the evening for an emergency appendectomy and the following morning bright and early, Gordon appears at my bedside, all businesslike. Me, pale and wan, feeling sorry for myself and doing my best to give the appearance of having narrowly escaped sudden death. Looking forward to some comforting words.

"Well young fellah," he says, full of concern for my situation and handing me a bunch of grapes that looked as if the dog had been sitting on them, "How are you doing? I didn't bring you any flowers. Didn't think you would appreciate them." From somewhere he produced some documents; "Now, about these drawings. What are we going to do about this wound rotor motor?" And that was the nature of the beast. But Gordon would never ask anyone to do something he would not be prepared to do himself. I took a deep breath. An hour later Gordon gathered up the papers and prepared to leave. "Thanks Michael," he said and then delivered his Parthian shot; "See you in the office tomorrow."

On another occasion I was sitting in my office when Gordon walked in with the Manager of the tire testing department with whom I had been having some discussions regarding a new machine he wanted. It was an unusual application and I was proposing an unusual drive for it. Gordon sat down immediately and looked me straight in the face.

"I understand you are proposing an ac motor for a variable speed drive. I think you are full of soup." No nonsense or beating around the bush. That was Gordon to a T. Well, he was a first class mechanical engineer and well versed in other engineering applications but there were some aspects of electrical engineering that had passed him by. This was one of them. He listened to my explanation, "Very good, " he said, "That's an excellent approach to the problem!" and walked out. Gordon died many years ago, much to my sorrow. I only wished that there were more of his ilk in this world!

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Twentyfive years of my life were spent with Dunlop Canada with my time divided on an equal basis between the old plant in Toronto and the new operation in Whitby some thirty miles to the East, which came on stream in 1956. The problems in starting up a new plant are numerous and my dual responsibilities

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

kept my nose to the grindstone for quite a few years

I came to Dunlops straight from university, and compounding the feeling of total inadequacy in applying what I had learnt there, was the noticeable difference between Canada and the UK in engineering practice and philosophy. Certainly in electrical engineering and I very quickly began to wonder if I had learned anything worth while at university. I felt rather like a surgeon must feel the first time when the nurse hands him a scalpel! However time and experience bridge the gap and hopefully life gets back to normalcy once more

Typical to the business of approaching new problems was a little thing that cropped up a couple of months after getting my feet wet. My office adjoined that of the Chief Electrical Engineer, Dinty Moore, for whom I was working. One day when passing through the drafting office I noticed a pile of not much less than a hundred electrical drawings sitting on a filing cabinet. I thumbed through them for a while without understanding very much and then asked Dinty what they were. "They must be the drawings for the new Banbury control system, " he said, "You might like to see if you can make head or tail of them!"

I took them all home and spread them out on top of the grand piano, to my wife's dismay, and after working on them every evening for a couple of weeks I began to get a glimmering of what they were all about. But it took a couple of trips down to the manufacturer in New York before I really began to understand what I was into. Unfortunately, for years after that, I was the only one who knew or admitted to know anything about the system and many was the time when my telephone rang in the middle of the night. Occasionally the problem could be resolved over the phone but mostly it was drive thirty miles there and back with an hour, if you were lucky, in between. Back to bed with what was left of the night and bright and early in the office next morning. Once I was called out to the Whitby plant at midnight and just as I was leaving to go home I heard my name called on the paging system. An urgent electrical problem had shut down a whole department in the Toronto plant and could I come and wave my magic wand. I remember that problem quite well for when I got there I found a fuse had blown. It was the only thing the electrician had not checked!

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In 1972, five years before leaving the Company, I got involved in a project that became the forerunner of total computer control of large manufacturing plants. Control, you might say being the end product, but to get there we had first to know the real time status of the various processes of manufacturing. To make this information complete and available it would be necessary to monitor every single production machine in the plant. To start off with, it seemed logical to attack the most labour intensive department which, incidentally, showed an unacceptably high ratio of scheduled to output figures. I was asked to make proposals for a

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

system that would monitor machine status and output, and provide real time production figures to supervision and management. It was an exciting and challenging project and one that I welcomed wholeheartedly.

Basically we had to identify four things from each machine. The operator, the machine, its status and the component that was being built, each of which would be keyed in to a computer, through a small terminal, by the operator at the appropriate time. We invested in a Honeywell Minicomputer with 64k bytes(!) of core memory and a programmer, Peter Heath to design the software. The wiring to the machines and associated hardware was provided by a contractor to my specifications. Peter was a really bright young man from Melbourne Australia without whose commitment and expertise the project would barely have got off the ground

Suffice to say it did get off the ground and the information it provided justified its extension to the concomitant fields of inventory and scheduling and subsequently to total production control throughout the plant. Unfortunately, by the time the project was fully established and operational, Dunlop Canada was bought out by another tire company from the USA to whom anything that did not conform to their established engineering practices was unacceptable. It was clear to me that the days of my computer system were numbered and in common with many other people in the plant I took early retirement, and devoted myself to running a small engineering business that I had started several years previously.

I wont say that I was not disappointed at the turn of events, and my departure was effected in a friendly way. In saying goodbye and how sad we are to lose you etc. the VP, as he shook my hand, wished me a happy retirement. "Well," he said, not shedding too many tears, "You will now have the leisure to do all those things you never had time for." I suppose it was a bit mean of me, but the little bit of pique I felt, allowed me a good rejoinder, "You are very right there Sir," I said, "And as a matter of fact I am leaving tomorrow morning for a week in Switzerland, on an engineering project." He smiled over our clasped hands, but the smile didn't quite make it to his eyes!

In fairness to the new owners I should say that they did not dismantle my system until I had left their employ. Not for another three days in fact! That what they replaced it with was, in my opinion, antediluvian is neither here nor there. The inescapable consequence of returning to outdated methods was the fact that not much more than a year later the total manufacturing facility was closed down and all equipment and buildings sold. After less than twenty five years of operation!

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In the spring of 1972 I was returning with some friends from the east coast of Canada where we had been paddling around in the Atlantic among some really

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

impressive chunks of ice as big as houses. Nothing very adventuresome I admit, but it did make us feel a bit like rabbits in the middle of a herd of elephants. On the way back to Toronto we took the southern route through Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. None of us had been through that country before but we loved what we saw. Looking at the map we came across an extensive group of mountains in the middle of New Hampshire that none of us had ever heard of before and we decided to give it the once over. We didn't know what we were letting ourselves in for!

By midday we had the White Mountains - that's what they are called - on our right flank with an interesting looking road heading into the middle of them. We pulled up at the entrance to the road facing an impressive looking tollgate. The attendant looked at us and shook his head. "Carriage road don't open up till the end of the month, but you can walk up if you like." It was apparently eight miles and five thousand feet to the top of the highest peak, Mount Washington, and looking at the others I knew that we all had the same thought in our minds! We were all out of the cars by this time, mentally putting on our boots. Our friend looked at the sky. "Weather's all right for the time being, but don't take any chances. Up top there they get the worst weather in the United States. Once they had a blizzard and winds peaking at 250 miles!" We were duly impressed. Nevertheless we couldn't wait to get started.

Getting on for half way up we came across a big hut at the side of the road. Apparently disused, and with a chain pulled tight over the roof; I remembered what they had said about the winds up here and figured it was a pretty good anchorage! A few minutes later we passed the 4000ft. mark. It was obvious that we were not going to complete the round trip that day so we headed back to the cars, by which time our legs felt like they were made of rubber. A mile or so up the main road the Pinkham Notch Base Camp run by the Appalachian Mountain Club, is set back at the bottom of Tuckerman's Ravine. The track that runs up the ravine would be a tough trial for a four wheeler, and it certainly is a hard hour's grind to reach Hermit's Lake which is considered to be half way to the top, but isn't! From there a pleasant half hour's walk takes one to the foot of the headwall where skiers literally risk their necks for a couple of weeks at the end of May. On the left top of the snowfield there is a small patch of snow which is joined to the main snowfield by a constriction which is no more than ten feet wide with jagged rocks on either side. It is known as the South Gully and if you can ski that you can ski anything. The snow comes down to the bottom of the headwall and stops rather suddenly at what is laughingly referred to as the run out. If you hit it you are dead. It consists of large jagged tumbled boulders and they all have excellent stopping power. Definitely not for beginners

That was my introduction to the White Mountains and I think that all of us came back there one time or another. For me it was a new and wonderful world and during the next decade I went down several times a year hiking and skiing.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

Generally I would take a party of friends mostly from Toronto and schedule the day's hike, or ski, for the whole of the time we were there.

The map of the Presidential Range covers an area of fifteen miles by twenty dominated by Pinkham Notch from which hiking trails radiate out in all directions to the peaks, each of which is named after one of the American presidents. A hiker starting at Randolph at the north end of the range could traverse the following peaks in two days without pushing himself too hard: Madison, Adams, Jefferson, Clay, Washington, Monroe, Franklin, Eisenhower, Clinton, Jackson and Webster. At the end of the second day he would have come out to the road at Crawford Notch after having travelled about twenty miles and 6,500 feet up and down. And that's about average hiking if you are in good shape.

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Back in the fifties and sixties downhill skiing was occupying most of our recreational activities. My companions in those days were Ralph Elsassner, a Swiss musician and outdoors man, Joe Herwig, who survived the rubble of Berlin and came to Canada after the end of the war, Haigh Carthew, England, Montreal and Toronto, a competent skier and a much better one than I, Mike and Jacky Podborski and their two famous sons, Virgil Curri who was born with skis on in the Dolomite mountains of Italy and who I have never yet seen to fall. It was with Joe and Virgil and the Podborskis with half a dozen other friends that we spent a couple of weeks in Austria at Saint Anton and when we came back to Ontario all the hills seemed flat.

While at Saint Anton we were first on the Gondola in the morning and last off the hill at the end of the day. I don't think I ever enjoyed downhill skiing as much as I did on that trip. However, much as I enjoyed it, when I got back to Canada its foothold began to slip very quickly. The day after our return Joe and I joined the Podborskis at their chalet at Craighleith and as soon as we had our boots on we headed for our favourite run. It was a beautiful day and the run was in perfect condition, though it seemed flatter and much easier than I remembered it from a couple of weeks ago. When I got to the bottom Joe was standing there looking up at the hill with a puzzled expression.

"What have they done to the hill since we've been away?" After the big hills of St. Anton and being bullied by our instructor, who looked and skied like Stein Ericksson, into tackling runs that were not quite overhanging, anything short of Everest looked like an easy day for the ladies! Not, though, to disparage the Craighleith runs which were, if shorter than some, worthy of anybody's mettle as my many bruises in the past can affirm. In fact my memories of those hills and of the hospitality and friendship I found there will never be forgotten.

However, as I mentioned earlier, the attractions of backcountry skiing were claiming my interests to the extent that after Saint Anton I hardly ever skied

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

downhill again. That is not to say that I didn't miss it, and it is still in my blood and always will be.

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This chapter was supposed to be an overview of my early years in Canada up to 1970. You might say that they were a preface to the following twenty years when I started building wilderness trails around the Gibson River in Ontario.

During the sixties I did a lot of kayaking in Georgian Bay, a big body of water some three hundred miles in perimeter, adjoining Lake Huron and got to know a lot of its history and topography. Joe Herwig, a survivor from the rubble of Berlin in 1945, whom I knew from Dunlop Canada was bent on making his pile by the time he was fifty and then living it up. I managed to persuade him, not an easy job, that it made more sense to live it up while he was able - who knows what happens at fifty when it is twenty years away

Some people might have considered Joe a killjoy and he may well have ended up that way if it hadn't been for me. He eventually agreed, grudgingly would be a good epithet, to give this paddling business a try on a one-off basis. Just so that I would get off his back! One day when it was ideal kayaking weather, warm and sunny with a little wind to liven up the water, he agreed to go down to Lake Ontario some time in the future and in a manner of speaking 'get his feet wet'. On the chosen day God played Joe a dirty trick, cold and rain and wind enough for anybody. I didn't call Joe. I thought that if he wanted to cancel he would. But I didn't know him then as well as I do now. When he agrees to do something it is graven in stone and even the Apocalypse would scarcely deter him! Not that there was ever any conscious decision, to go or not to go, just that it would never have occurred to him that there might be a possible alternative. I was ready with the boat on the car at the appointed hour and right on the dot there was Joe. A man of few words. "We go?".

We went, and Joe sure got his feet wet that evening! We paddled around behind the Toronto breakwater for a time looking at the stuff that was coming over the top; at least I was. Joe was getting on with the paddling because that was what he had come for and I got the impression that if it had been blowing a force tenner it wouldn't have made any difference to him. He had his mind set on one thing and it was not the weather.

"Would you like to go outside the breakwater, Joe?" I yelled, "It not as bad as it looks." His response was something between a grunt and a shrug of which my interpretation was, "If that's what we came down for, let's get on with it." As we headed for the gap in the breakwater I saw a big one heading our way. You can't pussyfoot around in water like that, not when you have got solid concrete on either side and not more than two feet away.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

"Paddle like Hell," I shouted. I would have liked to explain to Joe what was going to happen, and particularly to him, within the next second or so, but I didn't think I had his full attention. The wave came high over the bow, ran along the deck and hit Joe smack in the chest, nicely breaking it for me. To this day I am not sure if he was even aware that he was up to his chest in water. We'd come here to paddle and that was what he was doing, come Hell or high water!

Once we were out in the open it was quite pleasant, we were soaked to the skin so the elements didn't bother us, and we played around in the water for about an hour. As we headed back I knew the process going in through the gap was going to be the reverse of when we came out. With big water coming up behind, the harder you paddle the more likely you are to broach to!

"Stop paddling, Joe", I shouted, "And lift the paddle above your head." We had been into all this sort of thing on dry land, so I was just reminding him

"Why?" he asked, keeping on paddling! 'Ours not to reason why, - -', the immortal words flashed through my mind. "Never mind why, STOP PADDLING." The paddle rose above his head. He had got the message! And we slid comfortably through the gap with the water talking to us as it went past.

There was no immediate comment from Joe. A couple of grunts indicating he was not displeased with the initiation and on the way back in the car, the ultimate accolade "When are we going to do it again?" Over the next few years we did it again many times, mostly in Georgian Bay and on some of the northern rivers, in fair weather and foul. I don't think I could ever have found a better paddling companion. Whatever happened, whatever the conditions Joe was a man who got on with the job in hand. A man to be relied upon, he was never tired, he would paddle all day and all night if necessary whatever the odds, and at the end of the day he would never shirk the camp duties. He had a great appetite and was the official garbage can on any trip and in the boat we never had any disagreements. Out of the boat our somewhat differing philosophies proved a bit abrasive and eventually to my sorrow, our ways parted. Thus Joe, a man of all seasons! But more of him later.

Another man I introduced to kayaking was Ralph Elsassar. He and I used to visit the Podborskis at Craighleith and for several years drove up to their chalet almost every weekend during the ski season. Joe too was a regular visitor there. Yes, I talked him into that activity against his strenuous objections and he took to it as a duck takes to kayaking! Ralph was a Swiss and no stranger to downhill skiing. He and I shared a dislike for lineups and particularly enjoyed skiing down through the woods - provided the trees were not too close together. We would come up to the hills early and climb up to the top before the lifts started, our ambition being to put a set of tracks down each run before the ski patrols got there. Also we would

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

put on our sealskins and climb the hill when the tows broke down, causing much confusion among the people waiting on the hill who, seeing us skiing down, assumed that everything was back to normal again!

Ralph was an accomplished concert pianist and in 1959 my daughter Jane, then aged nine, was a pupil of his. One day after the ski season had come to a halt he and his mother were visiting with my family and the subject of kayaking came up. Ralph was quite interested in trying his hand and without further ado we planned a week's trip to the Bustard Islands at the north end of Georgian Bay. Hans Martinsen, who got me started in that activity was at the time planning a trip to the same islands and we arranged to meet them out there the following weekend

After a four hours drive we got to Key River late in the evening and slept in the car. From the highway Key River flows through a narrow canyon into the waters of Georgian Bay, eight miles away and as we set off the following morning I wondered how Ralph was going to enjoy his initiation. There was a strong wind funnelling up the river and nowhere to escape until we got to Key Harbour where we hoped to have a good breakfast before tackling another eight miles of open water. Funny how the wind always seems to be against you just when you need its help! Well, we earned our breakfast and as for Ralph, no complaints, and considering that this was the first time he had ever paddled a kayak he wasn't doing too badly. We stopped off at Mrs Trott's kitchen before tackling the 'Bay', which was looking quite lively, and had a hearty breakfast of Red River cereal, bacon and eggs with all the trimmings and coffee and toast. "And keep the coffee coming!" says Ralph.

There was an old fisherman standing on the dock when we came out. He looked at us with interest. "There was a young couple in a boat just like yours came through on the way to the Bustards, must a' been a couppla days back. We didn't give them much hope of getting across, not in this water. Where are you heading?" Ralph and I exchanged glances, not wanted to be labelled greenhorns. "Oh, just getting our feet wet," I said, pointing ambiguously to the West. He laughed, "Watch out for the shoals fellas, we don't want you damaging any of our rocks, with that pretty boat o' yours."

I had it in mind, once we were on our way, to wave nonchalantly to him, but Georgian Bay was claiming all my attention. Fortunately after half a mile of roller coasting we were able to get behind some cover and assess the situation. The wind was on our port beam, and we decided to hoist the sail, if only to keep the boat steady. For the first mile Sir Malcolm Campbell would have had difficulty in keeping up with us, and we both leaned back comfortably, thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

"At this rate", I said confidently, "We'll be there within the hour." But I had forgotten my reservations about being too presumptive. God, however, had not

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

forgotten! The wind shifted a point and our forward motion dropped while the huge bank of shoals on our starboard beam were beginning to be a consideration. We tacked to port and that resolved the problem of the shoals, but we didn't seem to be getting any closer to our destination and after wasting time tacking back and forth with the islands still not getting any closer, we dropped the sail, and prepared to work for our living. It took us the better part of three hours before we came into the shelter of the island.

"I hope Hans has got the coffee on," says Ralph, "I could do with just about four mugs right now." These islands, mostly red gneiss, all dipped down steeply into the water and it was always an effort to pull the boats up out of reach of the Mammagavessy.³ But we had ready help as Hans and Berit got us onto dry land. And not only had they got the coffee ready, they had seats of granite blocks, tables of more blocks and lee boards, and plenty of coffee with which to wash the other goodies down. It was quite a welcome and we languished in it!

"We watched you coming across," Berit leaned over with a handful of biscuits, "From our experience the other day, we knew the sail wasn't going to be of much help, in fact we almost got blown onto the shoals." I intercepted a warning look from Hans. A first class outdoorsman, but never known to make a wrong step! I smiled to myself, "We weren't too far off them ourselves."

A thirty knot breeze from the Northwest was blowing serried ranks of high cumulus across the sky, the water brilliant, sparkling white and blue. The sign of perfect weather for a few days at least. Ralph was leaning back with a bemused expression on his face, soaking up the sun. I knew in that moment that I had another convert to this way of life and in fact we had several years of it including some mountain climbing and hiking before he went and got married. However I found other companions and his wife, also a Swiss, turned out to be an enthusiast in the same philosophy

It is worthy of mention that of the three men, Hans, Joe and Ralph, that I spent a lot of time with in the outdoors, all married women with the same outdoor interests and as far as I know are still as much involved in that life after twenty years or more. Often, more often than not, in such cases, domesticity wins the day

I keep on talking about back country skiing and the country around Gibson River which occupied most of my activities during the seventies and eighties, but like people who talk much about the weather, I seem to be taking my time doing, or writing I should say, anything about it.

I would be considered unduly modest if I did not say that I was the moving force behind the design and development of the most extensive non-power trail system

³ A group of little people who would steal your canoe overnight and take it to the opposite side of the lake. Much respected by the Cree Indians

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

in Canada that is not built or supported in any way by the government or funded from the public purse. In total length it is close to one hundred and fifty miles, built within an area of two hundred square miles around the Gibson River in Ontario and bounded by Twelve Mile Bay, Honey Harbour and Gravenhurst. It is known as Gibson Trails and was constructed and funded by the members of the Five Winds Ski Club of Toronto

It would not be fair to say very much about the trails without a great deal of mention of those people who, by their work and their funding, made the design and construction and maintenance of this system possible.

The concept and basic design was my own, though I have to admit that the original initiative came from Chief Jackrabbit Johansson who built the Maple Leaf Trail in Quebec and died at the age of one hundred and two, still skiing every day. When I first met him in 1967 we discussed the impact of powered machines on Canada's lonely places, the technology of automobiles being duplicated in the bush together with their stink and pollution and the trail of garbage they leave behind. "You can't get rid of the devil," he said, "You have to replace him with something that will fire the imagination of people who are being inculcated by the motor manufacturers. If you can get them to use their legs instead of their backsides, the devil will go away. Great accomplishments have small beginnings, so give them a place where they can walk and ski and learn about nature instead of destroying it and maybe, sometime, they will find something of value in their lives."

I'll always remember Jackrabbit Johanssen and the values he had found in his life. So I remembered his advice and went away and spent twenty years of my life building trails. A small beginning.

I have spoken of Joe Herwig, who, though in at the beginning, soon found his allegiance with downhill more compelling, and Ralph Elsassaer and Virgil Curri all of whom played their part in this small beginning, but I have not yet mentioned another person who did as much as anybody in furthering the interests of back country skiing through the activities of Five Winds. Unfortunately and most unexpectedly she died in her sixties late in 1997 and her Epitaph is written in the Club Annals. Elisabeth Jaarsma joined Five Winds in 1972 and was to be seen working on the trails Summer and Winter. She also skied and hiked those same trails, and among the first to ski many of them and was a familiar figure on many of the club trips to the mountains of New Hampshire, and the waters of Georgian Bay. Well known and liked in the club, her death was a sad loss to the many who had shared her enthusiasms.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO CANOEING.

A while back I spoke of the time when Hans Martinsen introduced me to kayaking in Georgian Bay. Hans at the time was working for me in the drafting office at Dunlop Canada. A most ingenious and capable man and very much of an artist both in engineering and in its application in his private and recreational life. Of Norwegian extraction he experienced the impact of the German occupation of his country during the Second World War and like the rest of his countrymen, had no love for them or their works.

He joined Dunlop at about the same time as I did in 1953 and it was not long before he invited me to join him for a few days' canoeing in Algonquin Park. It was my first experience of Canada's backcountry and to say that I was enthralled would be a gross understatement. We came up from Toronto late on a Friday evening and slept in the open under a clear moonlit sky. On the first glimmerings of dawn we were out of our sacks and slid the canoe quietly into a three foot high blanket of mist lying on the surface of Canoe Lake. Sitting on the thwarts of the canoe we could see nothing of our surroundings, everything being lost in the mist. Every now and again we would stand up and poke our heads above the blanket. It was an eerie feeling like looking over of the top of clouds with one's feet on the ground somehow disembodied. The surroundings were unbelievably beautiful, white pines, cedar and tamarack floating in a sea of cotton wool with the faint glimmer of the rising sun lighting the mist and occasionally striking through, painting a Turner-esque effect of light and colour on the water.

It was a moment of sheer wonderment, and as we sat down, the mist enveloping us once more, a loon called out from nearby, the clear warbling notes echoing from across the lake. I said to Hans, "If you could sell this moment with all that could be seen and heard and felt there's not a man who would not give all he possessed for it."

That day, the first of many in Algonquin, was one of impossible dreams. I think we went through Joe and Little Joe and Black Bear up to Otterslides. Maybe we detoured back and camped on Sunbeam ghosting our way past little islands and hidden lakes all of which would have qualified for Elysium. And what completed the perfection was the fact that all day we didn't see a single soul.

Tucked up in our sacks the Northern Lights put on a colorful display of celestial fireworks for us, and Bless my Heart, if our old friend the Whipporwill didn't turn up to entertain us. Before dropping off I asked myself if there could be anything

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

more wonderful in the world than what I had experienced that day. Then I thought, on the basis that dancing is great fun but the piper always has his price, what torments will I have to endure in order to pay for all these delights? But who counts the cost when Heaven is the reward?

If that was Algonquin I had developed a mighty taste for it and each time I came back for more, the trough was same and the menu, delicious as always but varied so to bewilder the senses. The call of a Wolf or a Loon crying in the distance. Portaging along a fallen tree trunk, running into, literally, a moose cow in the rutting season, beavers repairing their dams. Each trip with its indefinable redolence of White Pine and sombre Hemlocks with the occasional sturdy Oak or ubiquitous Tamaracks touching the mind with their wispy fingers. A redolence that brings tears to your eyes.

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CHAPTER III

POST WAR ADVENTURES IN ITALY.

I have mentioned the circumstances surrounding my initiation into the mysteries of downhill skiing, and although they were not the occasion of very much advance planning on my part, I don't suppose they so were much out of the ordinary that they merit any more comment than appeared in previous pages. The same might be said of my subsequent experiences in this field of endeavour, though I may, I hope, be forgiven some reminiscence of events that highlight my years of sliding down hills, that otherwise could be described as hum drum.

Nella Giannesini, who was the girl who hustled me into the downhill, business, had family connections with a bus and trucking company and consequently there was never any shortage of transportation to the Dolomites, or of events and people to share them. Admittedly I was at the time still in the army, the main war having come to an end in 1945, but the work I was involved in allowed considerable laxity in the use of military vehicles. However, that being as it may, it was a real luxury being driven to the hills and back, particularly back, when wine, women and song were the pleasant alternative to spending my time behind the steering wheel. Some of my friends expressed curiosity as to what kind of army I was in, particularly as my winter activities extrapolated to stumbling around on some of the dolomitic crags in the same area.

In these days the term 'downhill' is clearly understood, but fifty years ago skiing was skiing, be it up, down or cross. Downhill you slipped the cables of the beartrap - there was no other - binding under hooks on each side of the skis to hold your boots down firmly. For uphill you put on sealskins and released the cables and for cross you took off the sealskins. And that was it! Some of the bindings had devices that were laughingly referred to as 'safety releases' which meant that if you had a bad fall you stood a good chance of coming out of it with only one leg broken. The fact that after two seasons of tackling the steep *piste* of the Dolomites with series of connected egg beaters I had got away with nothing worse than a slightly broken leg and a bent ankle, was due entirely to beginners luck which in no way affected the statistic.

If I thought my introduction to skiing was on the baby slopes at Tarvisio, I decided that I had better find another word for what I found at, and above another place called Sella Nevea. Heaven indeed! You drove up the military road, so called because it was fit only for tracked vehicles, for about five miles of twists and turns and potholes and U turns and broken bridges, until you reached what could only have been Paradise itself! A horseshoe shaped cirque half a mile across at it's widest point, set in the middle of a group of mountains creating a sun trap that might well have been the original Shangri La. Situated in the middle of this

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

veritable fairy land was a picturesque multi story lodge built from local timber with a huge room, in the middle of which was a vast elevated fireplace surmounted by an inverted funnel under which at least twenty people could stand warming the cockles and swilling down a never ending succession of gluewein. All of this was, of course, *apres ski*. During the day it was 'on sealskins' and up through the woods and above the tree line where the scene of endless snow covered peaks, deep powder snow and blue sky above had to be endured with fortitude!

In those early days I never asked where we were going, I just got on the bus or the truck, whichever turned up. The driver, being a considerate fellow, would normally run his vehicle around the little town about three thirty in the morning blowing his horn to wake up any late risers. Not only did it wake up the skiers, it also woke up everybody else in the town, which incidentally accounts for the significant rise in birth rate at that time, among the non skiing fraternity.

A week after the Tarvisio trip - the second in my life - we went to the Heaven of Sella Nevea and found out what skiing was all about. It was after eight in the morning when we arrived - a little late because our driver stopped off at a cafe in Udine owned by his brother who, he explained provided the best coffee and grappa in the whole of Italy. I had practised all week attaching the various pieces of equipment to my person, so was not too far behind the pack when they headed for the hill, and was very pleasantly surprised to find that, with the sealskins, I could climb up the steepest of hills without sliding back at all. All the go-go chaps took the hill at a dead gallop and quickly disappeared from sight, while I, though not totally unfit, plodded along at the sort of rate I felt I could keep up all day. Imagine my surprise half an hour later to find the advance group catching their breath on the horizon, but the moment they spotted me they were off. This sequence turned into a sort of tortoise and hare operation until about two hours later when not only did they wait for me to catch up, but offered me some grappa and friendly conversation, to slow me down no doubt! I explained *en passant* that if I stopped I would have difficulty in getting started again.

Soon we were all out of the woods and in a long snow valley with a heavily corniced crest up ahead about a mile distant. On either side the snow clad mountains towered over us and shook their skirts at us as we toiled up to the crest and lunch. It was about this time when I looked up at that crest and took notice of the steepening slopes, down which I feared that I was going to be shown up, as indeed I was! The way up to the crest was a nifty bit of side stepping for some thirty feet at an angle of what looked not much less than vertical. Watching the experts, it appeared quite easy, but everybody was half through their lunch by the time I got there. Rest and be thankful, I thought! But not for long - the resting part I mean.

Lunch, looking over the Passo di Predil to a panorama of peaks, Canin, Jof di

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

Dogna, Montasio and the massive bulk of Mangart to the East, dominating the scene of such beauty that I almost forgot what was facing me imminently - the descent to Sella Nevea! The valley, though 'cwm' would be a better description, that we ascended in the morning looked unmanageably steep when viewed from above and to get back off the cornice over which my companions were now dropping one by one onto the slope below, was nothing short of suicide. I heard Nell's voice behind me, " Just push yourself off the edge and lean well forward," she informed me, "The snow's quite soft, and if you fall you cant hurt yourself". Never mind the soft snow, I thought to myself, a parachute would do the trick nicely!

I peered over the cornice to the chasm in front of me and was just thinking about looking for an easy solution to my dilemma when my skis relieved me of responsibility by quietly sliding over the lip and taking me with them. I picked myself up unhurt about a hundred yards, I beg your pardon, meters - that's frog for yards - down the valley and took stock of the situation. A huge bank of dark clouds gloomed over the western horizon and seemed to be heading directly for me. It had suddenly got quite warm and when I reached the forest below, the rain was just starting. It was four in the pm when I reached Sella Nevea, soaked to the skin, hungry, thirsty and dead beat. Inside the lodge and under the big inverted funnel I talked about earlier was a crackling big fire, its flames illuminating about ten pairs of shapely bare legs belonging to the female contingent. I ducked my head under the rim of the funnel to see if anybody needed any help and was rewarded with a view of feminine pulchritude draped by not much more than panties and brassieres while other wet female attire was being dried over the fire. Nobody seemed to be in need of help, in fact I got some wet garment across my face to emphasise the premise. However I was in good company for most of the other helpful and considerate male members of the group were being similarly treated in this cavalierly fashion

The following year I got myself into a downhill race at Sappada which is a bit more to the West and not very far from Cortina d'Ampezzo. I was the last to climb the hill, and took a short cut which crossed the *pista* at a place where everybody was falling and losing a lot of time. The only two who did not fall at that spot were the man who came first who literally flew over the hazard, and the writer who cravenly sidestepped it and thereby got in second.. At the bottom of the hill there was a large mound of steaming cow manure against which I bounced before steaming my way, high as a polecat to the finishing line where I was awarded a bronze medal - not the Olympic kind! After the ceremony I noticed that people seemed to be avoiding me, and it wasn't until Nella handed me a glass of Gluewein and suggested that there was an excellent view of something in the mid distance - downwind I noticed - that I twigged the source of my unpopularity.

On the return journey nobody sat next to me, but a fellow officer, of whom there were several on this trip, kept looking at me in a rather disdainful manner. After a

while, though still keeping his distance, he leaned towards me," I say Old Chap, did you shit your pants today?" Generally it is about a week before I figure out a good response to this sort of question but this time I was on my toes. I looked my FO in the face, "Not today!". I said.

*

Eventually my peace time war came to an end and I found myself, an untrained, unwanted ex soldier whose past exploits such as shooting people or blowing up bridges or jumping out of aeroplanes were of little interest to those who had to stay at home, if it was still there, and get bombed out of existence without even the chance to shoot back at the buggers.

But before having to face this metamorphosis of form and spirit, I managed in 1947 to bend the one and fortify the other on skis with a long week in Cortina d'Ampezzo, and a long weekend on the backside of Marmolada. Cortina to Italy and the Dolomites is what St Moritz is to Switzerland, and Marmolada, a giant in its own right with a glacier on its north side and steep wide open slopes dropping two and a half thousand vertical feet from the summit hut, is sheer heaven for the telemarker.

I wont say much about Cortina. If you have been there you dont need me to tell you about it. If you haven't, no words of mine could create an adequate picture of surroundings that beggar description. In those days there were three main runs each with a number of subsidiary trails. The Pocol chair lift served the easy hills, Faloria which was a double gondola with the sledge to get you to the top of everything, everything being great length, barricades which hair pinned their way down an all but vertical cliff, and minefields galore. If you were looking for a challenge you had come to the right place. *Col dru Sce* was something else. A sledge lift seating about twelve skiers pulled one up the steepest hill I have ever seen and when you looked back all you could see was a lot of space! Not a high hill but contoured and banked like The *Cresta* run⁴ and when taken on skis you had be very careful not to shoot over the top and land among the cedars which would just about take the clothes and the skin off a man in a suit of armour.

The north side of Marmolada is an immense open slope. Its south face is a Mecca for alpinists and I once had the very great pleasure of meeting Giusto Gervasutti, a famed Italian climber, who ascended it with ski equipment on his back and then skied down the north side, all in one day. And he was an old man of forty in those days. My long weekend late in the Winter season on the North side of that mountain was another ski trip to remember. My old friend, the Giannesini truck, took about a dozen of us from Gorizia, winding up along a sinuous road, actually not much more than a track with a few laybys in case another vehicle came in the opposite direction, to the cabin at the foot of the mountain.

⁴ A bobsleigh or luge run.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

I was the only Brit on that trip, not quite the youngest at twenty nine but surely the most inexperienced. The others were a mixture of Italians, Slovenians, one Croat who was eventually to be my brother in law, and a couple of Austrians. Everybody got out of the truck stretching their limbs after the long drive from Gorizia, drinking in the huge snowfield that stretched a mile or so, unbroken to the summit.

"What happened to the chair lift?" somebody asked. Apparently it had been taken out by an avalanche the previous season, and for us it was Shank's Mare. But that was tomorrow for the day was well advanced and there was to be much eating and drinking and Gemutlichkeit before we could get our heads down. Which we did, and not a few were any better off for it the next morning! However, sore heads or no, everybody ate a hearty breakfast ready for the climb. Half way up one of our number could be seen in the distance squatting down and attending to his needs. Unfortunately there was nowhere to hide on those wide open slopes.

One of his friends spotted him; "Ehi, Piero!" he shouted, "Resting already? We're only half way there."

Marmolada has two summits not more than a hundred yards apart, the main one a steepish knob at 3,342 meters and, at the time well concealed beneath a heavy blanket of snow. From that point the panorama of mountain scenery was something for the eye to behold. To the East, some twelve miles distant the vast northwest face of Civetta rising to the crest with its highest point hardly more than one hundred meters lower than Marmolada, dominated the imagination of the beholder. To the North I thought I could identify Tofana and Monte Cristallo above Cortina d'Ampezzo but with the hundreds of beautiful snow covered mountains dominating my range of vision I could be sure of very little. About thirty feet below the east summit of Marmolada which is separated from the main by a knife edge col, is a small cabin run by the Italian Alpine Club - CAI. At the time it was totally buried under several feet of snow but provided a well protected sanctuary in case of need. However the weather at the time was pleasantly warm so and we all propped up our skis and stretched out on them in the sunshine enjoying a well earned lunch.

Afterwards most of the party climbed up to the crest of the col hoping to see something of the fearsome South Face, but the snow had not yet retreated from the edge, and nobody was foolhardy enough to get very near for fear of falling through a cornice like the famous Austrian solo climber, Hermann Buhl who fell to his death through a cornice high in the Karakorams. At least we could see and identify some of the better known peaks, Monte Cristallo, Tre Tofane, etc.,etc. Some even claimed to be able to see Mangart and Montasio to the East and Matterhorn, Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa. But when people began to pick out Everest, K2, and Kangchengunga I thought it was time to go before somebody

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

found the Antarctic and got frostbitten.

The ski down to the cabin was one I shall never forget. A mixture of sheer rhapsody and craven fear as I varied from what I thought were controlled telemarks and probably were not much more than connected stem turns, to complete loss of control and tumbling head over ski tips to an ignominious heap in the snow. One of my Italian friends, I think it was Piero of the pants down, said that I was going down so fast on my backside that nobody could keep up with me! The two Austrians showed off their impeccable style with their usual panache while I concentrated on my panache without impressing anybody while developing my connected egg beaters, and was pleasantly surprised to see at least one other attempting to imitate my technique, though with not so much success as I.

At this juncture my readers might reasonably wonder why, with the better part of two seasons behind me, I had not made better progress on the hill. One who gives the impression of being an absolute dummy in that field of endeavour and then, almost in the same breath, gives a vivid description of his death defying experiences, invites accusations of false modesty, with all that that entails. Well, as to that, I know that my level of technique must have improved significantly or my friends would have never invited me to join them in these relatively high mountain jaunts on skis. However, watching how some of those fellows skied, one legged Stein Eriksen⁵ style, did very little for my ego, so I hope I may be allowed a little modesty!

March of 1947 in company with three Italian friends I paid my last respects to Cortina. I had just bought myself a fine pair of hickory skis with steel edges - yet! - and the latest type of Everest bindings, all provided by my friend Primas - the one who got out of bed to equip me in the middle of the night - who advised me that with my new purchases I would be able to ski like Stein Eriksen! I wasn't too sure about that, but I have to admit that on that ski trip I had only one fall. It was on the first run of the first day half way down Falloria and I broke some bone in my ankle and spent the rest of the week in hospital. However I didn't miss anything for my kind friends visited me each evening, regaling me with, no doubt, greatly exaggerated stories of the super conditions, the abundance of *neve farinosa*⁶ and their own incredible accomplishments. And we thought of you all the time! Yes, I thought to myself, I'll bet you rotten buggers didn't even give me a single thought, and me lying there in hospital crying my eyes out all day long!

The next time I put my new skis on was six years later in Canada on a hill barely a hundred meters high at Hockley Valley! But I didn't give a damn how high it was,

⁵ Stein Eriksen, a very stylish skier who was noted for keeping his legs together when skiing that the current joke was that his ski pants had only one leg in them.

⁶ Powder snow.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

it was so good to get the planks on again.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHONEY WAR

In these days few have any notion of what war is really like. The media have dramatised it to the point where a single hand grenade produces an explosion comparable with that of a small nuclear bomb. And yet, while being totally out all proportion to actuality, it fails to create any sensation of the reality. In a sense it would seem to do precisely that, but unlike the soldier, the watcher has no emotional involvement whatever. In fact he can switch off the TV and return to the serenity of his sitting room with the conviction that war must be really exciting and a lot of fun. A bit like a fast run down the ski hill. For those people there is nothing that I could say about war that he would be able to relate to. On the other side of the coin there are many, not so many now, contemporaries who do know what war is like and not all of them are much interested in hearing stories of death and destruction

My own war experiences covered a period of over seven years which includes two post war years up in the area around the, then, Yugoslav border with Italy. I won't say that I had an easy war but I know that all in all, no matter where in the world I was serving, I had little to complain about in comparison with some of the really frightful conditions of bloodshed and hardship faced by so many of my contemporaries. For that reason, though I cannot and will not ignore that period of my life I will try to illustrate the lighter side of it and show that behind the suffering and death there is always the spark of humour to make it easier, if not bearable

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You might say that my war started in early in 1938 when I was barely twenty, though the shooting didn't start until much later. The RAF was advertising for pilots to fly Hurricanes and it sounded like an awful lot of fun, zooming around in the air and drinking a lot of beer with my daredevil friends. I could hardly wait to join up, and presented myself at a recruiting office in North London. After filling in the usual forms, and submitting to a very cursory medical and optical examination I found myself standing in front of somebody who looked as if he had been flying Sopwith Camels in the Great War. A nice old gentleman, and he asked me a lot of penetrating questions to which I must have given the wrong answers for I was turned down, because of poor eyesight they said, but privately I thought the interviewer didn't like my wispy moustache. So much for the Air Force, though I have to admit that probably they did me a good service since the average life expectancy for Pilot Officers once the war got going, was not very much to shout about.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

A few days later I happened to walking down Buckingham Gate when I heard the sound of bagpipes coming out of the London Scottish drill hall. Addressing myself to a huge individual in full highland regalia I asked about 'joining up' and was subjected to a spate of words, of which I understood only two. "Next doorr." So next door I went and found myself within the portals of the 2nd. Battalion, Queens Westminsters of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. An officer producing unit yet! I dont think I expected to be handed a Commission on a plate, tomorrow would have been fine, but the Recruiting Officer gave me the once over, a medical officer said "Cough" and I was IN! Rifleman Naughton, Report for drill Thursday 1800 hours. About turn! Dismiss!" And that was how I joined the Territorial Army.

We had drill and other instructions twice a week. Mostly "Left turn," "Right turn", "Quick march," and "We'll make a soldier out of you yet!" In the Summer we all went to training camp down in Birley, Hampshire where I learnt how to route march, wash dishes and drink large quantities of beer and on one occasion after a sustained bout of the latter I put the Orderly Officer in a huge sawyer of cold soup for which I fully expected some extreme punishment, but nothing was ever said about it, by my superiors that is, of whom there seemed to be an overabundance. Of course I didn't get away with it completely, but it took a war for me to find out that the official mind sometimes has a long memory..

I enjoyed my part time soldiering which really was a long way from the real thing A life of Reilly about which I had no complaints. My proudest moment was in 1939 when they gave me a Lee Enfield rifle to take home, and I stood with it in the underground, the cynosure of all eyes, trying to look like a Field Marshal!

Two days before Chamberlain's feeble declaration of war we were all called up, me with my rifle and not much more than a tooth brush and the only thing we did all that day was fill sandbags. I suppose I knew most of the fellows in my platoon but the only names that I can remember now were those who eventually comprised the group that later on went to the Commandos. Jimmy Hanley the film actor, Bill Cody who came to OCTU with me, Harry Needleman a real old crook, Jack Frost whose name I could never forget, Freddy Gardiner who could never pass a bit of rock without trying to climb it, and LenCohen who lost his tin hat in the middle of a blizzard on the Isle of Arran.

Jack and I spent the whole day long on sandbag fatigue and when we were stood down for the evening, just about dead beat we decided to head for the nearest pub. Jack was out on his feet, or so he claimed. "God!," he groaned, "If Mae West asked me to 'Come up and see me som'time ', I'd have to turn her down in favour of half a dozen pints." At that moment we were just stepping out onto the street and facing us on the other side was a picture to melt the hardest heart. A gorgeous looking girl in a skimpy dress, and not much else from the look of it, was holding

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

a sandbag in one hand and trying to fill it with an oversized shovel with the other. A sight guaranteed to appeal to the chivalrous instincts of any red blooded male. Somehow all thoughts of fatigue and beer vanished like the morning mists under the rising sun, and we both homed in upon this maiden in distress.

"Oh, thank you sooo much, I thought I would never even get one bag filled", she murmured wearily, "I can hold the bag if one of you could shovel the sand in." We both grabbed for the shovel. "No, no, old chap. It's quite alright. You go ahead and have your beer. Not at all. You worked harder all day. I'll stay and help this lady. " Meanwhile, we were wrestling for possession of the shovel, and getting less polite in the process, though I dont think we would actually have come to blows. The maiden in distress resolved the problem competently and with dispatch.

"Why don't you take it in turns to shovel." she suggested, and then, observing that neither of us was relinquishing his hold upon the implement - Solomon would have been proud of her - "Eenie, meenie, miney, mo - - " she said and handed me the bone of contention and picked up the sandbag, holding it out to be filled! Well, as I said, she had on a very skimpy dress which, in the process of shovelling sand turned out to be delightfully revealing. Naturally I turned my eyes away, not wanting to embarrass the poor girl. When the first bag was filled, Jack practically snatched the shovel out of my hands which I thought was rather unsporting of him, and, I am ashamed to say, did not avert his eyes from what was inside the dress!

We finally settled down to a certain rhytm and got about fifty bags filled. She looked at us with a grateful smile. "That was a great help. Would you like to come in for a drink, both of you?" And without waiting for an answer she stepped inside the entrance to a flat just behind her, and then turned around to us as we followed her through. "Oh, I would like you to meet my husband. What did you say your names were?"

Jack and I grinned at each other ruefully. We'd been well and truly had. It was 'fair do's, but we did punish his bottle of whisky, in fact we killed it stone dead and as we drained it to the last drop I saw from the expression on his face that he was torn between opening a new bottle or devising some way of getting rid of us without offending the mores of hospitality. I caught Jack's eye and we rose to our feet. No sense in outstaying our welcome, the scenery had disappeared and anyway we had some serious beer processing to do.

Our host thanked us cordially for our help, and we for the excellent Scotch, though I couldn't resist the rejoinder. "And such a pleasant evening," says I with what I hoped was a whimsical smile, "We both found it most enjoyable. Too bad you were unable to join us!"

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

The sequel, if one could so call it, to that little story came about some six months later. I had developed a condition, familiarly known as 'little pattering feet around the private parts' and was sent to see a specialist. As I stood there in front of the doctor with my pants around my ankles, he looked up with a grin, "Been filling any more sandbags lately?" It was my erstwhile host whose whisky and other *familiari* we had so enjoyed. "Unfortunately no, Sir," says I, "But having seen Naples, what else has life to offer?" Or words to that effect!

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It is a matter of record that the first nine months of the war were fairly quiet at home though our chaps in France were getting a bloody nose For my part it was more like a holiday than anything else. After a short tour of guard duty at Northolt airfield, I was ordered to present my miserable - not my adjective - self at the company office, where I found the Company Commander, a Major Wybird, waiting to see me.

"Ah, Naughton, yes, yes." He shuffled some papers on his desk.. "You are being transferred to Brigade Headquarters." A vision of an early Commission passed through my mind. Staff officer? Brigade Major? Ultimately Brigadier? Hmmm ? I gave myself a mental pat on the back. Obviously someone had appreciated my true worth! ". "- - - - - going to cook for the Brigadier." Suddenly I was back on *terra firma* again and realised that my mentor was barking at me. "Are you listening to what I am saying or are you deaf?" It was time I used my wits, what few there were. "Yessir, I heard quite clearly. You said I am going to work for the Brigadier." The voice of the Sergeant Major boomed behind me, "Not *work* you half wit, you dont have the brains for that. You are to *cook* for the Brigadier. Begging your pardon Sir." This last remark being addressed in rather more conciliatory tones to the Major.

I permitted my self to a relieved smile. "I'm sorry Sir, but I dont know anything about cooking." Major Wybird looked up with a bland smile, shuffling some more papers. "Ah, here we are, Naughton, Rifleman, # 68697604, trade - cook! Company clerk will furnish you with a rail pass for tomorrow morning. And report to BHQ at 1100 sharp." There was a pregnant pause and then he added, "And try to remember you are not a bloody missionary. If anybody gets put in the soup, this time it will be you." As I said before, some people have long memories!

The following morning I duly reported myself to BHQ and was marched in to the Brigadier who was probably expecting some gourmet dishes. When he heard the horrible truth about my cooking experience, or rather lack of it, I was unceremoniously ejected from the office but was able to overhear a spirited one way telephone conversation on the other side of the door, in which my name seemed to be coming in for a lot of uncomplimentary remarks.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

I should mention at this point, that the Brigade HQ was situated on the second floor of a golf club which was part and parcel of the Bushey Hall Hotel where most of the Brigade officers were messing and this was where I ended up, fighting for my King and Country, in the hotel kitchen learning how to cook! Mornings and evenings were taken up working with various chefs, while in the afternoon I played golf with the professional who had nothing very much to do with himself, and was glad of a bit of company. In the meantime I did learn how to make suet pudding and scrambled eggs, and one time I was allowed to cook breakfast for the Brigade staff, including the Brigadier. Probably the chief chef who was French and whose only ambition was to get rid of me by fair means or foul, thought that I would poison all the officers and then get conveniently shot at dawn, or worse!

It was not until March of 1940 that the French chef finally managed to get rid of me. One night the pastry chef and I crept up into the bell tower and rang two of the bells making a Hell of a racket and probably waking up half of southern England into the bargain. Needless to say we got caught and the following day the pastrychef got called up and went into the Royal Engineers, I was RTU'd - returned to my battalion - and Hitler marched into the Low Countries. The Phoney War was over!

When I returned to my Unit I was marched into Major Wybird's office expecting the guillotine to fall, but everything seemed to be forgiven. "I see they couldn't make a cook out of you," says he, "So now we will see if we can make a soldier out of you". And that was the last I heard about cooking - thank God!

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Well, Dunkirk came and went, we took a beating in Norway though not without leaving our visiting card, the war in the air took a turn for the worse and Leo Amerys stood up in parliament and berated Chamberlain for his masterly inaction with that famous utterance "You have sat here for too long for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let's have done with it. In the name of God, GO!" Which he did, but not until he was voted out by a large majority. So, as everybody knows, good old Winnie came back and we began to give Jerry a bit of what he was giving us.

In the Queen's Westminsters, barring route marches and the occasional tactical exercises, nothing very much was happening, and eventually a bunch of us got fed up with sitting on our backsides and volunteered for the Paratroopers. However still nothing happened for a couple more months and we all thought our applications had been filed and forgotten. But the great day did come and we were shipped off to the Isle of Arran off the west coast of Scotland. It was on the ferry out of Ardrossen that we began to find out just what we had volunteered for.

CHAPTER V

LIFE WITH THE COMMANDOS.

I think we had all been looking forward to jumping out of aeroplanes, but it was a big Glaswegian fellow we met on the boat who wised us up as to our fortunes. We were going to join the Commandos not the Parachutists. There were big gray rollers coming in from the West into which the boat was burying her bows and showering us all with freezing spray. In the distance through the driving rain we could see the bleak outlines of Arran which was barely discernable from the black clouds which obscured most of the western horizon. Somewhere on the middle of them lightening was playing some Hellish sonata composed by the Devil himself. I could almost see the words written up there, 'Abandon Hope all ye who enter.' Next to me Freddie Gardiner was also enjoying the scenery and sucking his ubiquitous pipe. I dug my elbow in his ribs, "Did you bring your swimsuit Freddie!" Always a bit monosyllabic was our Freddie, and I wasn't all that surprised by his eloquent comment, "Christ!" he muttered out of the corner of his mouth. I knew what he meant.

We were able to joke about the weather. After all, no matter how bad it may look in real time, there's always the next morning when it's being nice to everybody. Trouble was, that friendly Glaswegian wanted to make sure that we were well informed about the delights of Commando training that awaited us. Nice little walks in the country for twenty five miles non stop, with bricks in the pack. A refreshing swim off the one hundred yard jetty in Whiting Bay, coming up on New Year's Eve - but not to worry, you'll be so drunk that you won't feel the cold at all. And then there's the sixty five mile march round the island which is an easy day for the ladies. You'll love it when you get used to it. And strangely enough, we did; it was getting through the first few days that was the hardest.

We listened to this guy for about half an hour non stop. Finally Freddie reaches out and gives him a friendly punch in the shoulder. "That's quite interesting," he says, "How long will it be before we get to some real training?" Later on Freddie says that he is going to apply for a transfer back to our battalion, first thing in the morning. And that made two of us! But next morning the sun was shining like it was mid Summer and we forgot all about going back. And then there was this very nice and friendly 2nd Lieutenant who, from the look of him, obviously was in no condition to walk more than the distance to the nearest pub. He lined us all up.

"I expect you have been told all kinds of horror stories about the training," he says, cheering us all up, "Don't believe any of it, it's much the same as you have been used to with your various units. Anyway, this morning we'll take it easy and by the time we come back you'll all be clamouring for something to get yourselves

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

warmed up a bit. So follow me, Fellows." And with that he starts off up the hill at a dead gallop. I should mention that in Arran there are only uphill and downhill, the wind is never at your back and most of the time it is raining buckets. We did this dead gallop thing for the better part of two hours when we arrived back at our starting point, somewhat fatigued. Some of us were still alive but not very many. The officer dismissed us and disappeared rapidly in the direction of the nearest pub - probably five miles away! "There you are," says Freddie, "I told you he was in good condition to walk to the nearest pub!" Some of us were sitting down wondering if we would be able to get up in time for lunch. The others were still standing up swaying slightly. They didn't have the energy to sit down!" .

This set the pattern for the next few weeks, eating, drinking, sleeping and trying to stay out of pointless fights with diminutive Glaswegian terriers, and for the rest of the available time chasing our tails all over Hell's Half Acre. And believe it or not after a couple of weeks of this torture we were actually beginning to enjoy it. Soon we were climbing the steepest hills and wading through icy torrents and sleeping out in the open in all kinds of weather. And yet I do not remember anybody ever reporting sick except with minor things like broken bones or concussion.

In November of 1941, after we'd been at it for a couple of months it was decided to form an I Section, I for Intelligence, and I was surprised to find myself, together with all my friends from the Queens Westminsters, comprising the total complement of the Section. Later I discovered that Harry Needleman, one of the Q.Ws, had been responsible for the arrangement. How he did it I'll never know, but there we all were, tucked in like a lot of dirty shirts. What was more we had our own billets, about three miles outside Whiting Bay where the HQ of our Commando, #9 Commando, was located. In those days, in fact at least until I left the Unit in September 1941, all the Commandos were billeted in private houses. We had hardly got settled in when our section officer, George Bissett, disappeared on some secret mission. Before leaving he told us that we would have to organise our own training until the new man arrived! Well, it should come as no surprise that we weren't complaining about this arrangement, in fact, no sooner had George gone than we all headed back to our billets and got the cards out. All that day we played poker and refreshed ourselves with beer, of which we had a good stock.

The following morning, after a hearty breakfast we returned to the poker table and somebody dealt the cards. I remember looking at my hand but I don't think it registered. The others were all looking fit, and suddenly Freddie threw down his hand. "I can't stand this any more," he said, "Let's go out and do some training!" And that's what we did. There was no question in anybody's mind. We all needed some fresh air.

That was the one thing we got plenty of. Fresh air! Mixed freely with just about

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

everything the weather could throw at us and it didn't seem to make any difference whether the sky was blue or grey or even black. If the truth were known I would say that, on the whole it was preferable to be soaking wet for then nothing really mattered any more, Many times Freddie and I would head for the nearest water and roll in it. Once we climbed down a waterfall and got a bit damp in the process, and when we got to the bottom, Damned if Freddie didn't want to go up and do it again! Silly bugger! Still, it was all good clean fun, and do you know, in all the time I was with the commandos, I dont think I ever had a bath. My wife had a succinct comment on that, but I'd better not repeat it.

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I loved that island. You could walk its length and breadth for months on end and never see a soul. There is one road that defines its perimeter and another that joins the loop in the middle making a figure eight. You could see a bit of traffic on the southeast corner, sort of Brodick to Lagg Inn⁷. But I remember walking round that loop together with Henry Lucas, our Section officer, Freddie Gardiner, Len Cohen, Harry Needleman and all sixty five miles of it and didn't see a single body, let alone a vehicle. Mind you, I couldn't blame anybody for staying indoors. Who'd want to go out in a raging blizzard all bloody night night except a bunch of half witted Commandos? And of course we must have been out of our minds for, secretly though no one would have admitted it, we were all enjoying ourselves and wouldn't have missed it for anything. Maybe half the fun was being able to impress lesser mortals in the local pub with our tales of suffering and endurance! However I think that perhaps we didn't impress too many, if any, of our fellow Commandos. I remember one of our number, who shall be nameless, being called to boot after too many beers by someone who had heard it all. "Och, ye lieing Bastard, I ken well whaur ye were that night," he glared at him pugnatically, "Ye were abed with auld McGillicuddy's daughter, and if he kens what ye were up tae, ye'll be short some parts of your anatomy!" Nothing much more was said on the subject, but knowing McGillicuddy's daughter I suspect that our friend had had a no less active night than ours!

In the Intelligence Section we were supposed to be able to do anything, with the exception of overall strategic planning, that anybody else could do from the Colonel downwards. Explosives and demolitions, communications and codes, weaponry, map reading, construction of sand tables, to say nothing of climbing unclimable cliffs and were we to be faced with the Matterhorn we were expected to be first to the top! And therein lies a tale

Just before the war started in September 1939 I was in Scotland wandering around in the Grampian Mountains. Walking, not climbing. Getting lost without map or compass. Sleeping among the rocks and seeing the little people in the mist. And,

⁷ A hostelry about five miles to the West of Whiting Bay. Much favoured by the Commandos because of the comfortable atmosphere and a very sexy looking bar maid!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

of some significance though I know not what, crossing the river Spey near Boat 'o Garten and not even getting wet! It was in the middle of all these geographical convolutions and topographical incompetence that I came across a bit of rock, less than a hundred feet high, that couldn't be called more than a good scramble. Well, I scrambled up to the top and when I got there I couldn't have felt more pleased with myself than if I had done the Eiger Direct in one day! When I joined the Commandos I was asked if I had any climbing experience and I replied in an offhand way, not wanting to appear too modest, "Oh! Did a bit of scrambling around in the Grampians, you know."

Not far from where we were billeted on Arran there is a steep, near vertical, cliff called Dippin Head. Its about a hundred and fifty feet high, and one day Henry Lucas took us out there to see what we could do. It wasn't too difficult and somehow or other I managed to be first to the top. It wasn't that I was any better than the rest, it was just that they were all much worse than I was! Be that as it may, but the upshot of all this confusion was that I was put in charge of the climbing programme when we went to North Wales where there are a few quite big chunks of rock including one called Snowdon! It was the beginning of a totally undistinguished and fragmented but wholly enjoyable career in the art of scrambling up rock faces!

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Its funny how some things stick in one's mind to the exclusion of more portentous events. Earlier in this narrative I said that it is a lot of fun getting shot at, as long as one didn't get hit. That premise could be extended to many other chancy occasions, such as being in bed with a rattlesnake and not getting bitten or facing a grizzly bear and knowing that the absolutely last alternative open to you is to turn and run.. The first reaction on coming out unscathed from such situations is a strong sense of the comic and a tendency, born of relief at having survived with a whole skin, to treat it all as a big joke

One day, still on Aran, Freddy Gardiner and I were getting some first hand experience in the use of explosives and planned to remove a large hunk of rock which was partially blocking a section of somebody's driveway. In order to place the charge we were obliged to climb down about twelve feet of sheer basaltic rock without very much to hang on to. Going down was quite easy and we tamped in about half a pound of plastic high explosive and shoved in the detonator with a short length of safety fuse. I turned to Freddy who was examining the return route to safety with great interest.

"Get moving Freddy," I urged him, "I'm just going to light the fuse." Which I did immediately with my cigarette end. It fizzed away comfortably, but when I looked around, there was Freddy still examining the only way out. "You know," quoth he unhurriedly, "This would be perfect for some practice in mantelshelving." I was very conscious of the short length of fuse spluttering away two feet from my ear.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

“Bugger the mantelshelf,” I shouted, urging him upwards, “We’ve got ten seconds before this lot goes up.” It turned out that the handhold we dropped off coming down was out of reach. “Quick, give me a bunk up.” says Freddy, not seeming to worry overly about who was going to give me one. I saw his boots disappearing over the parapet and there was me with four seconds to go and feeling rather lonely when a length of rope snaked down which I grabbed, hoping like Hell that Freddy was on the other end, which he was. I wasn’t at all ashamed to use the rope and went up like an elevator. We lay there with our faces in the heather with pieces of rock and heather and black peat raining down on us, me wondering whether my feet were still attached to my legs.

Freddy looked at me with a big grin on his face, “You stupid bugger, you almost killed me.” “Sod you,” I responded, “Next time I’ll go first and you can get on with your bloody mantelshelving.” The only other thing I remembered about that episode was that we were cracking jokes about it all the way down the hill!

I said earlier on that getting shot at is quite pleasurable as long as one didn't get hit.. And the more deadly the intent, the greater the pleasure. I remember the story of the rather attractive Scottish lady in Arran who was peeling potatoes in front of her kitchen window when a spent bullet whistled its way through the open window. Apparently it hit the potato making rather a mess of it, but did no other damage. She stormed down to Whiting Bay and into Colonel Seagert's office throwing the remains of the potato onto his desk.

"Your fellows up there in the hills there are no goin' tae kill many Germans if they canne' shoot better than that!" she said indignantly, "And that was mair last potato too!" The colonel apologised profusely and explained that there was nothing personal about the incident, and offered most generously to replace the potato! More to the point he gallantly invited her to the officers mess where she turned up with, unfortunately, her man who turned out to have a prodigious thirst and almost ran the bar dry of whisky, repeating endlessly, "Aye, ye'll have tae dee better an' that next time!" Though to what 'next time' referred to we were never quite sure.

While on the subject of getting shot at I'll always remember a night exercise on the Isle of Arran shortly after I joined # 9 Commando. It was at the platoon level, and I dont think anybody had the faintest idea of what it was all about, only that the opposition was another Commando. We all lay out behind some bushes and were dutifully potting away into the dark with blanks - that is to say, no bullets coming out of the business end of our rifles.

We had been doing this for some minutes when we noticed that the 'enemy's' shots were ricocheting which meant that *they* were using live rounds! Somebody shouted out the interesting news, "Hey, Fellows, the buggers are using live

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

rounds!" There was no need for any instructions, and the sound of magazines being changed all down the line was the signal for everybody to wake up. Bang, bang, bang, and now *our* shots were ricocheting as well, and everybody was happy!

Another time at Inverary at the top of Loch Fyne, also in Scotland, Jimmy Hanly and I, being expendable since we both were slated for a Commission, were equipped with targets mounted on not too long a pole and sent out in the hills. The idea was that we should wave the targets in the air so that our dearest friends and buddies would have something to shoot at! Unfortunately no shots were fired at all, but neither of us was willing to stick his head up to see what was going on in case our comrades in arms mistook us for the real enemy. Finally Jimmy had a brainwave. "Hang your beret over the target, and then stick it up. We'll soon see what's happening."

"I dont see why I should have my beret shot to pieces, hang up your own!". But Jimmy maintained they were all such rotten shots that there was little danger of them doing any damage. So we both put our berets up. And were immediately rewarded with a veritable fusillage which resulted in three holes in my headgear, which I kept quiet about, and none in Jimmy's.

"There you are," he said, "I told you they were rotten shots." To which I responded "OK. Jimmy, put it on your head next time, and then we'll know for sure." I figured that they must have been pretty close by that time, and would be waiting to see the whites of our eyes. But he didn't seem to be too keen on that idea. Next thing we knew was three Commandos standing on top of the sangar we were hiding behind pointing their rifles at us. "You'r both dead." someone said.

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Early in February 1941 the Commonwealth army entered El Ageila on the border between Libya and Tripolitania after marching through the desert from Tobrk some 250 miles distant. There the complete Italian army with all its arms and equipment under General Berguenzeli surrendered unconditionally to the British Commander in Chief, General Wavell. It seemed to augur well for for our future prospects.

At the same time, hardly having fired a shot in anger, #9 Commando moved from Arran to Criccieth, a small town in North Wales and the birth place of Lloyd George, from where I was sent to run a series of week long courses in rock climbing!

Somehow I was given a completely free hand in the organisation and location of these courses. We took all our equipment with a three ton truck and six eager would-be climbers and parked ourselves in the Gorfywvsa or Peny-pas Hotel at

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

the foot of the trails leading up to the three main peaks of Snowdon, I Llywedd and Crib Goch. Every day it rained all day and during the six days we spent up there we must have covered every square inch of the country between Snowdon and Tryfan and the Glydders in between.. Lunch was a cup of water, of which commodity there was no shortage, and a couple of chunks of hard tack chocolate and Army dog biscuits. Occasionally, if we were lucky we got a big hunk of Parkin cake. Each evening we returned to the hotel, in which we were the only guests, soaking wet and dressed ourselves up in all kinds of odd clothing left behind by pre war visitors. Then, looking like the most disreputable of hoboos, went down to the dining room where we wolfed everything they put in front of us.

By breakfast time our uniforms were dry and off we went to do the same thing as yesterday. I never heard a word of complaint and I think that despite me they must have learned something useful that week. Including me. Each week a new batch appeared and, well, it was 'more of the same' for the next three weeks during which we all learned a lot about climbing. One day we had a surprise visit from a famous mountaineer, no less than Frank Smythe who had climbed many peaks in Europe and the Himalaya. Earlier in the thirties, he and Eric Shipton climbed without oxygen, via the North Col, to within a thousand feet of the summit of Everest. It was a signal honour that he should spend time with us, and we not only enjoyed his company but I am sure we also learned a lot from him. The funny thing was that the few hours he spent with us was the only time when it didn't rain all day! At other times it regularly stopped raining each evening, and started again each morning the moment we stepped out of the front door. And I'll tell you one thing for sure, it was better by far than a week's holiday at Bognor!

I could talk for weeks on end about the exciting experiences we had with #9 Commando, but I think it might be taxing the attention of any readers that are still with me. Nevertheless an incident just before I left the Commando to go to OCTU is worth recounting. We were in the middle of a big inter Commando exercise in Dumfries and Ayrshire in Scotland when I was called to the Colonel's HQ and introduced to a rather foppish looking subaltern who looked as if he had just come out of a beauty parlour. I was to take this apparition to Kirkudbright. "Its only about six miles across country and I cant spare the transport, " explained the Colonel, "So get a move on; this -" there was the faintest of pauses at this point, and he went on, " - officer is in a hurry. And report to Major Todd when you get back."

I knew that *get a move on* meant, *as the crow flies* only a good deal faster, so we set off at a jog trot. No complaints, yet, from my companion, but I was pretty sure that he wouldn't have said no to a nice comfortable staff car! I cant remember the name of the river; it wasn't more than about a hundred feet wide, and certainly no more than knee deep but it happened to cross our route. Suddenly there was a bit of a yelp from my side. He'd seen the river! " I say! Is that a river up there?" His head began to rotate from side to side. I knew what he was looking for, but there

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

weren't any. "How are we going to get across?" "Oh, its not very deep Sir. We can wade across." Dead silence for a while but I could hear the wheels turning. Then, "Well, you'll have to carry me across." I thought about this for not too long, and I knew I had only too options. Disobeying an order from an officer, that was a court martial offence. So I carried him, piggy back across the river. Well, half way across anyway and then a most unfortunate thing happened. I stepped onto a slippery rock and over we went into about five feet of water! As we broke surface I thought happily of Aphrodite, though my chap didn't seem to be enjoying himself at all! In fact I think he was just about fit to be tied. All his nice clothing covered in mud and weeds. "You did that on purpose," he hissed at me, "I'll have you court martialled for that." From then on communications between lord and servant dropped to a record low. Half an hour later we marched into the Brigade HQ. together with my dripping charge. Not a word of thanks either. Of course I had to report the incident to the Brigade Major who tried to look displeased, but I was sure the tale was told with great glee in the Officers Mess that eveng.

I didn't get courtmartialled, but a couple of days laterI was called in front of the colonel once more. "Ah, Naughton," he said, looking up from some papers on his desk.. "Orders for your Commission have come through. You and Sergeant Cody are to report to Dunbar OCTU immediately. Good luck to you both." Then, as an afterthought, "What's this I hear about you throwing officers in the drink? You seem to be making a habit of that sort of thing." As I said earlier on, the Army has a long memory!

In retrospect the time I spent with #9 Commando seemed a lot longer than twelve months which was the period, almost to the day that shaped most of my life's ambitions and accomplishments even to my eightyth year. It instilled in me an appreciation of the outdoors and respect for the people and animals with whom I shared it. It gave me a sense of self discipline and single mindedness and responsibility that had been lacking in my earlier years and it left me with, you might say, *mens sana in corpore sano*. The very high level of physical fitness that resulted from the Commando training certainly contributed much to the *corpore sano* part of it. Additionally I was given a great deal of responsibility, in the administrative side in the planning of exercises and night landings, and I began to appreciate that there is a lot more to life than having a good time and kicking over the traces, though I can't deny that I had my fair share of that as well. As far as the *mens sana* part of it goes, let me say, suffice to say, that then and in similar sorts of life threatening situations, I was mostly able to make decisions quickly that affected my immediate compadres, with, very rarely, any question of my competence to make them. Perhaps what impressed me most, and what gave me confidence in my own judgement was the seemingly unquestioned confidence by my equals in my leadership. Though I never thought of it as leadership, simply that what I was doing and the decisions I was making were, in my mind for the

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

common good

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One of the decisions that I made while in the Commandos did not work out well, for anybody. I met a local girl when we were in the Kirkbubright area and to tell the truth, we got on very well together. It was not long before I found myself proposing to her, and being readily accepted. I wont say that I was talked into it, but the early enthusiasms quickly began to give way to doubts in my mind even before I left to go the OCTU. Later I discussed these doubts with Betty, but she persuaded me that we should go ahead with the marriage. "If we dont get married now," she said, " we never will." And so we did.

A month after I sailed for India, she left my family with whom she had been staying, and took up with another man. The two of them lived together, happily I hoped, until our divorce in 1947 since when, I had no further news of her. She had lived in a small Scottish village, and I always thought that marriage with me was her chance to escape from a life of domestic drudgery trapped within a parochial society with little to choose between kirk and family. Who could blame her? Certainly not I for whom, admittedly, it was a fortunate release. But more of Betty anon.

CHAPTER VI

AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN

When I left #9 Commando in September 1940 I was barely an Acting Sergeant, the rank being awarded presumably so that I could bawl out the lesser mortals around me and order them to stand to attention when half way up some vertiginous precipice like the Devils Kitchen near Tryfan! However, when Cody and I arrived at Dunbar OCTU and started breathing the rarified air of pre officialdom, we threw off the cavils and restraints of other ranks. We had become accustomed to Warrant Officers addressing us as lazy, slovenly, half dressed sub humans, but now that we had white bands around our caps and thus some pretensions to being gentlemen they had to be more polite to us; so after subjecting us to the usual abuse they were always most punctilious in adding 'SIR' afterwards!

The training unit was organised on a battalion basis, that is to say split up into five Companies each with five platoons of four sections of seven men each. A lot of the time was spent in the classroom on Organisation and Administration, Military Law and History, General Military and Political Strategy and Field Tactics, Crime and Punishment, and many technical subjects such as use of explosives and demolitions, communications, weaponry and ammunition and map reading and orientation, etc.,etc! Some of it stuck but for the most part we came out at the end totally ignorant and wondering what the hell we would do when commanding a unit under enemy fire. Steve Cody and I were probably a bit ahead of the game since we had a grounding and not a little experience in many of the subjects while in the Commandos. Also we were a lot fitter than our companions and the officers who were training us, and it was this latter fact that got both of us into trouble with our Company Commander when we were to be awarded our spurs, so to speak.

Life in the OCTU - Officer Cadet Training Unit - did not differ much from what we had been used to previously, except that it was more specialised, professional you might say and with the emphasis on command rather than on taking orders. We were not allowed to forget the little that we had already learned about parade ground drill, in fact we were taught quite a bit more by the Scots Guards drill sergeant who was determined that our Company would be the best ever at the passing out parade at the end of the course and damned near killed us all in the process. Well, he certainly did put us through our paces and, though nobody was the worse for it, by the time he considered us ready we had earned any kudos that were to come our way.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

One rather interesting exercise, designed to test our ability to find our way through mixed country, was to dump parties of two, armed only with map and compass, radially around and equidistant, approximately ten miles, from an arbitrary center point. The purpose of the exercise was of course to find the center point and to add a little interest, there was a prize for the first party to arrive. It was more or less accepted that basically it was going to be a competition between Steve Cody and me, this sort of thing being old hat to both of us. It was not surprising then, that our two parties were allocated the longest and most strenuous of all the routes - of which there were about ten others. In fact Steve and I had a little bet on between ourselves. However, as it turned out, it wasn't going to be a walkover for, as an additional handicap our respective partners were both from sedentary backgrounds.

My partner in this enterprise, Graham Cavanaugh by name, was a straight forward chap, one whom I knew well and very much respected. Before starting out he looked at me with a rather glum expression, "I suppose you are going to run all the bloody way!" he groaned. Since that was about what I had been planning, knowing that Steve wasn't one much given to hanging around, I thought to myself, 'Least said soonest mended!' I have to say it, he was a game'un, that one, and he didn't want to let the firm down so he put his heart into it for about half a mile by which time we were heading for an unfriendly looking hill. I knew what would make Graham happy but a detour around the hill would have lost us the race. There was only one thing to do, so I took his rifle and headed up the hill. And there were more to come before we were home by which time I was also carrying his pack and pulling him along behind me

We did that ten miles in ninety minutes. It was a 'T' intersection of two back roads, and when we got there, of the truck that was supposed to be waiting, there was no sign. And no sign of Steve either. I looked at the map and saw that there was a similar intersection about five minutes walk down the road. Graham was out on his back, blissfully unaware of the situation. "Sorry, Graham," I said, "The truck driver can't read the map and he's gone to the wrong point. Come on. Its only five minutes away". This intelligence was not met with much enthusiasm, but needs must! I was way ahead of Graham and around a corner when I saw where I had been expecting the truck only, No Truck! "Sorry Graham, We were too early." And back we went, to find the truck, Steve with a big grin across his face, two other parties and the officer who was referee. I explained what had happened. "Ah!" says the officer, "You did not trust your map reading." I hastened to refute this slur upon my expertise, " It was the truck driver's map reading that I didn't trust." The officer looked at me rather quizziczzly, me standing there holding two rifles and supporting Graham as well. I dont remember the officer's name, it could well have been Solomon! "I'm afraid I will have to award the prize to Cody," says he, "But we'll give you the honour." With which judgement I was quite satisfied, though the decision as to who won the bet between me and Steve took a little longer to settle and quite a few pints!

What ran Steve and me into trouble with our judge and final arbiter, the Company Commander was that the training we underwent with the Commandos emphasised that in any field operation, speed was an essential parameter. Most of the exercises we took part in at OCTU seemed to be modelled around interminable delays while commanders were trying to make up their minds about their tactics while allowing the 'enemy' to take his time to mount an effective counter offensive. It was a bit like the Dardanelles during the First World War. The politicians seemed incapable of making any decision, while the German General Von Sanders was quietly getting himself organised with troops moved into position and joined up with the Turks. When they did finally decide to go ahead it was too late and the attack turned into a rout. When it was Steve's or my turn to plan and lead an offensive, everybody was literally run off their feet, including the Company Commander who would have preferred a more leisurely pace! At least this was my appreciation of the situation.

About a week before the end of the course, both Steve and I were informed that we were not considered to be up to scratch and that we were to be held back for a further month's training. Well, to say that we were both thoroughly pissed off would be the understatement of the week! However there was light at the end of the tunnel in the shape of a retired Indian Army Colonel - out of the same mould as my old friend Gordon Reid - who we had seen wandering around most days but had never figured out what he was doing there. The following day we found out, when an orderly told us to report to Colonel Field's office, at the double. It took us about one minute, it had to be good news, nothing could have been worse than our present situation. The colonel looked at us quizzically, "Stand easy, Gentlemen" says he. 'Aha, ' I thought to myself, 'We are Gentlemen.' That meant it *was* good news! I understand that your Company Commander does not like your tactics. Well, I've been watching you both and I do not agree with him." We knew there was more to come and we waited with bated breath. "The Indian Army needs officers like you," he went on, "How would you like to go to India?" There was no doubt about that answer. An immediate and unanimous 'Yes' . "In that case ," says the Colonel, a man of few words, "I'll make all the arrangements, and you will pass out next week with the rest of your group. And with my Blessing." Which we did, though not without a few dirty looks from our judge and, not so final, arbiter.

In those days men didn't hug each other⁸, and we weren't very keen on soccer anyway! But the moment we got out of the office we shook hands solemnly and then started punching each other with delight. And as we walked, I beg your pardon, marched away, I looked up to the window, and there was the Colonel standing there with a big grin across his face. He'd made two guys happy and put a spoke in the Company Commander's wheel into the bargain. And that was how we got our Commissions!

⁸ My editor's comment on this statement was, "You must have been very young."

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

CHAPTER VII

ROUND THE CAPE TO INDIA

The two weeks leave between passing out from OCTU and shipping out to India did not allow me much time to fit in all the things that had to be done in that period. Getting equipped, and fitted for my uniform; arranging with Grindlays Bank for my finances and, of course, getting married and finding time for a few days honeymoon. It was to say the least a hectic fourteen days.

The first memorable thing that I did after getting married - well, maybe the second - was to make an arse of myself in front of Buckingham Palace. It wasn't the first time I had walked past the sentries outside the palace and stopped with a companion to admire the smart turnout, including the toecaps of the boots in which you could see your face as clearly as in a mirror. Betty was all agog to see the sights, and I said to her, "I'll show you the turnout at the Palace where the Guards are on duty twenty four hours round the clock." and we walked right up to the sentry and stopped in front of him. Immediately he came to attention with a terrific thump of his left foot. They do that all the time of course, even if only to keep the onlookers on their toes - an off their own! But this time the onlooker was an officer - me, and I was not yet quite used to being saluted! Moreover, I didn't know if he was supposed to salute subalterns, or even if he *had* saluted anybody. There's a saying in the army, 'If it moves salute it', and the corollary to that, for commissioned ranks, is 'If it salutes, salute back' never mind for whom it was intended. And there was me, in a welter of indecision, rooted to the ground. Then I remembered the other golden rule, 'Do something anyway. It's harder to hit a moving target.

I turned round to Betty and grabbing her arm, hauled her off as fast as I could "But I want to see all the ceremony outside the Palace." she complained. "Bugger the ceremony," says I, panic stricken, "Just keep going. I'll explain later." Failure to return a salute from a passing soldier is not the end of the world, though it is not advisable to make a habit of it. But to ignore a salute from a guardsman on duty, outside the Palace yet, is to disregard the conventions of military behaviour. At the best it could be regarded as ignorance; at the worst, a Court Martial offence. In my case, being a nice innocent and shiny 2nd Lieutenant ranking, so it is said, one below a Lance Corporal, I was an easy target for the wit of a seasoned Guardsman. In fact, when he returned to the guardroom, he probably had a good laugh and said something to the effect of "Caught another one this morning!" Betty listened to all this and asked "Why dont we go back right now and salute him, then he will know you didn't do it on purpose." Apart from the fact that it would be an impertinence, under the circumstances to salute and it could be taken as a rebuke to the sentry. Anyway, wild horses would not have dragged me back there, but further explanations would have been futile

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

Just after the war, well, three years after, I was trying to explain to an elderly lady from the Balkans, something about the Englishman's response to a pun. A not very clever pun earns a groan from the listener; at the other end of the spectrum the highest compliment that can be paid to the punster is that the listener goes out and shoots himself. The one thing that is absolutely taboo is to laugh at a pun. I explained all this to the lady who shook her head sadly, quite convinced that we were all quite mad. Some months later this same lady came to me looking rather pleased.

"You remember what you said about not laughing at a pun?" she said, "Well, you were quite wrong. I told another Englishman the same pun that you told me. And guess what! He laughed, so there!" "Of course he laughed," I explained, "Being a foreigner he knew you would expect him to laugh, and did not want to hurt your feelings."

The moral of these two minor incidents is that if somebody does not understand the rationale of a decision, explanations are futile and often lead to acrimonious disagreements, or worse!

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Steve Cody and I, together with some two thousand others, mostly Army and Air Force, sailed from Gourock on the drunken Duchess of Atholl - drunken because she had a flat bottom for sailing up the St Lawrence river in Canada and in any sort of sea she'll roll damn near ninety degrees - in early December 1941 and were just in time for what the crew described as the worst storm in twenty five years. Before we left the Albion shore - got my tongue in my cheek there - one event stood out in my mind for many a day. Hearing a commotion on the dockside we peered down from the sun deck, and there, lined up four or five deep and a hundred yards long was the RAF contingent who, it seemed had walked off the boat in protest against something, we knew not what. Nor did we ever find out what it was all about. But in all the time we were on board ship, we never again saw an RAF uniform, so assumed that they had not sailed with us..

On the voyage to Durban there seemed to be something new and interesting happening every day. I loved to watch the Dolphins diving in and out of the huge waves like a row of guardsmen keeping pace with the ship. Once we saw a German Condor, keeping well out of range of the DEMS armaments, circling the convoy, presumably reporting our position to the U Boats. The fourth day out I came up to the sun deck to cast an optic on the situation and I have to admit that it was amazingly calm, at least the sides of the colossal waves were calm. The drunken Duchess was about 22,000 tons displacement and down in the trough this mountain of water towered above us, and as I watched her clawing her way up to the top I was quite sure that she was never going to make it. Somehow she lurched over the crest and at that moment I had a clear view of what was ahead of us. At

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

that moment came one of our party came shooting out of his cabin together with most of his belongings scattered over the deck; needless to say he was the subject of much derision!

Down below, tween decks, the troops were not having an enviable time. What with rampant sea sickness and the cramped quarters it must have been a minor sort of Hell for them. However after the first five days we headed to the South and were very soon 'On the road to Mandalay, where the flying fishes play.' What was more to the point our companion ship, the Andes, was the one next to us in the convoy, and she seemed to be carrying nothing but nurses. Binoculars were most popular and visual communications were the order of the day! I even saw a couple of Marines trying out their manual semaphore, but whether they were able to establish communications I never knew.

The only spot of excitement was when I spotted a periscope trailing a nearby ship, but it turned out to be the ship's log. For the benefit of you landlubbers a ship's log is a contrivance which is towed about a hundred yards behind the stern; its purpose is to give the ship's speed through the water from which the total distance may be calculated. Another false alarm came when we were all sitting down to dinner. Suddenly there was the sound of a terrific explosion, and forks were halted half way to the mouth. I looked around the room and noticed that, notwithstanding the general state of alarm, the waiters were continuing to bustle around, seemingly quite unperturbed. Somebody at our table grabbed a passing waiter and inquired, "Oh, by the way, have we been torpedoed?" Of course we were all ready to abandon ship, but nobody wanted to be the first to chicken out. The waiter looked at us patiently, "Bless you no, Sir." he explained, "She just lifted her flat bottom out of the water and smacked it down again. You'll hear that a few times before this storm blows itself out!"

Things had calmed down very nicely as we headed into the South Atlantic, and it was decided to organise some entertainment for the long suffering troops downstairs. My part in the concert was a skit about a greenhorn subaltern holding his first Company Office. That's a bit like a magistrate's court where soldiers who have been misbehaving themselves, like getting drunk or assaulting someone or trying to swim home, are wheeled in before the platoon officer with the Sergeant Major whispering sweet things into the culprit's ear. "CAPS OFF, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, HALT, PRIVATER SMITH NUMBER 698318934. DID GET INTOXICATED AND PISSED ALL OVER EVERYBODY. SIR!" And the officer has to dispense justice, trying not to think that 'There by the grace of God - - -!' And there I was sitting behind my desk trying to look as if it was my first time, which it was, and reading the charge sheet - that's a 252 to you old sweats. Well I knew what a charge sheet was all right so I just jumped in feet first and started reading. It was the first word that unhorsed me - WOAS - - - - - . I stopped dead trying to think, 'What the Hell did Woas mean, for God's sake' There were a few chuckles from the audience, Warrant Officers and the like who were

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

well ahead of me, but dead silence elsewhere. Suddenly it came to me, WOAS means Whilst On Active Service! I got as far as 'Whilst on - -' but it was too late. I'd been rumbled. There was a roar of laughter mostly directed at me personally, and the skit was a real success to say nothing of my red face

We dropped into Cape Town for a few hours. Time enough to see 'Oom Paul' up there smoking his pipe before we were on our way to Durban where we had four days leave. We were not too popular with the Booers who mostly ignored us completely. I had chummed up with another subaltern, Paul Logan, and were setting out to walk to downtown Durban, which was a fair way, when a big American convertible, I think it was a Lincoln, pulled up alongside us and the driver, a very friendly non Booer leaned over. "Where are you going Fellows? Do you need a lift?" We hoped we were going to Durban and Yes we'd love a lift. "Well, hop in chaps," he said, my name is Michael Smith. We hopped in gratefully and introduced ourselves

Our benefactor, as he turned out to be, took us to his house in a nice quiet area just north of the business center and invited us in for drinks and lunch and introduced us to his wife and to the 'boy', the latter being a big friendly grinning Zulu, about six foot four and broad in proportion. Built, you might say, like the proverbial brick shithouse. He showed us the tools of his trade. One Assegai, which is a throwing spear, with a sharp point and an edge that you could have shaved with. He held it in his hand with practised poise and made a few, we hoped, friendly passes in the general direction of our midriffs. "I give you demonstration," he said with a loud chuckle. But our hostess came to our rescue, just in the nick of time, we thought. "Now, now, Bomo," she remonstrated, "No demonstrations today. You go out into the garden and cut a few flowers for me with that razor or yours." But Bomo was not to be dismissed so lightly. "OK, but first I just show my leg killer." And he produced this huge Knobkerrie from somewhere. The thing weighs about a ton and when wielded by one of Bomo's size, legs wouldn't stand a chance. I tucked my legs away carefully behind the table and admired this massive weapon from a safe distance.

The four days we spent in Durban were not wasted. We played squash in the Caister hotel up on the Berea, met a couple of nurses and took them horseriding, and dining and dancing in the evenings; drove out to Pietermaritzberg and went to the horse races, and when we didn't have anything better to do spent the time lying on the Strand and swimming to our heart's content. And for all these arrangements we had to thank Michael Smith and his wife who looked after us as if we were their prodigal sons. Never a dull moment. And at the end Michael drove us back to the Drunken Duchess and as a parting present gave us a huge open box of peaches which did not last very long! My only regret about those four days was that I lost contact with the Smiths and was never able to show my appreciation for all they had done for us.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

The next day we sailed quietly out of Durban harbour in the Duchess of Athol, and then just as quietly, left the convoy and returned to port. Of course everybody was Gung Ho about coming back to Durban and were looking forward to some more of the same! To the disappointment of the enlisted men and officers, there was no shore leave and within twenty four hours we were all transshipped to the SS Andes

It was not until after the war that I found out that the Duchess of Athol, for reasons unknown, was ordered back to England and was torpedoed just off Freetown, Sierra Leone. With what loss of life I was unable to ascertain, but I thought that 'there but for the grace of God' and a couple of months I might have been writing this from the Lost City of Atlantis.

On board the Andes - which had been full of nurses - we found to our even greater disappointment that they had all flown the coop - and were on our way unescorted to Bombay, from where some of us, including Paul, went to Mhow in Central India to brush up our Urdu and get acclimatised.

Nothing very much of any import happened there except the tiger hunt. We heard that there were three tigers loose in the jungle and that a local Rajah had shot one of them, leaving two. In our innocence a few of us decided to mount our own hunt, and engaged a taxi wallah to take us to the scene of activity. The evening before, Paul and I visited a Major Edelmann who had been a friend of one of my many aunts, and we talked about our plans for the following day. He listened to us for a while and then asked us whether we were taking a Shikar wallah⁹, and what kind of guns would we be carrying. I explained that we were well armed with sword sticks, whips and assorted knives and a camera and that we were not taking any guns as it was not fair to the tiger. Well, I can tell you that caused a great deal of merriment to the Major who had been in India a bit longer than we had. "I doubt very much that you will meet up with Sher Sahib¹⁰, in fact I hope like Hell you don't," he said, looking at us sadly and shaking his head, "The only advice I can give you is 'Make plenty of noise and if you do happen to see him, say your prayers. Better still, stay in the cantonment and get drunk."

Of course we didn't take his advice and the following morning found ourselves walking through the jungle - dry brush I would call it - with a very puzzled taxi wallah waiting hopefully for our return. Hopefully, because if we didn't come back, having been eaten by the tiger or worse, he wouldn't get paid! After about an hour of walking in the direction indicated by the taxi wallah I somehow managed to get myself separated from my companions by what in Canada might have been known as an Esker¹¹. Not more than about two hundred yards long it didn't

⁹ A combination of guide and hunter

¹⁰ Mr Tiger.

¹¹ Esker, in my experience are commonly found in Northern Canada. A ridge composed of sand and gravel deposited by glacial rivers. Can be up to twenty feet high and a mile or so long.

present much of a hazard to our orientation, so I just kept going. Meanwhile I noticed some movement in the brush about fifty yards away and I don't need to tell you what it was. I just didn't know that they came so big. It looked at me making a very unfriendly growling noise while I remained rooted to the ground hoping that the tiger would think I was a tree, or that he had had breakfast already. Then, as I looked, somehow he wasn't there any more. After a while I heard some shouting. Ah, I thought, they have missed me. Wait till I tell them I saw the tiger. They were all duly impressed until Paul asked me if I got many pictures of the beast! Needless to say, at the time, taking photographs of the tiger had not been high on my list of priorities.

What impressed me most about that little scenario was the image that to this day I still carry in my mind, of that magnificent animal. When I saw him, not so much blending in with, but part of his natural habitat, visible only when he was moving, that I was able to appreciate his sheer size and strength, a picture of form and colour and lithe and effortless movement. My abiding thought was how anybody could, just for the sake of senseless bravado, possibly wish to destroy such a creature of wild beauty

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Shortly after our *tiger hunting* escapade I found that I had been posted to the 11th Sikh Regiment and was to join the 1st Battalion which was at that time somewhere northeast of Calcutta. It took the better part of two days to reach Calcutta, and another two, thanks to some Rajputs who gave me a lift before I found my battalion heading east out of Imphal in Burma. Where I duly reported to the Adjutant - who wasn't expecting me!

This was about 75 miles from the Chindwin River which is a tributary of the Irrawaddy. Of course there was a big flap on because the Japs were reportedly already in Malaya and heading north. I can't remember the adjutant's name. "Somebody has made a balls up." he said after looking at my papers, "If you had been posted to us I would have been notified a week ago. I'll give you a travel warrant to the Das Giyarah¹² in Nowshera, but it won't be much good to you until you get to Calcutta, or out of the country anyway."

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I had been looking forward to joining my own battalion and getting to know my fellow officers, some of whom I knew had been on board ship with me, and the idea of going to Burma was an exciting one. Anyway, the Japs were miles away and by the time we caught up with them they would be on the run! Little did I know that it was us who were going to be on the run. So I hitched my way back to India and a couple of days later found myself in Delhi with my bedroll and belongings at the railway station, my train having disappeared in the Bombay, Baroda and Central India direction. I knew that much

¹² Das Giyarah. 'Das' being 10 and 'Giyarah' 11, or the 10th Battalion of the 11th Sikh Regiment

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

because it was written on the coach as it passed me on its way south.

CHAPTER VIII

AFGHANISTAN AND THE NORTHWEST FRONTIER

On my way back from that short sojourn in Burma, I managed a couple of days in Delhi where I stayed at The Cecil Hotel and spent most of my time relaxing in the swimming pool and having Tonga races around Connaught Circus. Occasionally we would meet other serious Englishmen, like myself, having similar races, but in the opposite direction. I remember one collision after which, loose Tonga wheels were flying around in all directions, one of which very nearly decapitated me. How nobody was killed or injured, I'll never know. What I do know is that we were well and truly overcharged for the damage but were happy to escape with whole skins.

After a long journey through the Punjab by train I arrived at Nowshera in the North West Frontier and was duly impressed to be met by Captain Batty who was the adjutant of the 10th/11th Sikh training battalion which I was joining. My pleasure was diminished somewhat when he said "I don't usually meet subalterns at the station, but I happened to be passing when I saw you standing there, so I thought I would pick you up before you melted." The temperature was about one hundred and twenty in the shade, and standing out there in the open was a bit like being in a blast furnace.

I remember very little of those first few weeks of settling down to regimental life. A kaleidoscope of new responsibilities and incomprehensible duties. I do remember being called into the Adjutant's office and being given a rocket for not extinguishing my cigarette before entering. I gathered that I was to meet the C.O., Colonel Field and was left standing to attention while Batty announced my presence. I heard something being said about 'wet behind the ears' and I thought I'd better try to gainsay any such impressions before I got a bad name. Batty put his head round the door, "The Colonel will see you now, Naughton," he said, "And be on your best behaviour!" So I marched in smartly, stood to attention and saluted. "This is 2nd. Lieutenant Naughton, Sir." He didn't make any disparaging remarks, at least not out loud. The Colonel walked across and held out his hand, "Field," he says, "Glad to have you with us. You came from the Commandos, I believe, and very highly recommended at that. We will have to see if we can give you some duties commensurate with your experience. In the meantime Captain Batty will get you fixed up with your quarters and introduce you to my staff." He nodded affably in dismissal and I marched out, thinking to myself, 'Obviously there's some merit in dropping officers in the drink!' As for Batty, he wasn't such drip as I had thought. As a matter of fact he turned out to be quite a decent chap, and I got to like and respect him, the better I knew him.

I got to know most of my fellow officers, one of whom who was a 'wet behind the ears' like me and made a practice of saluting me each time we met and called me

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

'Sir'. I didn't complain, put it down to my seniority! After a week or so somebody must have put him wise for suddenly he stopped saluting, and just gave me dirty looks. The insignia of the '11th Sikh' regiment was worn on the shoulder tabs topped by a small crown which, next to my single pip seemed to be a crown and a pip which is the badge of rank of Lieutenant Colonel. It turned out that he was a junior at the same school as I was. No doubt I kicked his backside a few times but I'll be damned if I can remember the fellows's name.

My immediate duties consisted of holding 'five in the morning' parades, and refereeing ground hockey games. The Adjutant button holed me one day and said that I was to referee a match in the pm. When I told him that I knew nothing about the game he laughed, "Just run around and blow the whistle occasionally," he said, "You'll get the hang of it soon enough." Which I did, eventually, and meanwhile the game proceeded as if I didn't exist. After eleven am, parades came to an end and the jawans went to their quarters while officers went about their business whatever that was. For my part, that was the period in which I visited my Urdu instructor, Munshi Sahib as he was known. By then my Urdu was passable, but it was necessary, unlike in the old days out there, to be able to converse and clearly understand what was going on around you. Fortunately I have a good ear for languages so didn't have much difficulty in getting the hang of it.

Lunch in the mess was at 1 pm, and nobody, but nobody sat down until the C.O. took his seat at the head of the table. The first time I came in to lunch I was watching my pees and quze and being very careful not to step out of line. Not so my erstwhile school friend - let's call him Joe - who barged in and sat down in solitary state at the table. I was almost making up my mind to join him when I discerned Captain Batty, under a full head of steam, arriving from the bar making a beeline for the miscreant. 'Aha,' I thought to meself, 'Somebody is going to get a rocket.' I didn't hear what Batty said, but it must have been very much to the point for poor Joe leapt to his feet with a red face, even knocking his chair over! To complete the scenario, the C.O. who never missed the oppprtunity for a spot of whimsy, arrived from the bar. "I dont hear any music," he said, looking at no one in particular. I think I was the only one who twigged his meaning, having been in on the scene from the beginning, but the others seemed to be struggling for comprehension. I saw the Colonel's eye on me and I gave him what I hoped he would interpret as a knowing smile. "Musical chairs," he said patiently, "Musical chairs. But I don't hear any music!" I don't think Joe ever sat down again until he was the last one standing..

In the afternoon there were a number of entertainments available such as golf, tennis, squash - for those who were not caught for refereeing.. That is to say, most officers were free until five pm when duty called for the next few hours. After that it was chota pegs - Officer's Call - on the lawn before dinner. In between these breaks, before breakfast, before lunch, after lunch - for those who were going to run around in the heat - and before dinner, everybody changed into fresh clothes.

Which explains why dhobi wallahs¹³ were in much demand.

Living quarters for commissioned ranks were reasonably comfortable and consisted of a spacious bungalow housing one or maybe two subalterns. A surprisingly large number of servants looking after the needs of several bungalows were always on hand. In addition each officer had his personal servant, known as a 'bearer' who organised the other servants and made sure that his 'Sahib' lacked for nothing - a Major Domo you might say. For a time I had a bungalow to myself, which was a bit of a luxury for a subaltern, but after a few weeks a full lieutenant, Peter Wainwright, was moved in with me. A most likeable chap and I got on with him very well. His background was MT - motor transport - in which he was experienced and quietly competent and this was a bit of a disappointment to me for I had been hoping to get the MT Section for myself. However fate intervened on my behalf for Peter was a bottle of whisky a day man and hardly spoke any Urdu at all. The fact was, I got the MT Section and Peter somehow, just disappeared. I was sorry to see him go.

When I say that he drank a lot, and he certainly did, I don't think I ever saw him the worse for drink - except once! In the Indian Army, in addition to Other Ranks, the common soldiers known as 'jawans', there were Kings Commissioned Officers and VCOs - Viceroy's Commissioned Officers - the latter being all being native officers with their own Mess. It was traditional that all new Kings Commissioned officers coming to the Regiment, sooner or later were invited for an evening in the VCO's mess where they were plied non stop with mitha malta, which is a local country spirit of formidable strength. Few, if any, ever came out of that ordeal on their own feet. Peter was duly invited and bets were duly placed upon his performance. Somewhere around ten in the evening I was heading back to the bungalow when I was waylaid by Capt Batty. "Come and give me a hand would you," he said with a grin, "Wainwright is a bit the worse for weather." We walked through the trees towards the VCO's mess and were halted by a sentry standing guard over what looked like a log of wood. Of course it was Peter, out literally like a light.

We got Peter back to the bungalow, laid him out a charpoy with a chamber pot under his head and left him for the night. The following morning when I woke up there was Peter, shaving and singing his head off with a bottle of whisky in his other hand. He looked at me cheerfully, "Care for a drink, Mike?" I shook my head sadly, "Good God Peter," I exclaimed, "You must have a head like solid rock!" And he didn't even have a headache.

The following week everything seemed to happen all at the same time. First I went to Peshawar, close to the Afghanistan border, to take my Urdu examination to the accompaniment of Ghandi's Congressionalists who were having a

¹³

Laundry men.

tomasha¹⁴ outside, trying to set the building on fire and throwing rocks through the windows. When I got back to Nowshera I was given a nice new bungalow, all on my own, and just to add a few frills almost shit my pants in the middle of lunch in the mess. I rose hurriedly, without asking permission and made a beeline for the bog. Sitting down at the table before the C.O. as I explained before, is taboo. Rising therefrom falls into the same category, but needs must when the devil drives! When I returned there was a dead hush around the table as I took my seat. Everybody was waiting for the Old Man's pronouncement. "I trust you made it, Naughton." he murmured. "Hm?"

At the end of the week I was called into the Adjutant's office. I extinguished my cigarette(!) and reported promptly, expecting the worst. But it was good news and Batty got up and held out his hand, "Congratulations, Naughton. I have just heard that you got top marks with your Urdu exam." he scratched his head thoughtfully, "I also have to tell you that your name will appear in Battalion Orders tomorrow morning. You have been promoted to Acting Lieutenant as of tomorrow and next week you will take over the MT Section - for your sins." I said something appropriate and prepared to leave. "Oh, and one other thing that wont be covered in Battalion Orders. No more close shaves in the middle of lunch, please." he said with a smile. " Too much of that will give the Regiment a bad name." My only worry at this point was what the devil did he mean when he said that I was getting the MT Section - *for my sins?* Well, I wasn't long in finding out.

Starting off with tigers, it didn't take long to acquaint myself with the various kinds of wild life that seemed to abound in that part of the world. Shawks, Vultures, Hyenas and Jackals, several kinds of venomous snakes, Scorpions and Mongooses. Every time I peered round a corner, there always seemed to be one of that ilk with his eye on me.

Around the bungalow there were always a handful of scorpions hiding between the sheets or inside the leg of riding britches. I once got stung in the ankle by one. They can be pretty painful and if left untended can kill a dog or put a man out of action for several days. I was saved by the prompt action of Bagha Khan, my bearer who slashed the swelling with a razor blade and sucked out the poison. Cobras, I'll come to later, but the snake that nobody wants to tangle with is the Silver Kraite. Fast as lightening and the most venomous of all the reptiles. Get bitten by one of those and you're dead mutton in about five minutes. I saw one once when we were sitting on the lawn outside the mess having our sundowners. Suddenly there was a hush in the lively conversation around us as instant death made its leisurely way across the grass.

The Shawk - that's what it is called when ladies are present - is a big bird and quite intelligent, more or less in the Vulture class and often quite tame. They are a dirty white colour and big enough to injure a small child; feeding them is strictly

¹⁴ A lively party or a minor riot. The word covers a wide spectrum of human activity.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

verboten. Sitting outside the Nowshera club once, taking our afternoon tea in the shade of a yum yum tree, we were contemplating a plate of week old and rock hard hot cross buns when I noticed a Shawk on the roof, observing us keenly. Suddenly he spread his wings and soared over our heads looking down with obvious interest at what was on the plate. After short reconnaissance flight he did a perfect 'chandelle' - showing off, no doubt - and stooped over the plate to pick up one of the buns. An Osprey, taking a fish off the surface of a lake, couldn't have done better.

The bird returned to the roof and examined his catch closely, and it was pretty obvious that he was not enamoured of it. If I expected him to drop it right away I had another think coming. He took a quick circle around and then dropped it right back on the plate where he picked it up! You can say what you like, but I'll bet you anything you like, he was having a good laugh at us. And don't tell me that birds don't have a sense of humour!

If you've ever read Rudyard Kipling's stories about Rikitikitavi the mongoose and the King Cobra, you'll be amused at my firsthand experience with not too friendly snake. I was sitting comfortably in my bathtub, luxuriating after a session in the squash court, when my dog started barking frantically at something in the hole in the wall that lets out the waste water. The hole, about four inches square, was normally plugged with a piece of narrow gauge chicken wire to keep out the frogs and other livestock. At that moment the only thing plugging the hole seemed, to judge from the sound of hissing and spitting that was issuing forth, was a badly frightened kitten.

Arising from the bath like Aphrodite, though no doubt less attractive than that lady, and giving terse instructions to the dog which were totally disregarded, I put my hand down to the hole to coerce the poor little thing into the open, but without effect. I suppose I must have looked a bit like that rather frank sketch entitled 'Father standing in the bathtub looking for the soap'. I certainly didn't find any soap, any more than I found the kitten though there was definitely something there looking most unkittenish and far from frightened though all I could see were two basilisk eyes that I didn't like the look of for one second. It was then that I remembered the saying about supping with the Devil and decided to provide myself with some more remote means of communication, thus probably saving my hide.

Returning to the fray with my workaday swagger stick, and accompanied by the dog who was being extremely rude to whoever was in the hole, I pushed in the stick in the hope of persuading it to vacate the premises, but far from obliging, it struck the stick several times with such a vicious force that I began to plan a strategic withdrawal. It was then that I saw who my antagonist was, as the mean looking head of a black cobra appeared out of the hole! At that moment my bearer appeared on the scene, fortuitously I must admit, brandishing a large piece of

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

timber and shoved me aside with his shoulder. When the shouting was all over, the words of that famous lyric poem Barnacle Bill the Sailor, came to mind, something about, 'I being a silly girl, laying myself down to keep the sailor warm, etc, etc - -'.

Well, I didn't actually lay myself down, which was just as well for posterity, my posterity anyway, but my next action well qualified me for the soubriquet of 'silly girl'. As the situation came home to me I realised the cobra, pretty damn quickly would be shooting out backwards into the open, and all I had to do was dong him over the head with my swagger stick and that would be the end of him, which indeed it was, although a little later than I planned! It never occurred to me that this was my lucky day! Cobras tend to be rather quick on the uptake, quick to spot a good opening to sink their teeth in some nice human flesh, and there was I, on offer so to speak. Fortunately for me, this fellow had other things on his mind and about one thousandth of a second before he could relay his artillery, my stick descended on his head, probably not doing any more damage than temporarily stunning him.

So there I stood patting myself on the back for a job of work well done, while the cobra was quietly planning his counter attack. Then for the second time, I was rudely pushed out of the way by my bearer who dispatched the innocent cause of all this excitement - after all he was only looking for a nice fat frog for his dinner - with what looked like an over sized lathi. Bagha Khan, pronounced 'Bugger', looked at me sadly and said, "Next time Sahib silly bugger, he dead bugger! After which we all had a good laugh together.

There was a sequel to this story for Bagha Khan took the dead cobra out into the fields so that when his mate came looking for him, we'd all be out of the limelight. Unfortunately nobody told the dog about this subterfuge and he brought the remains back to my door and loudly proclaimed his cleverness to all and sundry. Looking out to see what all the pother was all about, the first thing I noticed was the silly dog wagging his tail and looking pleased with himself. The second thing I saw was, presumably, the mate of the dead cobra, standing about three feet high looking less than friendly, no more than a few yards away, planning reprisals no doubt. Fortunately Bagha Khan appeared again and dealt swiftly with the situation before I was able to employ any more 'silly girl' tactics

It would not be true to say that horse riding in the Indian Army was obligatory. It wasn't, and there were no unwritten rules about it about it either. It was just that you were never quite a member of the *club* if you didn't indulge in that activity. At no time did I ever account myself as an accomplished horseman, but I was never averse, so said my friends, to making an ass of myself on horseback. On one occasion, shortly after arriving in Nowshera I got the loan of a beautiful black mare to take me exploring the country towards the Afghanistan border, and on the way back we passed a field where they were practising short chukkas. My mare

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

was a polo pony and there was no way she was going to miss the game. She had been very responsive up to that point but despite my efforts, she rushed onto the field and joined in the fray. I got soundly cursed for a while until someone recognised my mount. "For God's sake someone give him a stick," he said, and looking at me meaningfully, "I hope you know something about the game." *Its going to be like the ground hockey. Rush around for a while and you'll soon get the hang of it!* Well, I dont know how much of a hang I got. I cant say I gained anything in popularity, but some how I managed to stay in the saddle until it was too dark to play any longer.

I did not get into any more polo games, but I very much enjoyed a good gallop along the banks of the Kabul River always provided that hedges and ditches could be avoided. There was one time that I found, too late, that under certain conditions galloping is not advisable and could be painful and embarrassing. Shortly after I took over the MT Section, I was in the middle of taking a bath when my bearer Bagha Khan announced that the syce was waiting outside my bungalow with a horse for me to try out. What happened next might be classed as another 'silly girl ' episode!

Without thinking very much I stepped out of the bath, threw on a bath robe and leaped into the saddle. The horse, being used no doubt to a more traditional form of dress, gave me a funny sort of look, flicked one ear and then bolted! Fortunately there was plenty of open space, though less fortunately, plenty of my fellow officers, all with long memories, following the course of Lady Godiver with great interest! I very quickly concluded that my bath robe, which was flying behind me like a sail in the wind was not really adequate for this form of exercise. Also, there being nothing between me and the saddle, that part of my anatomy was not going to be suitable to be sat upon for quite a few days days.

Later, while we were enjoying our sundowners on the lawn before going in to the mess for dinner, I seemed to be the subject of a number of covert glances from my fellow officers, and the Colonel though making no comment on my exploits that afternoon had a look on his face that boded no good for me. Holding his fire, I thought! There was a lot of lively conversation round the table, but not one word on the subject nearest and dearest to the hearts of everybody present - except one. But I wasn't keeping my fingers crossed

Presently the Colonel swivelled his head around and looked me straight in the face. "Ah! Naughton." he said pleasantly. There was an immediate hush around the table. The colonel was going to cast the first stone! "If my reports are correct," he said, "You have added a new dimension to your equestrian activities which seem to have been inspired by Lady Godiva herself, or was it John Gilpin?" "At all events" he continued, beaming down at me pleasantly , "Should you be tempted to repeat the performance, I trust you will spare our blushes and arrange to have us all blindfolded before the event."

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

I took that under recognisance, but there was no escape for the next several weeks when I had to endure the not so subtle remarks in the Mess!

When I eventually got back to England, and that was not until 1947, I was often asked what was my most scary situation during the war, and it was a question I had no hesitation or doubt in my mind in answering. One of my duties in the MT Section was to oversee the driving instruction for all the new intake. Some of the jawans, mostly Sikhs, had never even seen a vehicle before, let alone driven one. Every now and again the NCOs would produce a batch and pronounce them ready for testing. It was my responsibility to examine each one of them under various conditions of terrain and that, to say the least, was a trying situation. A situation that made clear to me what the Adjutant meant when he said 'for your sins'. I would more willingly have faced a German soldier running at me with a bayonet.

Sometimes I would take a training drive up into the foot hills of the Himalayas spending the night in Murree and then by the Nathiaghali - which was more suitable for mountain goats than four wheeled vehicles - to Abbottabad and back to Nowshera, a total distance of about 200 miles. Definitely not for nervous drivers.

In those days the road from Murree to Abbottabad, about 35 miles, went through some of the most stunning mountain scenery that you could imagine. To the North were the snow capped giants of the Karakoram though too far away to put a name to any of them. Closer was Nanga Parbat, getting on for 27,000 feet high, rising out of the misty blue foothills of the panorama, while the road wound itself through a maze of tree clad hills rising to over 9,000 feet. It was not a route to be tackled by learner drivers and for most of the way I had the instructor Havildars behind the steering wheels. Even then I was holding my breadth a few times.

I would have classed that road as a good camel track and there were several places where a couple of feet to one side would have resulted in a tumble of a hundred feet or so. I was glad when we reached Abbottabad and a glass of cool Bugle Brand beer at a restaurant that looked just like 'Sams' in Murree, complete even to the 'One Armed Bandit'!

From there down to the plains at Taxila the road was steep in places but with an asphalt surface. Nowadays that whole area has been civilized and route between Murree goes through tourist attractions boasting golf courses, ski lifts and lakeside resorts. Might almost be in Switzerland!

It was during one of these trips that I met Caroline in Murree, which is a comfortable hill station at 7000 ft high. Caroline was a lovely blonde Welsh girl and I fell in love with her at first sight. Some of my friends wondered why I was always going up to Murree and when I explained about the training drives I was

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

met with a certain amount of scepticism and loose remarks about swanning. Even the Colonel threw in a few whimsical comments. If the truth were known, given the paucity of young, white, attractive and unattached women, I was undoubtedly considered to be in an enviable position. Funnily enough, on one occasion when Caroline and I were having some drinks in the Murree club, another subaltern, Peter King, who I had known on board ship and one with whom I hadn't seen quite eye to eye, turned up and made blatant overtures to my companion. However, before things got out of hand, she very neatly turned the tables on him. "Michael, why don't we go down to Sams and have some of his famous ham and eggs," she suggested, "And then your friend can have our table. I'm sure he won't mind signing the chitti." We got outside and there was only one ricksha waiting, so I gave him the directions and we hopped in. My last happy memory of that little farce was the expression on Peter's face as the kitmagar handed him the chitti!

We hadn't been on the go for long when Caroline turned to me with a questioning look on her face. "Michael," she complained, "This is *not* the way to Sams. Where are we going?" I looked out, and it seemed that we were headed back to the Murree House hotel. "I told him quite clearly where to go," I said a bit ambiguously, "But he seems to be taking us - . "Yes," says Caroline, not looking too displeased I thought, "I know where he is taking us. You are just like all the other officers, only one thing in your mind!" Which wasn't true, but what she was referring to was, I must admit, not at the bottom of my list of priorities.

One of the people that I had quite a lot to do with was an Afghan, known, because of the fact that he was always dressed in 'civvies', as Mufti Sahib¹⁵. A very friendly and knowledgeable young man, and not at all like some of those Pathan tribesmen who would likely slit your throat if it suited their purpose. A most useful man who seemed able to produce vehicles and vehicle parts out of his hat. He had other expertise in procurement, and I was not the only one in the battalion who used his services. At the time I had a cute little puppy - provided by Mufti Sahib, of course - whose antecedents were not too clearly defined. Fully grown he would be close to the size of an Irish Wolfhound, only about twice the girth. I called him Baraji. There were a lot of them around in the villages up beyond the passes and were held to be more aggressive and wiley than even a wolf. Mufti told me that he had once tried to shoot one which was supposed to have rabies and each time he raised his Jezail - a home made rifle which, together with the big Khyber knife, the tribesmen carried with them at all times - the dog would leap sideways with great agility running and feinting like a soccer player. I could tell tales about those dogs that you'd hardly believe - remember I had one myself and, thank God, we were the best of friends.

Daytime temperatures in the 'Hot Weather' were about as high as you would get anywhere. I remember one day going down to the station to meet someone and left the truck in the open for about ten minutes. When I got back I jumped into the

¹⁵

Mufti – civilian clothes.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

driving seat and rested my bare arm on the flat metal top of the door, but not for long! It was just about red hot in that broiling sun and I had a painful burn that bothered me for more than a week. At night time it wasn't much better, so most of us used to sleep in the open - under the mosquito net, of course! One night I heard a hyena snuffling around at the foot of my bed and I was considering my best course of action when I heard a sound which just about curdled my blood. It was Baraji in full warpaint, going like the clappers for the hyena who didn't waste time making tracks for home and mother. He didn't stand a chance! There was all Hell let loose for a few minutes out there in the dark, and I decided not to interfere! Presently along comes Baraji, pleased as Punch with himself, half carryind, half dragging one very dead hyena with his throat torn out. I could have cried, in fact I think I did a little. Baraji had just signed his death warrant. You dont tangle with a rabid hyena, and most of them *were* rabid. Any domestic animals including dogs that come into contact with a suspected rabid have to be destroyed and I knew I too would be considered to have been infected, and would have to have to have massive shots in the stomach which are pretty debilitating

I loved that dog and it just about broke my heart to lose him. A few weeks before the hyena business Mufti and I drove over to Peshawar, officially to look for some MT parts, and then carried on over the Khyber Pass into Afghaniistan and Baraji came with us. That part of the trip was not official, which meant that if we ran into trouble, like having our throats slit or worse, we were on our own, no questions asked. However Mufti knew his way around and anyway the Pathan guards were scared stiff of Baraji! We spent a couple of days scrambling in the hills and all the time we could see the Afridi watching us from up on the ridges. Occasionally there would be a rifle shot and I could hear the spent bullets whiffling past us. Mufti laughed and told me not to worry. "They are quite friendly," he said, "They are just letting us know they are there." I have known better friends, I thought to myself and I don't mind admitting I had my hand on my revolver most of the time.

Mufti's dwelling was in Ferozapore about ten miles outside Jallalapore on the high road - a rose by any other name! - to Kabul, and it commanded a good view of the gravel flats around the junction between the Kabul and the Laghman rivers. At this point we picked up a jangli wallah¹⁶ named Hassan, also well armed who was to guard the truck while we did a bit of exploring up in the hills. We were to return there in the evening but in the meantime we headed for a high point on the Golamat range some five miles distant and about 3000 feet above our starting point. I don't think I have ever seen a more unpleasant and arid landscape in my life. As we climbed continuously through jagged peaks and precipices devoid of shade with temperatures in the upper fifties - Centigrade, that is - I began to wonder what the Hell we were doing there in this bare and barren country. However, I thought, only a couple more miles and then it is all downhill!

¹⁶

Lit: a jungle man. A tramp.

It seemed more like ten than two miles, but we got there eventually and were rewarded with an awesome view of hundreds of tortured peaks that even Hell couldn't emulate. Away to the North, snow on the tops of the Hindu Kush seemed to bring a breath of cool air to us. Right in ahead, some four thousand feet higher and ten to fifteen miles to Northwest was the Karinj range. There was no snow on it and it looked just as ugly and unfriendly, if not more so, than the desolate ranges we had already seen. I felt not the slightest desire to sample its attractions and recalled the horrors that General Elphinstone's doomed army must have suffered in the retreat from Kabul back in 1843 when 40,000 army and 20,000 followers were picked off by the jezailchis under the command of Akbar Khan., one by one, mostly in the Jagdallak Pass. Of all those men and women only one man, a doctor, survived to reach the fort at Jallalabad. General Elphinstone who was the commander of all the forces in Kabul at that time and of the retreat toward Jallalabad, was an incredible example of incompetence and indecisiveness in a situation that could have been saved before they ever left Kabul.

While we were thus engaged taking in this devilish scenery I noticed a small party, mounted on Afghan ponies, approaching from the direction of Kabul. Mufti thought they were Gilzai and since we were trespassing on their property, so to speak, and we were not sure of what sort of welcome we might expect. Of the Gilzai it was said that they were the most warlike and untrustworthy of the Pathan tribesmen in that part of Afghanistan so it behooved us to tread warily. However it was a relief to see that they were Hazara, according to Mufti though I could not have told them apart, and all five of them were carrying rifles with an easy familiarity and probably a big knife under their robes. On closer inspection I noticed that four of the rifles were of the home made variety called 'Jezails' while the fifth was a regular army issue, Lee Enfield - stolen, no doubt from one of the camps.

As a matter of interest the Jezails were well constructed and amazingly accurate despite the fact that the barrels and particularly the rifling were of poor construction, some of them even being smooth bore. On the other side of the coin there was a quite a significant percentage of these rifles that were fitted with original Lee Enfield barrels, a lot of them probably cannibalised from abandoned ordinance. I have a feeling that the bolt might have presented similar problems in the manufacture of the home made variety. That being said, whatever the provenance of his rifle, the average Afghani could hit a bulls eye at a distance of a hundred yards almost every time!

We stopped and talked to the Hazara for a few minutes, as ruffianly and murderous a bunch of badmarshes¹⁷ as I could wish to meet. I was most relieved to find that they all seemed to be speaking the Urdu tongue and we had no difficulty in communicating with them. Later it transpired that while I was speaking Urdu, they were conversing in Pashtu and yet we managed to understand

¹⁷

Bandits.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

each other quite well. Sadly, after finding that we were speaking different languages, we seemed no longer able to communicate. Well, certainly not with our previous fluency!

It took us an hour and a half to get back to the truck. It *was* downhill all the way and the temperature, as the sun dropped behind the hills, was a comfortable forty five. At least Mufti said it was comfortable so it must have been. The blessing was that we hardly seemed to sweat at all, so our clothing was quite dry. In actual fact I think we both sweated like pigs, but the air was so dry that it evaporated almost immediately, but if you sat down and crossed your legs, the sweat oozed out like a river! Our friend Hassan was waiting for us patiently and to all intents seemed to be totally air conditioned!

On the way up we had eaten boiled eggs, curried goat and char - tea - of course in a Char Khana but this evening Mufti provided an excellent meal at his house consisting of goat pilau with peas and a dozen side dishes that almost blew a hole in my stomach. The best part of it was the COLD beer that he surreptitiously produced when nobody was looking. Two bottles of Murree Bugle Brand beer with a faint mist on the outside of the bottles!

"Where the Hell did you get cold beer from." I exclaimed, it was like nectar. "We have something like a Karez here," he explained, "The water flows down there like a river and it is beautifully cool. That's where I keep the beer!" If you go into the country four days by camel to the West of Girishk on the Helmand river you may get to see the real thing which is underground aqueducts constructed, it is said, a thousand years ago by the Gilzai engineers. Where the water comes from I have no idea, but it is pretty certain that it disappears, like the Helmand and the Argandab into the Dasht i Margo in Central Afghanistan, *the desert of death*.

In Sing Chiang which is the westernmost province of China some five hundred miles to the Northeast, the most dominating feature is the Tarim Basin which is host to the Takla Makan desert *from which one never returns*. Around its two thousand mile perimeter many great rivers like the Yarkand and the Karakul draining the Karakoram giants, few of whose passes are less than eighteen thousand feet high flow into the desert and just disappear.

After the meal which no French chef could have equalled, he produced some pastries that were cooked together with dried blackcurrants which I very much enjoyed. "You know," I said munching away happily, "My grandmother used to make pastries like these." Mufti looked puzzled, "I didn't know you had that kind of beetle in Englistan." he said! I looked more closely at the crisp looking currants on the outside of the pastries and saw that they all had wings! What could I say? "Very tasty, my grandmother would have been proud of you!"

When we got back to Nowshera I was met by my VCO, Subadar Ajaib Singh. He

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

was basically in charge of the MT Section in my absence. "Sathsiriakal, Sahib." he saluted me with the universal Sikh greeting, "I think perhaps you forget - *Sab bulgaya hain!* - the big MT meeting with the Area Commander." Oh my God, I thought to myself, now I *am* for the high jump. It was an important meeting, and not to turn up for it was paramount to suicide! Ajaib Singh looked at me without the slightest expression, "I told them you had been detained on urgent business, Sahib, and that you had detailed me to speak for you." When a Sikh likes you, and Ajaib Singh, for some reason I couldn't fathom, seemed to like me. As I did him, with respect. "Ajaib Singh," I said, "You are an officer and a gentleman. And I hope I would have done the same for you." "Thank you Sahib," this time with a slight frown, "Also, the Adjutant was looking for you."

As indeed he was, but not for the reason I thought. He looked at me a bit warily I thought, "Sit down. What the Hell were you doing in Afghanistan, for God's sake? And who the Devil is Caroline? And when are you planning to visit the Hindu Kush, or wherever your next port of call is?"

*"I took the route through the mountains,
I ran through the Vale of Kashmir,
I ran through the rhododendrons,
Till I came to the land of Pamir. -
And there, in a precipice valley
A girl my choice I met,
Or I might have been running yet.*

Robert Frost's poem ran through my mind, but I cared not for I knew I wasn't on the carpet. In fact, just the reverse. "I went to Peshawar with Mufti Sahib to look for some engine parts, and he invited me to come to his house for dinner. He didn't tell me how far it was, but on the way I managed to improve my Pashto. Caroline I met in Kashmir but so far I never got to the Pamirs, not even the Hindu Kush." He looked at me wearily, "So far!" he exclaimed, "How old are you by the way?". Coming on twenty four Sir. As a matter of fact," I added, "Its my birthday next week.". "At this rate," he said, "By next year you'll either be a Colonel or will have come to a sticky end, probably the latter! Fortunately for you, the C.O. seems to take some encouragement from your activities. He has asked me to inform you that as of tomorrow you are promoted temporary Major and at 0500 hours you will take over command of 'A' Company until further notice." He shook his head sadly but held out his hand to me, "I suppose I should congratulate you, but for God's sake, do try and stay home for a few days, will you? And don't expect a birthday card from me."

I cannot say that my period with 'A' Company was the most exciting of the war. It was mostly routine work, a lot of O&A - Organisation & Administration - holding Company Office, which is a sort of minor court martial for defaulters, keeping

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

tabs on Platoon Commanders and carrying out organised and spot inspections, issuing Company Orders, and keeping the C.O. informed, mostly through the Adjutant, of the Status Quo. As far as the latter was concerned it was mostly *deja vu* anyway since any events out of the normal run of affairs generally got to the C.O's ears before I even knew about it!

The very first thing I did with my new duties as Company Commander was to inspect the five platoon cookhouses. A good soldier is a well fed soldier and I resolved that *my* company would not founder on that basic concept. So I stepped out smartly with the Company Jemadar at my side and headed for the first cookhouse; I was expected. I heard a voice in the distance, "Khabadari se! Sahib a gaya. Jaldi karo!" ¹⁸ A British army sergeant might have expressed the same sentiments in a more comfortable vernacular! As we walked into the cookhouse I was presented for approval with a quarter size chapatti and an appropriate quantity of dahl to keep it company. It was excellent, "Bahut accha hai," ¹⁹I mouthed, "Shabash – Well done!" And I ate the lot. And that was my first mistake. By the time we reached the second platoon, word had spread and a second slightly larger sample awaited me.

When I was tucking into my first sample the Jemadar had whispered something into my ear. Something about the dahl – lentil curry, and chapatti, but I didn't pay any attention to him. I was much too busy chomping away at the roti- food. I looked at the expectant faces in front of me and suddenly realised that, having finished off the first offering I was not going to be able to leave anything on my second plate. And there were four more to come! After that I was going to face my normal breakfast and I might have known that the C.O. was going to be sitting next to me. He looked at me with concern, though he wasn't breaking an arm or a leg! "Good morning, Naughton," he says, "Off your breakfast this morning?" Of course the old bugger knew the score very well. I grinned sheepishly, "You might have warned me, Sir." Of course this was just another of those booby traps that the new boys have to circumnavigate or fall into the pit. Mostly the latter.

*

Looking back on those days from the remoteness of my eightyth year, I marvel, not only at the seemingly casual way responsibility is handed out to subalterns barely off the mother's breast, but also at the eager way it is accepted by all and sundry. The question of competence to handle a job that you hardly knew existed, never entered one's mind. Or at least it didn't mine and I don't imagine I am much different in this respect from anybody else. I suppose it was bit like the hockey game - *Get in there and do your thing, you'll soon get the hang of it - !* Even in the field of battle when all the experienced officers are dead, a young 'one pippet' like I was when I first came to India, may well be faced with leading a company or

¹⁸ Look out! The Sahib is coming. Hurry up.

¹⁹ Very good, indeed!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

even a battalion against the enemy. Officers are expected to cope with any unexpected emergency and no excuses accepted! The saving grace is that the army is a bit like a family, when the chips are down they stick together, and a quiet word of advice from a VCO or a Sergeant Major at a critical moment would be ignored at your peril.

This should not be read as a criticism of training programmes or of decisions made by senior officers, in fact just the reverse. At full establishment there is always somebody to lead you through minefields, but if that somebody ain't there, for whatever reason, the junior subaltern had better be prepared to use his initiative and discretion. *That's why you are an officer. If you can't handle responsibility you shouldn't be wearing that uniform.*

I started off thinking about what life in India is like, with particular emphasis on the Indian Army as it was then before partition in 1947. There were a multitude of rules, mostly unwritten, that governed the social and military behaviour of all officers. Minor ones like waiting for the C.O. to take his seat at meals, or walking into a senior officer's office smoking a cigarette. Gossiping about women carried no penalty but was severely frowned upon and repeated misdemeanors would result in the offender finding himself without anybody to talk to. Socially perhaps, the most serious and, I believe, a Court Martial offence, was to accept a personal cheque from a married Memsahib. In other directions there was a deal of laxity, permissiveness one might say, like riding a horse through a dining room provided that no damage or injury was occasioned and no visiting cards left.

CHAPTER IX

NORTH AFRICA

Battalion Orders. October 2nd 1942. Lt. Naughton will proceed to Bombay as O.C. Draft to North Africa..

There was a lot more to it than that but I wont bore you with a lot of army acronyms. Let it suffice that after an interminable railroad trip across the Sind desert and down to Bombay harbour I found myself ensconced in a quite comfortable cabin on board an old pilgrim ship that hadn't done much more all its life than travel between India and Jedda which is the port on the Red Sea for Mecca. It had a redolent odour of hot Madras curry, cracked corn and hot sweaty bodies on their way to and from Mecca, a hundred thousand of them through the years. I wont guess at its age but it would not surprise me if it was a good deal older than any living person Tween, decks it had been thoroughly hosed down before our draft came aboard, in fact it is certain that no Sikh would have set foot on it otherwise.. Nevertheless, the pervasive odour of food, feces, and flesh in heat and cramped quarters would persist until its end.

My first port of call in Bombay was to my bank, Grindleys, to get some cash, only to encounter an irate manager who informed me that they had received no deposits from the Indian Army Pay Corps for over a month, all payments being withheld until I surfaced in Africa. That meant that all the cheques that I had written to settle my debts in Nowshera - servants wages, Club fees and expenses, bungalow and furniture rental and Mess fees etc, - were returned NSF. Fortunately Jim Everslie who shared my bungalow with me and was himself a bank manager, paid all my debts before any outcry. A friend in need is a friend indeed! What really grieved me was that six months later he was killed in Tripolitania and I never got the chance to see him again.

So there we were, Ron Griffiths, a subaltern from the same Sikh battalion, and I, loose for the night in Bombay with barely sixty rupees between us - that was about five pounds! Well there wasn't much we could do with that, so after some deep thought, we decided to look in on as many brothels around Colaba Hill as time would permit! And a very amusing and entertaining evening it was. At each of the houses the girls were lined up for us, all nationalities, colour and religious persuasion. Most of the "Madams" twigged us pretty soon, but evidently business was slack that evening and the girls, most of them anyway, were all smiles and jokes, some of the latter being pretty close to the bone. In fact you wouldn't have believed some of the things they were saying, and doing, and on one occasion we both took to our heels before we got dragged into the bedrooms!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

We walked out of the twelvth brothel, each of us smelling like a whore's bedroom, not surprisingly. Griff turned to me with a grin, "You smell like a whore's bedroom," he turned up his nose, "Lucky we don't have wives to go back to, you know how suspicious women can be, on occasion!" Bloody right too, I thought to myself, anybody coming home smelling like this would likely get his eyes scratched out.

It was getting on for midnight and I was beginning to think of home and mother. "What about it," I said, "That was number twelve, you want to go for broke at number thirteen, or shall we call it a day?" I forget what he said. What I do remember is walking in to a house that looked like Ann Hathaway's cottage and almost into the arms of two French girls whose looks would have melted the heart of a brick wall. With hair, not mine, in my face I was struggling to get away, when I caught a look on Griff's ugly phizog. They wanted thirty rupees apiece, and as I said, that was exactly all we had between us "It isn't too far to walk back to the ship," says Griff, "Is it?" ²⁰

Our ship cast off at 0900 hrs, and if you have ever seen a pierhead jump you'll know what I mean. We only just made it made it, and Griff turned to me, "It was lucky we had all that exercise last night or we would have been swimming right now!" I agreed heartily, though I wasn't quite sure to what exercise he was referring.

*

The voyage across the Indian Ocean. In the water we passed through schools of Portugese Men 'O War. Huge big jelly fish some thee feet in diameter and a kiss from any one of them would put a man out for a week or more, or kill him if he hadn't said his prayers. Needless to say there were no requests for swimming. I thought there were plenty of sharks, though someone told me that you never find a shark anywhere near those graceful but deadly jellyfish.

On board ship there was not much to claim my attention. My draft, all Sikhs, some fifty three of them were well behaved and under the eagle eye of a Jemadar, contented themselves with gymnastics and wrestling to keep in shape. As all the main hatches were kept open to improve ventilation below decks, the jawans were always to be found in that vicinity. It was here that I learned another lesson, which I'll never forget. Below the open hatch there was another on the lower deck, which was covered. About the size of a boxing ring, it was a handy place to store sacks of ata from which they made their chapattis. I often went down there and chatted with the jawans and their senior NCOs

²⁰ After reading that paragraph, my editor concluded that our visits were on a professional basis. The thought 'twelve times in one nighr' did not occur to her and I wondered what sort of stamina she attributed to the average male!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

A couple of days out of Bombay the Jemadar came up to my cabin with a problem. "What are we going to do about the ata²¹, Sahib?" he asked me anxiously. I had no idea what he was talking about and intimated as much.. "The sacks you stepped over are now unclean, and the jawans will not eat it." This was a facer indeed. I did know that stepping over food means that dirt from one's body drops onto the food and renders it uneatable and I had just not been thinking.

"I am sorry about that," I said, with a confidence I did not feel, "Leave it with me and I will have them replaced." But light was beginning to dawn! Gurkhas are not too fussy and there was a draft on board whose O.C. was a friend of mine, and a chess whiz, from the old Drunken Duchess. David Cruikshank. In no time at all we were sitting in my cabin nursing chota pegs and comparing notes." Fact is, Old Chap," I confided in him, "I need a coupla of sacks of ata, and I wondered if you have any going spare." He looked at me curiously, "Don't tell me that you are running short already? In any case we are a bit short ourselves - only got enough to keep us going until we get to Aden."

"Oh, that's all right," I said, hopefully, "I can let you have a couple of sacks in exchange." David wrinkled his brows thoughtfully, "Ata is ata, Old Boy. What's the matter with it, mixed with rat shit or something?" I hastened to reassure him, "No, no. Its quite alright. Its just that I, er, just --" David burst out laughing, "So you cocked your leg over it and scattered your crabs over their food! Don't worry, we will do a little exchange." So everybody was happy and none the wiser, I hoped! My Jemadar, who was no fool, congratulated me later on the new ata, "That ata is very good indeed, Sahib. Bahut achha hai." he said, looking me with a straight the face, "What did you do with the old stuff?" "Oh, that's probably down at the bottom of the ocean by now." I said with a modicum of truth.

It wasn't long before we docked at Suez. The road out of Cairo to the west is a ten mile, arrow straight dual carriageway that points to Mena and the three big pyramids where it does a ninety degree turn to the North. 125 miles away is Alexandria which is the main port for east Mediteranean. Two or three miles up that road from Mena is Cowley and two Indian Reinforcement camps It was to the second one of these camps that I duly delivered my Sikh draft. I had been expecting to join my battalion with the 4th Indian Division near El Alamein. There was something pretty big in the wind and though nothing was official there was little doubt that Jerry was going to face a concerted push to the West in the very near future.

Indeed it was several two days after my arrival in Cowley that I got my marching orders and was driven off in the direction of Alex to join my battalion with the 4th Indian Division.

Somebody once asked me if I was disappointed not to be in the thick of the

²¹ Ata is basically staple diet, being flower of milled corn, from which chapattis are made.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

Alamein offensive. I can't say I ever really thought about it, one way or the other. No doubt about it, there was a lot of shit flying about, most of it being to the North of the line, if you can call it that. There was quite a bit of skirmishing - though if you were in the middle of it I am sure it would have been lively enough for anyone - towards the Quattara Depression. Effectively, as I understood the situation, the 2th/11th Sikh Battalion and the 4th Indian Division, of which it was part was supposed to be straddling the Ruweisart Ridge right in the middle of the Eighth Army line up. There was not a little confusion about who was where and when. In a major offensive this is to be expected particularly when the topographical features are not easily recognisable and for the most part obliterated by Khamsin²² storms and friendly and enemy action. So it will be understood that at the Brigade level no one was going to break an arm and a leg to help a disoriented subaltern who didn't know where his war was!

Eventually, after kicking my heels around BHQ for the better part of the day, the Brigade Major located me. "Where the Hell have you been, Naughton," I thought to myself, I've heard that question before! "We've had a signal from Q Echelon in Cairo. You are to return to Cowley forthwith." I thought he was going to say that I was going to miss the fun, but he didn't. Perhaps he had had all the fun he needed for the rest of his life.

But he hadn't quite finished with me yet. "I see you got your Commission out of the Commandos," he said, looking at a document on his table, "Number Nine, wasn't it?" But he didn't wait for a reply, "Your CO there, Colonel Seagert; he's an uncle of mine and apparently spoke well of you. Anyway Cowley wants somebody to organise the battle inoculation programme down there and you seem to fill the bill. There's a Havildar outside waiting for you, Kharram Singh, and he's going to drive you back in comfort." He looked up and smiled, "Well, Good Luck and don't blow yourself up too often, and don't kill too many jawans either."

The last admonition referred of course to the fact that the Battle Inoculation course had to be pretty realistic in order that the trainees got to know what it was really like to come under enemy fire. That meant that there was going to be lots of live stuff flying around, just like on the field of battle, and if you didn't keep your head, and other parts of your anatomy down, you were liable to have them rearranged. So some minor casualties were not to be unexpected

It was early in November, the day when Rommel began to withdraw the Afrika Korp, and only a couple of days before the US "Torch" landings began, that first light saw us heading back to Cowley with Kharram Singh. The eighty mile trip back to Alex was pretty good going, a lot of it across the desert since the Eighth Army supply convoys were hogging the road, such as it was. Jerry was well out

²² Khamsin is the Arabic word for fifty, which is the number of hours the storm supposed to blow for fifty hours

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

of range by that time and most of the minefields and the safe areas between them had been marked out. Nevertheless, even though Kharram Singh was reputedly an old hand at this sort of thing I was pretty glad when we got well clear of Alamein.

Getting in to Alex by midday we topped up our jerrycans and took off without delay for Cowley, some hundred and twenty miles away. Halfway down, on the other side of Wadi Natrun there was - still is I guess - a bunch or small pyramids that I thought were the Abusir group, and we stopped off here and had a brew up to admire the scenery. We had rations for two days and I was just beginning to think that it was going to be bully beef and dog biscuits for lunch when Kharram Sing, with a big grin across his face, produced a couple of sealed packages from a Bren gun pouch. They turned out to be American K Ration. I'd heard of them, much as one might hear of El Dorado, but never seen one before. Without thinking I spoke in English, "Where the Hell did you get them from?" And Kharram responded in kind, though his idiom left something to be desired, "Asking no lies, Sahib," he said, "Not getting no pack drill." You will recall that the Americans were still in the Atlantic somewhere at that time but I remembered that the Yanks had been in Kashmir - and putting up all the local prices too - about the time I was up there, so I guessed the old rascal had been doing a bit of foraging somewhere! My K ration, entitled *breakfast* contained a tin of something that called itself 'Ham and Eggs', some dried fruit and biscuits, three cigarettes and some toilet paper, from which I presumed that the GIs were expected to shit first thing in the morning.!

After lunch we drove the old Bedford into the desert and hid it behind some scrub well out of sight from the road and set off on foot to have a look at the pyramids. However they were further than they looked, must have been several miles away, and to complicate matters Wadi Natrun boasted a few quicksands. We skirted one patch only to be faced with a second when the sky turned black and we were in the middle of a dust storm. For a moment I thought it was the dreaded Khamsin which blows for fifty days, so we crouched down and covered our faces as best we could. A few thoughts went through my mind, none of them very heartening. Strangely enough the most recurrent thought was me standing in front of the Camp Commandment who was saying something like, 'What the Hell did you think you were doing? Walking across the desert to look at a bloody pyramid? Did you think you were Beau Geste or something?' And a lot more of the same no doubt.

We sat there miserably for about half an hour. Fortunately we had both brought our (luke warm) water bottles but we weren't drinking until we knew how long it was going to have to last us. But as it turned out we didn't have to worry. The storm was not much more than a dust devil with an exaggerated idea of its own importance and it faded away as suddenly as it had started, but leaving the sun blotted out for a while. The landscape now looked quite different under its blanket of dust, in fact almost unrecognisable, like after a blizzard. However the truck was only a short distance away but the moment we got to our feet I

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

remembered the quicksands. I turned round to warn Kharram Singh and as soon as I saw his expression I knew what was foremost in both our minds! "Khabadari se, Sahib." says he. You Damn right, Charlie, I thought to myself, with the greatest of care indeed!

Consulting my compass I saw that we were headed almost due South, about eighty degrees off course! In the end we got out of that rotten Wadi without mishap but then I remembered something Jim Everslie had told me once about patches of something like flour or gypsum that a truck would flounder in and never get out of. That was down in the Sind Desert and I just hoped that we hadn't parked our truck in a similar patch. However, right then, we had other things on our mind for we couldn't *find* the Damn thing. All we could see was a lot of yellow nothing stretching for ever in all directions. Eventually we practically walked right into it, covered all over with sand and dust and looking just like another bit of the desert. Until that moment I didn't know you could fall in love with a truck!

That night in the mess I was enjoying a burra peg, that's about four fingers of scotch to you infidels, when I ran into Captain Booker, the Adjutant. "Oh, Hello Naughton," he exclaimed, "I thought we had got rid of you. Didn't Monty roll out the Welcome mat for you?"

The next morning I was introduced to the Chief Training Instructor, Major Galloway who gave me an overview of my duties which didn't bear any relation to what I had been planning for the last twenty four hours! In fact it was beginning to look like I was going to be sitting on my backside while some jumped up white Sergeant Major took the jawans on forced route marches, along the Alex road, believe it or not! Well, that's what they had been doing before my arrival. One thing I was sure of. They hadn't sent me back to Cowley to sit on my backside, and I put my concerns to Major Galloway as diplomatically as possible. But there was no problem as far as he was concerned. "Take a few days to get the lie of the land, " he suggested, "And then put your thoughts down on paper and we can mull it over next week."

It was considered imperative by this time, at least by Higher Echelon, that all reinforcement troops should be subjected to a realistic style of training in order to prepare them mentally and physically for what they were going to face when they came up against the German army. This entailed getting through and under and over a number of obstacles while under fire from live ammunition and explosives, not to mention a few land mines scattered around at random. This method of training was used extensively by the Commandos in the early part of the war, but was not in general use until 1943. It was known as Battle Inoculation for which 3% casualties was considered a fair premium to pay for the resultant saving of life in actual battle.

I spent the next few days exploring the neighbouring desert. It was ideal terrain for the sort of training I had in mind. Good solid going on hard packed surfaces with lots of big dunes and rocky outcrops and kopjes that were as good as anything we had had to face in the Commandos. I needed about five square miles of this stuff, of which less than one would be dedicated to the actual assault course itself. The remainder to be used for tactical exercises under simulated battle conditions.

On the third day I ran into an old Arab and a train of three camels carrying brushwood. We stopped and communicated, somehow; in fact we became, eventually, quite friendly. I was carrying a P38 rifle with telescopic sights at the time, and he asked me some questions about it. So I fired off a half pound stick of gelignite that I had stuck on a small cliff face about a hundred yards away. It made a satisfying explosion with which he seemed quite impressed and then he picked a piece of plank about 6" by 9" and held it out at arm's length inviting me to put a hole in it! Well, I was only ten feet away and you couldn't miss anything at that range so I moved back about twentyfive yards and fired. I looked closely to see if he had all his fingers Apparently none were missing and he looked at with a big grin and held up the piece of wood with the required hole for my inspection. "Aiowa, Aiowa," he said, Quies ketir." Very good indeed. And out goes his arm again with the piece of wood so I obliged once more. Then damned if he didn't

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

want a third go!

This was getting a bit tiresome but I noticed he was standing with his legs apart so I aimed right between his knees. However, as I squeezed the trigger I remembered, since half the time they are pulling up their nightshirts and inviting admiration, how well those guys are hung and I didn't really want him to come home with anything missing. However, much to my relief, he was laughing because he thought I had missed - the piece of wood, that is. He didn't know the half of it so I told him to inspect his night shirt, which he did and promptly found the hole in it! After the hubub had died down he began to laugh again, but any further target practice was OUT!

Osman, as his name was, turned out to be a most useful acquaintance. The next time I met him I gave him a tin of fifty cigarettes and he became most cooperative. I wanted to explore the neighbouring desert and to learn a few do's and dont's and how to recognise quicksands, so Osman turned up the next day with two unloaded camels, and a couple of goatskins in case we got thirsty. First off he taught me how to mount my camel whose name was Habbiba, and how to get her to fold her legs under her, but the moment I approached her she screamed - there's no other word for it - but Osman just laughed, "Pay no attention to her," he said, "She always tries that on with anybody new!" Well, I got there somehow, with Osman's help and promptly fell off on the other side, to the vocal accompaniment of gurgles and screams and general hysteria from Habbiba. Finally I got up and stayed up, clinging onto her hump for dear life whereupon she rose to her feet like a small boat in a rough sea and looking back to me with a malicious grin on her face, spat copiously and, for a grand finale farted thunderously like a high pressure faucet full of air and water. After that all was peace.

That day we visited the Abusir pyramids, ten ten miles into the desert south of Wadi Natrun and west of the Giza group. Both camels were running amazingly smoothly, and me falling off most of the time, and Osman, with tears of laughter rolling down his face, wheeling our mounts back to pick me up. The last time I came off I got so mad that I ran flat out and did a running jump and got back onto the so called saddle. I think Habbiba was surprised for after that she was as good as gold and I never fell off again, well, that day anyway. I would have liked to stay and explore the pyramids, there were about eight of them, but I wanted to get the feel of where the Wadi Natrun started and return to quarters with a fair idea of the country to the North of our camp.

It was about 1500 hours with not more than five miles to go when I spotted a lump of something that didn't belong in the desert. It turned out to be a half track belonging to the 6/10 Baluchis with an English subaltern and a Naik, both long dead and dried blood all over the place. What the Hell it was doing out there I never found out, but it was out of petrol, battery dead, well dented and no water. The temperature inside was pretty horrific even then in November and I closed it

all up feeling a bit sick. What a terrible way to die, right out there in the desert with not a soul or sign of life. Its different when one is in the thick of battle and everybody is banging away at each other, tanks rattling and squeaking, clouds of dust and confusion and nobody knows what the Hell is going on and of course, guys getting killed and wounded all the time. It is different because you are all in the same boat; not just out there in that vast wilderness without even a Jerry to keep you company, like these two poor buggers. I said some words before we left; I hoped they were appropriate. Osman was waiting with the camels. "They have peace now," he grinned at me, "Our turn will come later!"

We had a lot of conversation, Osman and I. Between us we had a little French, a sort of synapse between Arabic and Urdu/Pusto, he some but not much English and me a bit more. Out of all that, together with our hands and facial expressions, we managed quite well indeed without any misunderstanding. So if my recollections of any conversations in Pasto, or Tajik, or Uighur or even Arabic seem a bit glib, it is because I have invoked my author's licence to present it all in my execrable, though hopefully recognisable English.

*

Back at the camp, aching in every bone and with a sore backside into the bargain, I limped into the Adjutant's office to make my report, briefly about my reconnaissance, and in some detail, of the half track we had found. Booker looked at me, quizzically, I thought, "Hello Naughton," he said "Had a good day? Water bottle empty I presume? I had a report of two Arabs on camelback appearing out of the desert, one of them answering to your description." he added, glancing at my Arab headgear. I wasn't quite sure whether the report referred to me or to Habbiba - no doubt we shared some resemblance after our toils of the day.

Booker listened in silence to my report and pulled a long face when I told him about the half track and the bodies inside it. "Thanks a lot for that, Mike. I'll call them up and give them your map reference. As for your reconnaissance, you'd better talk to Major Galloway about that. He will be expecting a report anyway." There was a faint hesitation in his voice, "I think he may have some news of interest to you. Not all bad though. "He looked at my headgear again," And get that 'dhoti'²³ rag off your head before you appear in the Mess. And have a bloody bath or something. You smell like the arse end of a camel."

Of course I should have reported to Major Galloway first. He was my senior officer and a Major to boot, but he let me off the hook. " I had a signal from Booker just now. Good work finding that half track. 'Q' Echelon will have it brought in this evening." I thought I heard a discriminating sniff from his direction. "You'll want to get changed, no doubt, and we can talk about your trip

²³ A loin cloth worn by most native Indians. Not to be recommended as a handkerchief for the ladies!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

tomorrow. Oh, and by the way; if you have a spare pip knocking about you can put it up right away. Congrats." That meant I'd have the rank of Acting Captain *and* get paid for it, but I'd get busted back to Lieutenant by anybody of Field rank or above who didn't like the look of my phiz! War substantive rank means you keep it and the only way you can lose it is by Court Martial.

In the Mess there were a few crude remarks about how I got my Captaincy so quickly, but to be fair it went with the job which was going to take all my time for a few months or until the next step, wherever it was going to be, across the Mediteraneum. Major Galloway, it was rumoured, was headed for greener pastures which meant more responsibility for yours truly. Galloway had told me that I would be acting very much under my own recognizance, given that there was nobody else to say me nay and that suited me down to the ground.

All of this must say something of my philosophy of life, if you could call it that. I call it a mixture of empiricism with a dash of common sense. Others might call it something less complimentary. Even when I was a kid at school I was a loner and never got mixed up with the gangs of mischief makers and paid for it *too* in loss of popularity. I was never very good at team sports, not really very interested. But I loved climbing up trees and flag posts and drainpipes and once I got stuck on the top of an exposed roof, after lights out at school and would have been there all night had not my best friend *and* enemy, Peter Borchers, come up and rescued me. Nobody ever found out about that escapade. When I was about sixteen I started a cigarette factory - I found I had a few friends there - and we turned out some pretty good quality smokes at half the price you would pay in the shops. Unfortunately the masters found out about *that* enterprise, gave us all a walloping and confiscated the equipment. We had a chemical laboratory and when we were old enough to be allowed to use it, I started manufacturing gunpowder - and testing it. Next came nitroglycerine, but fortunately it was unsuccessful, or I wouldn't likely be talking about it now..

Of course during my school days and into the early days of the war I didn't have the same freedom to follow my own bent. There was always someone waiting to give me a good whack if I stepped out of line. It was only when I got into the Commandos where personal initiative was encouraged that I found my metier. It was not that there was any great revelation, in fact I am sure I was completely unaware of the way my life was developing. In some ways, having little or no imagination, I would welcome responsibilities not only without any thought as to my capability in responding to them, but extrapolating them along my own lines far beyond what originally had been envisaged. It wasn't even that I had confidence in my own ability. It was just that it did not even remotely occur to me that the job might be too big for me or even that there could be any way to do it other than my way!

Some people might consider me to be a super egotist and indeed that might well

be so. I would certainly not contest them in their view, but I would argue most vehemently with them that I had ever seen myself as such. Or is that the mark of the true egotist? I would not say that any of my projects, be they military, engineering, or recreational, worked out well. They worked out the way I wanted them to work out and the ultimate accolade was that I never heard a single word of criticism of any of my projects, constructive or otherwise. Perhaps they really couldn't figure out who it was I had on my side. Any more than I could!

After about a week of traipsing about the desert, mostly with my two friends, Osman and Habbiba, I had a fair idea in my head of what I wanted to do. That is to say, the configuration and length of the course, the location and type of obstacles, and how to simulate actual assault conditions without creasing too many backsides. Additionally I needed a sort of control post in a position from which I could view the entire course from start to finish. Obviously I couldn't do all the work myself so I was going to need a work force to get everything into position. I produced a sand table of my proposed course on a scale of 1000/1 and sat down with Major Galloway to discuss it. Not that there was a lot of discussion "I dont know how you fellows think up all this stuff. " he exclaimed, "You mean to tell me that while the jawans are struggling through these obstacles, you are going set off mines and fire at them with machine guns?" Well we weren't going to fire *at* them, just close enough to make them keep their heads down. "That is what it is going to be like out there when Jerry is throwing everything he's got at them." I pointed out, "They'd better get used to the feeling of being shot at before facing the real thing."

Galloway looked at me rather unhappily. "And what about all those mines and other fireworks going off around them? We don't want them going home with bits and pieces missing and not having fired a shot in anger." he said. "I suppose you know that you are only allowed 3% casualties?" However he seemed somewhat mollified after I had explained that I did not expect to have *any* casualties. 'I hope,' I added to myself. He asked a few more questions about cost, time and manpower. Well, it wasn't going to be much in the way of materials, some timber and nails, a couple of rolls of danert - barbed wire - 1000 rounds of ammo and some bricks of guncotton. "I'll also need, I would say, a section of REs²⁴ to build the obstacles and the command post and connect the charges to the control panel therein."

Three days after my discussion with Major Galloway I got my REs plus a subaltern, Ian Russel by name, who was to supervise the construction work which then began in earnest. The actual assault course, when finished, wound its serpentine way around a high point at the top of which was located the control post. From that position I could see each obstacle and observe the antics of the jawans who were trying to surmount them. There were barbed wire entanglements, two foot diameter pipes to crawl through, cliffs to scale and descend and a twelve foot jump down into soft sand, etc. To add to the fun there

²⁴

Royal Engineers.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

were Bren guns enfilading the sufferers on fixed lines and slabs of guncotton in deep sand on both sides of the obstacles. From my command post I could fire any of the charges simply by depressing a push button of which there was one for each and every charge. At various points we threw training grenades and fired pistols and rifles at the combattants, always being careful to aim off.

The men went through in groups of five and were supposed to operate as a *chupau*²⁵ and look after their wounded. Various refererees would shout out information like "You're wounded", or "You're dead," or "You're walking wounded," and his pals had to make sure he was dead or carry him out. Always under fire. With about thirty minutes between groups we got about thirty men through the course in a day and in a three month period close on 1500.

While the progress of inoculation went forward with no apparent lack of success and only two minor casualties, it was somewhat complicated by the fact that a camel track, invisible to the infidel eye, wound its way right through the middle of 'hostilities'. On one occasion a train of no less than eight camels found itself involved in the action, and the fracas was not improved by the participants who thought the scenario had been devised to introduce some local colour and treated the animals as natural obstacles,

As part of these exercises, I organised a demonstration of the booby trapping tactics employed by the departing Germans. It was not considered fair play to blow up any of our own people, even for the sake of reality, and in actual fact there were very few volunteers for the honour. Consequently the explosives had to be placed strategically, that is to say, close enough to the participants that they got the message but without the inconvenience of becoming a casualty statistic. There were also a number of spectators including a Brigadier, all of whom seemed to be enjoying the scene much more so than the participants !

Each of the charges was a 1 lb. block of guncotton which, buried in the sand, made a very nasty bang but didn't do much damage other than throw up a lot of sand over everybody. Normally the charge would be placed as close as possible to the actuating switch but in this demonstration it was offset by about twelve feet or so and connected to the contact point by a length of instantaneous fuse buried in the sand where it could not be seen. The term 'instantaneous' is a misnomer. It burns, leaving a trail of smoke visible to the eye, but too fast to do anything about it, certainly not over a twelve foot length. Another type, detonating fuse, really is instantaneous, in human terms. Burning at the rate of some 12,000 meters, that's over seven miles, give or take a bit, per second which doesn't allow much time to take evasive action.

This was the situation then as two cautious stalwarts were carefully examining the door of a hut to ascertain if it had been boobytrapped. It had of course, and it was

²⁵

Patrol

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

at this moment that I noticed the Brigadier standing close to the buried charge. I guess it was a conscious decision of mine to refrain from warning him. He was in no danger, and after all nobody had told me that Staff officers were exempt from battle inoculation, so I quietly held my peace but kept one eye on the Bragadier and one on what was happening at the door of the hut.

Presently there was a creak as then the door started to open, followed by a sharp crack as the fuse flamed its way directly for the Brigadier. For sure he saw it coming but he didn't have a hope in Hell of doing anything about it. After he had dusted himself down, rather carefully I thought, he turned to me with what I interpreted as a friendly smile, "Naughton", he said very quietly, "I'll have you bloody well Court Martialled for this you bugger!" Of course he was joking and, I thought, for a Brigadier, he was taking it very well. Or was he? About a couple of month later it was brought home to me that he had a long memory and that our relations had been less friendly than I thought! However more of that later.

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It was interesting to observe the way in which the various ethnic groups resolved the problems of dealing with the the dangers to life and limb in a real war. The ones that stood out among all those 'Indian' - there was no Pakistan in those days - groups were, to my eye, the Sikhs, Gurkas and Garwhalis, and the Mahrattas. In character and individuality and language, they were quite disparate. The Sikhs are among the most individualistic of all. They are neither Moslem nor Hindu and are remote from the Buddhist beliefs. Their clothing and personal hygiene is prescribed for them by their religion and is closely observed. They never cut their hair but contrive to keep it neat by rolling the beard tightly against the face and chin and at all times. The long hair - kase - which is twisted and rolled into a topknot together with two other items is one of the five personal features that are prescribed also by their religion. The other four - kangi, kashera, kura, and kirpal²⁶ - they are never without. If they are given an order they will never question it, but will always assess the situation in the light of common sense.

The Gurkhas and Garwhalis who are descended from the tribes of Rajputana and are basically Hindu in their beliefs but are fairly free and easy in the interpretation of their religious dogma. They mostly wear their hair cut bristly short, but always keep a twist of hair long enough to be pulled up to their reincarnation. Essentially cheerful mountain men, strong to the point of indefatigability, they always carry a Kukri which is a heavy curved knife suitable for shaving, though I don't think I ever saw one with a beard, or for cutting off bullocks' or enemies' heads. The Germans were scared stiff of them and I would be too if one of them came at me with a Kukri!

²⁶ Kangi – comb, kashera – underpants mode out of a single piece of cloth, kura – the steel bangle, sometimes more than one, worn on the wrist and kirpal – a miniature reproduction of the ceremonial Sikh sword.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

When they are given an order they will obey implicitly, but they will never, ever jump off a cliff. They will simply run down the cliff, surefooted like mountain goats. While I am sure most people have a good idea about that surefootedness I hope I may be allowed to digress briefly in order to illustrate this point. On the south side of the Bay of Naples is the Sorrento headland which hosts a mountainous ridge not much higher than a thousand feet. I was stationed there in the castle of Castelammare, and in my spare time spent many hours running up and down the mountain. There were a lot of nimblefooted goats there and I often tried to keep up with them - of course they always lost me. Once though I chased a goat up a trail that I knew led to a dead end, a circular sort of amphitheatre with 100 foot vertical sides that a fly could not climb. I came round the corner expecting a charge, but of the goat there was no sign! And no way he could have escaped. It didn't occur to me to look up until a couple of stones fell down from the top, and there he was, delicately pushing off another stone with his front hoof, looking down at me quizzically as if to say, "Fooled you there, didn't I!" There's a lot in common between that goat and the Gurkhas!

The Mahrattas, basically Hindus, deriving their name from 'Maharashtra (a word in Sanscrit meaning Great Kingdom) in the 15th Century were probably the most powerful and extensive race in India. Had it not been for the growing Sikh power in the latter part of that century, they would have bid fair to have ruled that continent from the Indus to Madras. Shivaji, their king who was more Rajput than Mahratta was a powerful ruler with far more influence than the Mogul Empire. As a race they were small and wiry and, though not powerfully built, were possessed of unusual stamina and it was said of them that they could out run the Matabeles of Central Africa.

I didn't see many Mahrattas at my training camp, but was most impressed with the few that took part in it. In intelligence they equalled the Sikhs but were small and skinny and it was my impression that their heart was not really in any fight that was not of direct benefit individually or to their race.

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At that time Ian Russell was a full Lieutenant and on duty I outranked him. Off duty one pip didn't make much difference and we spent a lot of our free time checking out the high spots, and a few of the low as well, in Cairo. I won't say we didn't get into any mischief, in fact one evening with two of us on a motor cycle we snatched the red Fez off the heads of two policemen, and created quite a stir in the mess when we walked in wearing our purloined headgear. But not for long. The adjutant poked his nose round the corner and told us to get those flower pots off our heads before the C.O. arrived. We had to hide them pretty quickly. Another time I had to go up to Port Said to talk my way into getting authorisation for the release of some rather special explosive devices. I took Ian with me and since we weren't due back at Cowley until noon the following day we took the

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

advice of one of the 'Gabardine Swine' and went to see what he described as a very popular cabaret. As cabarets go, I've seen better, but neither of us were prepared for the star performance which involved a donkey and a female performer. I won't say that either of us closed our eyes, but I felt pretty sick about it and so did Ian. It was one thing to be laughing and joking with the girls in the Bombay brothels, but this was just a depraved show which left a bad taste in the mouth and we were glad to get out of the place.

Back in Cairo we did the rounds between Shepherds Hotel, Groppis, The Bardia which was a middle of the line night club, and on one occasion we got invited by the C.O. together with Major Galloway, to a tomasha at the exclusive Gezeira Club. The place was stiff with more red tabs and gold braid braid than I knew existed. At least we didn't have to pay for our drinks. We were settled into a quiet corner where there were no red tabs when who should come along but old loud mouth Booker, our unloved adjutant. "Why, if it isn't Captain Naughton himself," he said in a voice that could have carried to Alamein. "Been blowing up any more generals lately?" Then, looking over his shoulder, I saw the general in question, well he was only a Brigadier, very pointedly not looking in my direction. Booker caught the situation and smirked. "Better buy me a drink, young fellah, and I'll put in a good word for you! " He was obviously enjoying himself, and more obviously had more to drink than was good for him. I was wondering how to put a stop to this boorishness without attracting any more attention when Major Galloway stepped in quietly, "I say Booker, why don't' you stop making an arse of yourself." he inquired. And that was the end of that. Or should have been.

There was not much love lost between the Allied forces and the Egyptians. When it had seemed that Rommel was going to sweep us out of the country, the Wogs, as they were known universally, never lost an opportunity to make things difficult for us and this included anything from throwing liquid boot polish over our uniforms to raping our womenfolk down some dark alley. Not surprisingly this led to a number of reprisals by the British and Allied forces. The situation was brought to mind when I took a Gurkha subaltern with a section of jawans out into the desert to take up some Danert stakes that had been installed for the defence of Cairo Perimeter, had it been necessary. When the truck could not be driven any further, the Gurkha officer told his men to pile their rifles, and detailed one jawan to stand guard over them. "Dont let anyone come near the rifles." he instructed the man. The little Gurkha saluted vigorously with a big grin and off we went across the desert. We returned, loaded with Danert stakes and all was peaceful as it was when we left. With one exception. There was a pile of dirty washing at the guard's feet, and inside the rags was one very dead Wog.

The young Gurkha officer, a Britisher newly out from England, looked in horror at the body. "My God," he exclaimed, "What are we going to do? What will the C.O. say? What, what - - - "he stopped, speechless, looking at me, probably hoping it was all a bad dream. "Pull yourself together, Man," I exclaimed brusquely,

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

"There's a shovel attached to the truck. Detail a jawan to fetch it. Jaldi!" This was no time for explanations and I gave the Gurkas orders to dig a grave four feet deep which they did with great gusto and happy grins. After the chap was buried decently I stood over the grave and gave the Arab equivalent for the sign of the Cross and said "Insh,Allah" - Go with God - and that was the end of it!

Burying dead Wogs was not one of my responsibilities though this last incident illustrates some of the varied situations that fell to my lot with brand new subalterns who were barely out of High School and didn't know their arse from their elbow.

One day Major Galloway asked me to take a group of these young fellows, somewhere safe, and initiate them in the handling of grenades. This meant a trip into the desert where they couldn't do any damage to expensive equipment, or to themselves, hopefully! We drove around for a while and eventually found some slit trenches about three feet deep which were ideal for the job, well, almost ideal!

Grenades are a handy item, look like a little pineapple and about the size of a cricket ball, only rather more lethal. There is a lever which is locked in position by a safety pin. When the pin is pulled out it releases the lever which, if not restrained by the throwers hand, strikes a detonating cap and in turn sets off a seven second fuse. After the time delay the grenade explodes, and it is advisable for health reasons not to be around at that time. The procedure is to pull out the safety pin, throw the grenade forward as far as possible and take cover. Nine out of ten will do just that the first time. The odd one will throw it among his companions, or throw it straight up in the air so that it falls at his feet, or dropping it after removing the pin. It will be understood therefore that during the exercise only one man throws at a time, while the instructor and his companions follow the trajectory with keen interest. It is not to be surprised that a live grenade falling in your direction focusses the mind to the exclusion of all else! Nevertheless seven seconds would be enough time to pick it up and throw it back. The one you have to watch out for is the fellow in the slit trench who pulls out the pin and then drops the grenade between his feet. If he hesitates he'll probably dither, thinking about his alternatives and the consequences, by which time he's dead, likely together with some of his fellows

One chap did manage to throw his grenade vertically upwards and when that happens you don't know whether its going to fall in the trench or land on the flat until the last moment. If its the former you get out of the trench, fast! Otherwise you stay down, well down. But you can't make the decision until you know for sure where its going to land. I held my left hand out, palm down and looking up, signalling the seconds with my right. It went into the trench, so I yelled out "OUT" Or something like that. Of course the Damn thing didn't go off. Which was just as well, for our booby was still standing there, growing roots! Those things can be delayed sometimes; the braid on the fuse maybe smolders for a

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

moment before the powder catches. Who knows. Anyway I shouted a few encouraging words to him and he got the message.

Now there was a dud at the bottom of the trench, and that had to be disposed of. The only way I knew was to lie down flat on the ground and take the pin out of another grenade but holding onto the lever. Then when all was ready, you let the lever fly off and very, very gently place it as close to the dud as possible but not touching. After that there's nothing to be done except roll over rather fast, close your eyes and bury your head in the sand and count the seconds. You have to do more or less the same thing if there are any duds lying on the surface. They must be picked up after a visual inspection and *carefully* piled, together with a live grenade which has just six seconds to live. Then you roll back into the slit trench, smartly.

We also used training grenades which were relatively harmless with a case of thin bakelite. They had a steel ball inside a cavity and when the grenade hit the ground the ball bounced around and hit the a detonator which was embedded in the side of the cavity. In the middle of the cavity the ball was held away from the detonator by the safety pin which dropped away when the grenade was thrown. In the case of a dud you just picked it up carefully angling it so that the ball was remote from the business end and then inserted the pin. As I said, these things were harmless, and so they were if you were ten yards away but I would not like one of them to go off in my hand.

One day Ian and I took off to explore the pyramids at Giza. There are three in that group which includes the Sphinx. The Great Pyramid KHUFU (Cheops), 756 feet high is the highest of them all, but about ten feet of the tip was missing at the time. This was outlined by an angle iron framework showing the original dimensions of the missing tip. We had already climbed to the top of this one, so we and moved on KHAFRA 'Chephren' which is the middle of the three, a bare 48 feet lower, though without any visible means of access. The third and smallest of the three, MENKAURE (Mycerinus), is only 356 feet high but allowed us to crawl into a passage through a hole in a barred steel gate gale just below ground level. There were no signs forbidding unauthorised entry and had there been we would probably not have seen them.

We had not brought any torches and the few matches we had did little to relieve the stygian darkness. The tunnel declined down into the pitch black dark by about ten per cent and into this we crawled on our hands and knees illuminated by the fading glimmer of light filtering through the gate behind us. We rationed out our matches striking one, then crawling a few feet and striking another until I hit my head against an abrupt T turn. We crouched there for a moment pondering our next move. I know what I was pondering and that was to retrace our knee steps without delay.. "Ian," I said, "Where the Hell are you?" "I'm right here, behind you. Let's get out of this hole and get some torches." Turning round wasn't too

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

easy in the confined space but I managed. "Oh, Shit!" came from in front of me. "What's the matter - - - Oh!" I suddenly knew what the matter was - there was no glimmer of light down the tunnel. "Go on a little bit." I said, "There's only rock on either side, but don't take any turnings!" I don't know how far we crawled, it seemed like a mile but it couldn't have been more than a few yards, and there was the good old glimmer again. The tunnel had levelled out as we were coming in, blocking the, now, barely discernable light from the entrance.

A week went by before we were able to have another go at it, but this time we came well equipped with torches and candles, and plenty of matches. Following the same route we soon came to the main burial chamber, the Mastaba I think it is called. Not a big room, maybe twenty feet square, with a plinth in the middle and nothing else. Of Mycerinus not a sign. To our right, as we entered, there was an opening with three or four steps down to what we took to have been Queen Khamerernebt's Chamber. Just another plinth in the middle, but with some ten or so empty cavities for her retinue. Not very exciting and we were just beginning to think about returning when my flash lamp caught an opening, maybe three feet square, high in the wall, about ten feet up.

Only one of us could go up and somehow I was elected, for better or for worse. So I climbed on Ian's shoulders and dragged myself into the hole. The passage behind it was quite symmetrical and angled up at about thirty five degrees; not easy to crawl up but needs must that I go on to investigate. Ian was down there calling for bulletins every few seconds while I had my work cut out scrabbling up the slope. The passage took a bend to the left not more than ten feet from me. Just around the corner was a sarcophagus angled across the passage and jammed between its sides. On the top of the sarcophagus its lid, which must have weighed a ton, was half on/half off. It looked as if all it needed was a dirty look to bring it sliding down in my direction. I shouted out to Ian, "Keep clear of the hole, there may be a ton of rubble shooting out at any moment..

As I spoke there was a soft tremulous sound from the direction of the sarcophagus from which, at that moment, a dark, diaphanous cloud of no apparent form or substance was issuing and advancing in my direction. In fact it enveloped me. It was time for me to go, which I did at high speed down the passage and shot out into the Chamber below accompanied by that fearsome miasma, and missing Ian by a whisker.

"Good God," cried Ian, "What's that noise up there?" We looked up and the ceiling was covered by a dark swirling, glittering mass of bats. Must have been thousands of them, barely a couple of feet above our heads! We made tracks for Home and Mother without wasting too much time. Normally I don't mind a bat or two, but I imagined them all flying down our exit tunnel and suffocating us.

When we emerged from the tunnel there was an Egyptian policeman on horseback waiting for us. "I was waiting to see if you got out," he said gravely, "Not

everybody does!"

From Port Said to Suez is close to one hundred miles with Ismalia being the halfway point. The first half from Port Said, though bordering the Nile Delta is separated from it by the road and railway and is pure canal without very much of interest until it runs into Lake Timsah at Ismalia. Further south are the Great Bitter Lakes which extend twenty five miles almost to Suez. and about ten miles across at their widest point. Timsah and the Bitter Lakes are connected by a few miles of canal dominated by Abbasia which was a huge Ordinance Supply Depot.

Whenever we could get away, which wasn't very often, I would go down to the lakes for a swim in the briny water which was almost as salty as the Dead Sea. One of those days when you cant wait to get in the water, we found a little pool surrounded by trees sheltering it from the burning sun. Ian, who was changed already, flung his clothes off and plunged in while I was getting into my trunks. He was standing up in about four feet of water and I looked down at him in unadulterated horror. The pool must have been some sort of outflow from the Ordinance camp sewage, and I dont need to tell you what was floating all around him! "Ian, I shouted at him, "Dont move. Look around you." He did not actually scream, but he couldn't have been more terrified had the pool been full of Pirahanas! He got out of the pool, gingerly, you might say, with some suspicious brown marks on his chest.

There was a standpipe nearby and Ian made a beeline for it and stood there for ten minutes frantically washing himself down. I couldn't help seeing the humourous side of his little adventure but I don't think he saw the joke!

That was in the Great Bitter Lake so we decided to go upstream a bit to Lake Timsah. Ian thought it was safer, but privately I didn't think anywhere was going to be much better than the Sweetwater Canal. And if you fall in that stretch of water they don't even bother to pull you out! Once I was watching an Arab sitting on the banks of the canal with a pile of water melons by his side. He had a hyperdomic syringe with which he was pumping something into each of the melons, the 'something' being the noxious fluid from the Sweetwater Canal.

Anyway, we had our swim in the Timsah, but I guess it was not our day. There was a luxurious looking ship, painted white and with more of the lines of a pleasure yacht, in the middle, so we thought it would be a good idea to swim out to it, maybe get ourselves invited aboard and scrounge a bottle of Scotch while we were at it. Alas for our hopes! When we got to about two hundred yards from the ship, some of the *fellaheen* in white nightshirts started running around. We stopped swimming and trod water for a moment to see what the fuss was about. Well, we soon found out as bullets started peppering the water around us "I don't thing we are very popular," said Ian, disappearing under the surface. I followed suit and we swam under water until our lungs were about to burst. We knew that they were still firing for we could see the spent bullets falling through the water

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

around us so we went up and grabbed some more air. After that I think we beat all records for underwater swimming and by the time we broke surface again the marksmen seemed to have lost interest.

We scrambled out and sat on the water's edge. It was all quiet on the Wog front! "Those buggers are pretty rotten shots." says Ian, with a scornful laugh. "I could have hit me easily at that range. Or maybe they were aiming to miss." But they were not aiming to miss. "Look at your hip, Ian." I instructed him. There was a shallow gouge on his thigh just below the hip, though not bleeding very much. Ian inspected the damage with a grin. "My first war wound." he said. "Couple of inches to the left and I'd have got a DSO!²⁷. I'd like to catch one of those sods. I'd cut his balls off!" We got in the 15 cwt and headed for camp. I looked at Ian, "You OK?" Yeah, he was OK. It was only a scratch and the bleeding had stopped. "Better keep quiet about it." I told him, "If anybody sees it tell them a Wog bint tried to scratch your eyes out - or whatever! If that bastard Booker finds out you will be RTU'd and I need you for a couple more weeks yet."

We found out later that King Farouq had been on the boat at the time and his guards always shot first and asked questions later. Ian and I sang the ²⁸Egyptian National Anthem all the way back to Cairo!

²⁷ Dicky shot off.

²⁸ The first line of which, no doubt by and 8th Army lyricist, runs something like this:
King Farouq, King Farouq, Hang your bollocks on a hook - - - ' and the rest in the same strain!

CHAPTER X

SICILY AND ITALY

By this time we were well into 1943 and my work with battle training was getting thin on the ground, mainly because the step across the pond was imminent and most reinforcements were settling in at the battalion level in preparation for the invasion of, as it turned out, Sicily. The Eighth Army, still known as Desert Rats, faced the main German resistance on the East side of the island but we didn't get much action from Jerry until we reached the Plains of Catania where he decided to make a stand. It was obvious that this was where the decisive battle was going to be so we settled in and got the boxing gloves on. No one except Higher Echelon knew who was going to fire the first shot, but rumour said that it would be a week before we'd be ready for the offensive.

Somebody once asked me what does an army do when it is preparing for battle. To that I said it trained for the battle and ate and slept occasionally. And while it was doing all those things it thought about women! At Catania it thought particularly about two women who had quietly set up their tents and were making a small fortune in cash and kind not very far from the lines. It was said that half the Eighth Army passed through those portals, and no matter what one may say about the wages of sin, those two girls certainly worked for it. It was also said that towards the end, two soldiers went in to the tents, took their pleasure with them and then relieved them of all their earnings. And you can say what you like about that, but I'll tell you one thing. There wasn't a manjack in the Eighth Army who wouldn't cheerfully have put a bullet in both those rotten bastards, without a second thought!

At Catania we knocked Jerry for six but not before he had caught a few in the slips. The Yanks under General Patton had landed in the area around Palermo where nobody had ever seen a German, and in fact I don't think half of the local Sicilians even knew there was a war on! So for the GI Joes it was Wine, Women and Song and a nice leisurely stroll 150 miles up the coast road to Messina. When Monty arrived there he found Patton, Blood and Guts they called him, waiting for him at the Town Hall. Patton shook him by the hand and said, "We shure beat you Limeys to it, Monty!" To which aphorism Monty made his famous reply, "Hello George, sorry to keep you waiting but we had to knock off a couple of Boche on the way up!"

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I wont weary you with a blow by blow account of the long struggle from Salerno to the Alps. Salerno and Cassino and Anzio and the River Sangro there were some rather bloody traffic jams and the Gothic Line slowed us down somewhat but after we crossed the Arno at Florence and Pisa on the west coast it was obvious that

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

resistance was fading and with it the war in Italy. Of course by that time the Eighth Army were long gone and fighting in France and beyond. And this is all I am going to say about the war.

However it is worthy of mention that long before the war was concluded in Europe, my own particular fortunes took an unexpected twist, for the better, I think. It was when the war in Italy was not much past the Rome/Pescara line that I had an interesting experience with some partisans which, as it turned out, was a catalyst for change.

I had managed to get a few days leave and was staying in small hotel in the hills above L'Aquila in the Gran Sasso where I planned to do a bit of walking and scrambling. In the evening I would come down from the hills and back to the hotel for supper. The second day I dropped into a local Taverna and sat on my own at the end of a long table. At the other end was a boisterous gang of Italians singing their heads off. Suddenly one of their number, probably thinking to embarrass me, jumped on the table and cried out "Che canta l'Inglese!"²⁹ I wasn't feeling much pain after several glasses of wine so I jumped on the table beside him and sang 'O Solo Mio' with the original Neapolitan lyrics which I had learned painstakingly in that indescribable city. By that time my Italian was not too bad and I got on quite well with the local 'boys' who plied me with so many drinks that I had difficulty in keeping a clear head. One of the 'boys', whom I would not have liked to meet down a dark alleyway at night, had a German Luger on him and, surprise, surprise, not only a Commando knife but one of the later issue which were darkened so as not to reflect the light! He said he knew how to use them and had put away a few Germans with their aid. I asked him where he got the knife, to which he replied that he had picked it up alongside a dead German! More likely a dead Commando, I thought, but I held my counsel on that point.

All of this was conducted *sotto voce* in the dark outside the 'pub' and I was getting a tad cautious about him - you never quite knew whose side some of these fellows were on. He kept on muttering something about *cabbagio* but finally I cottoned on to the fact that was his name, Silvio di Caravaggio! My Italian, by that time was not too bad but I had great difficulty in following his speech which was in some local patois. The gist of it was to the effect that had some German maps marked up with their defensive positions that he wanted to pass over to me.

I was a bit suspicious of him for I knew that the Partisans were usually known only by their first names and likely not their own at that and I knew that it could easily have been a plant, however, in for a penny! He said he had the maps hidden at some house behind the German lines, and we spent most of the night crawling up cliffs and across muddy streams only to find that a friend had taken the maps to his house in L'Aquila. Up to then I had not seen or heard any Germans but on the

²⁹

Let the Englishman sing!

way back I smelt tobacco smoke and heard their voices away below us. It was a lookout post and I thought lovingly of dropping a grenade in the middle of their nest, if I had had one in my pocket. As if I didn't know, Silvio whispered hoarsely in my ear, "Tedeschi, Tedeschi!" The talking stopped abruptly and someone said "Wer da?" and I thought we were finished but from the other side I heard another voice, "Was is loss?" But it was only Hans or Fritz or somebody coming up with some coffee. I could smell the aroma. What could I not have done to that coffee, Ersatz though it was! 'Bastards, I thought.'

We must have returned by a different route which I certainly didn't recognise, but one thing I knew for sure, the area was stiff with Krauts, 88s, MCG nests and MKIV Tigers and how we got through without being spotted, I'll never know. Of course we didn't advertise! When we got back to L'Aquila Silvio disappeared into the darkness and I went up to my room, to wait for him. At least that was what he thought, but not being of a very trustful nature I quickly rolled up my bedding roll and stuck my Commando knife, which I generally kept nice and handy, in my belt. Then I threw my stuff in the jeep and found a nice dark corner to wait in.

It wasn't long before Silvio turned up and headed for the hotel door, as quiet as a mouse. As sure as Hell I never heard him, and I would never have seen him if he hadn't walked in front of a distant dim light. I assumed it was Silvio, but he who takes no chances lives longer, and stepped behind him quietly with one arm round his neck and my knife at his throat. It was Silvio though he was somewhat peeved. "Quasi mi son' fatto nelle braghe" ³⁰ he complained, though with a relieved laugh

Just then he noticed my Commando knife, it was the original style - bright metal with a cross hatched handle. I knew he wanted it; so we swapped it and he gave me his in exchange. And to this day I still have it as a strong reminder of many things.

Silvio peered around apprehensively in the darkness. I counted a few shadows myself! "There a few *maladett*³¹ around," says he, "Better get moving before we get our throats slit". I gave him a friendly punch, "Buona Fortuna." I whispered and headed for the jeep with an eye over my shoulder. Stuffing the maps under the jeep seat, I took off the brake and rolled silently down the hill with no lights until I was clear of the town.

It was seven in the morning when I got back to camp, not at my brightest after my nocturnal outing and dug out the Adjutant without delay. Together, for the first time we both looked at the maps as I explained the circumstances. Old Rat Face - that was what we affectionately called him - scratched his head." You realise that these may be a plant, don't you?" After I had looked at them I knew Damn well that they were a plant for the area we had come through on the way back was shown to be lightly defended! But I never did discover who planted who, but I

³⁰ "I nearly shit my pants!"

³¹ Lit: Cursed. Traitors.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

liked to think that Silvio was straight. At all events, Jerry out guessed himself.

To cut a long story short, we feinted at the strongly held positions but did an encircling movement in strength, cutting off the whole of the 164th Regiment and elements of the 90th Light and the 21st Panzer Division. I came out of the whole *tomasha* smelling slightly of roses and there was some loose talk of a medal floating around, but I think old Rat Face got it and probably deserved it more than I! Later on the Colonel shook me by the hand and gave me some interesting news. I was to be seconded to some Cloak and Dagger outfit, Jugoslavia he thought, where my command of languages (!!!) could be utilised for the common weal.

One thing I wouldn't have gotten a medal for was a little argument with a burly farmer that ended in a challenge to a duel over a few grapes I was stealing from his vinyard. Funny thing was neither of us issued a challenge but somehow there was agreement between the two of us that we were committed to a duel! For the life of me I can't remember who was with me at the time - my partner in crime! We were both standing at the side of the dirt road munching away happily when over the horizon hove this large individual dressed in riding britches and carrying a shot gun, red in the face and brandishing his gun at me. After a not too complimentary dialogue, I pointed out that it was all very well to offer insults and threats when pointing a gun, but - - - -, well I forget what I said, but he responded by holding out a horny hand and said, "La Mano!"³² That meant I accepted his challenge - or he mine! So I said, ³³ "Domattina, alle ore sei. Spade!" My partner in crime did not speak more than a few words of Italian, but he got the gist of what had been going on. "You must be crazy," he complained, "You'll be for the high jump if the Old Man hears about it. That's if you are not dead." I wasn't too worried though. I had a rather nice duelling sword which I had liberated from some Fascist official and I figured even if the farmer had a sword, I stood a pretty good chance of running rings around him.

Talk about laugh, the following morning at dawn, there we were, me and my two seconds waiting by the roadside for what fate might bring. I was practising a few cuts and thrusts and jumping around - to the consternation of my companions. One of them, Jim Tait, I think it was, said "For fuck's sake, Naughton. Stop farting about before you fall on your sword." And a lot of other derisory remarks.

Time went on and after half an hour or so and no sign of the farmer, we decided that honour was satisfied and went back to camp only to find that the secret was out and were met with surreptitious grins over the breakfast table! Nobody said anything, but Old Rat Face called me in to his office next day and gave me my marching orders. "I wish you luck in your new appointment. And don't get into any duels with these Jugs. They are all pretty quick on the trigger, I hear! The art of one-upmanship was very popular in the army, as I had discovered several times previously!

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I said I wouldn't talk about the war, any more so I'll quit while the going is good and take you to Northeastern Italy and Jugoslavia. where it was a different kind of war.

³² My hand on it!

³³ Tomorrow morning at 6 O'Clock Sworda!

CHAPTER XI

CLOAK AND DAGGER

The last couple of years of my sojourn in sunny Italy began in the little port of Castellamare tucked away in the south east corner of the Bay of Naples from where the rocky and precipitous spine of the headland points to Capri and the underwater remains of Emperor Tiberius's palace, dropping into the sea from Sorrento to Positano and Amalfi on the South side where Admiral Nelson left his heart so long ago. Amalfi, Positano, Sorrento, and the Isle of Capri, all beloved of songsters and lovers.

If the title of this chapter seems to ascribe some covert significance to my activities let me say that the allusion contains more than a touch of whimsy. In actual fact it was far from what many people associate with secret intelligence work. I certainly never wore a cloak and though I often carried a Commando knife, daggers were not 'general issue' nor were they deemed necessary by the 'powers that be'. The 38 Smith & Wesson, which was standard issue for most commissioned ranks, was quite suitable and deadly for up to a few yards, but a small automatic which could easily be concealed in a pocket was much preferred.

My sojourn in Castellamare lasted several of months during which time I was taught a number of things which would come more appropriately under the heading of extra curricular activities. I suppose it was all useful background experience, but as things turned out, not very much of what we learned there was of much use in the field. A bit like getting a degree in engineering and then going into politics.

Much of my free time at Castellamare was spent on the hills behind the castle, climbing the precipitous cliffs and trying to out run the mountain goats that abounded in the area. The Bay of Naples was ideal for dingy sailing though with the loose footed *lateen* rig and many was the time we crept up to the Sorrento headland though we never got to Capri for the wind always dropped before we could clear the point. One of the chaps that used to come sailing with me, Simms his name was though for the life of me I cannot recall his first name, was in a way responsible for my meeting with Bozena and our eventual marriage in 1948. When it was deemed that we had learned all we needed, or were not capable of absorbing any more, I was scheduled to go up to Thessaloniki in Northern Greece while – I have just remembered his name – Alec Simms was to go to Jugoslavia.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

But he had a girl friend in Thessaloniki – how on earth he managed that I’ll never know – but we did a swap which worked out quite well, for me anyway.

Castellamare, or for that matter anywhere in the Bay of Naples, was part of and belonged to Greater Napoli. It was run by the Mafia - the Camorra - and the black marketeers who stole from the poor and the gullible who in turn stole from anyone. If you want to employ a crook, get yourself a Neapolitan. You will be amazed at his professional competence. The only ones who are not involved in this activity are babes in arms, though an inspection of their prams is liable to reveal all manner of loot. I remember offering to help a very old lady struggling to push a baby in a pram up a 20% incline. She tried to refuse my help, but I insisted only to find that it was so heavy I could barely move it. Under the baby was a hundredweight sack of grain – purloined, no doubt, from one of the ships in harbour! Courtesy gave way to discretion which was well advised under the circumstances. Coming round the corner and heading purposefully in my direction were a couple of toughs I had no intention of tangling with.

Another time I was coming into Naples from Benevento in a 15 cwt Chevy truck with a lot of equipment in the back. We had checked the lashings on the tarpaulin before we left and had not once stopped or driven below 40 mph. As we approached Naples, knowing the propensities of our light fingered friends, I began to feel a bit uneasy. I told the driver to stop and we ran around to the back of the truck and were surprised to see two shadowy figures dropping off and disappearing into the dark. We were only just in time for all the cords had been loosened and a couple of minutes later everything worth stealing would have been thrown out. It was then that I remembered the vehicle that had been tail gating us a few miles back, close enough for an agile boy to jump the gap. The backup vehicle drops back and picks up the loot and then follows the truck until it slows enough for the boys to drop off. You gotta hand it to ‘em!

On the other hand, I had always found the Neapolitans to be a charming people and very musical and humorous and certainly intelligent. That they were poor is undeniable and poverty breeds dishonesty. But somehow I could never hold it against them.

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Talking about chasing goats in the hills behind Castellamare I had a lesson in animal sagacity when I ran a goat into a box canyon terminating in a sort of amphitheater about the size of a church hall and with vertical sides that I would defy a fly to crawl up. But there was no sign of the goat and there was no place for him to go. I stood there in uffish thought, trying to figure out where the Hell he had gone. I didn’t have to wrack my brains for long.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

Suddenly a small stone fell down almost at my feet and I looked up to see the goat standing on the parapet delicately pushing another stone over the edge with the front of his hoof. He didn't tell me how he got to the top but as sure as Hell he wanted me to know that he had outsmarted me. It was several years later in Canada when I saw another goat doing more or less the same thing. They run at the vertical wall with a good curve on it and using the centrifugal force to keep them pressed against the surface they spiral upwards until they shoot out at the top. You gotta see that to believe it though!

Eventually I was shipped off to Venezia Giulia up in the northeast corner of Italy, but 'en passant' I managed to drop off for a couple of nights at a house in Florence overlooking the Giardini Boboli, which was the newly established British Consular office, and was made most welcome.

My first port of call was Cervignano, a small town of some 5,000 inhabitants where I met my fellow conspirators, a mixed group of about twelve intelligent looking individuals of varying ranks including two Italian Tenenti³⁴ from the Intelligence Branch of the Carabinieri³⁵ – a bit akin to the CID of Scotland Yard. Ranks didn't seem to count for very much and since we were dressed, for most of the time, in civilian clothes, I will refer to my companions by name only. Philip Simons, English upper class, the son of a prosperous north country grocer and an Oxford history graduate. Geoff Hackman, whose origin escapes me, an intelligent and cultured man with reputed Communist sympathies who together with Philip I classed as the *intelligensia* of the group. Bernard Regenstreif, Jewish from Roumania with classical good looks. Women literally threw themselves at him and everybody else hid their girl friends from him. Otherwise keen, reliable and perceptive. Henry Schlessinger, British of German origin, a bit slovenly – don't think I ever saw him with a clean shirt! Intelligent but not very active. Henry Mathieu, more interested in pursuing his own interests and persuading other people to do his underhand jobs. Charles Plank, a withdrawn rather sadistic individual, not very popular but got results. He ran a small detachment at Cormons, a village a couple of miles outside Gorozia. Bill Rowe, a big lumpy Maltese with a Slovenian girl friend. He saw rapists and murderers round every corner – mind you, there were plenty of them around – and never hesitated to pick a fight on her account. I was glad, in fact I think we all were glad when he took early *demob* and emigrated to Australia where no doubt he found lots of outlet for his pet aversions. I can never remember my batman's name but he was a hard case. Always ready for anything, good sense of humour and a predilection for eating glasses and gramophone records! Then there were the two Italians, Giuseppe Bonadona, an out and out ladies man always with a smile on his face and as ready with a gun as any of Al Capone's henchmen. A most likeable chap. We called him Goodman; Good Woman, in English, would have been a bit

³⁴ A rank in the Italian forces equivalent to Lieutenant in the British army.

³⁵ Italian police force

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

provocative!³⁶ And then there was Alberto. Quiet, likeable, and competent. Straus, so called because he repaired violins and played them as well. He was not on our strength officially but he earned his keep in a number of ways, was a good cook and knew his way around the convoluted practices of Italian officialdom. Others turned up later, one got shot, another ended up in hospital after mixing it with a communist who wrapped a bicycle around him. Finally there was Charles Portanier, of whom more anon.

The two Italians were sent to us as interpreters, but as most of us spoke fluent Italian – in fact for the greater part of the time we spoke Italian or the local dialect among ourselves - we had to find more appropriate duties for them.

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Gorizia is, or was then a small town with a population upwards of 10,000, overlooked and dominated by its castle. It sits about half way between Trieste and Udine and uncomfortably close to the then demarcation line between Zone A and Zone B.³⁷ I say uncomfortably because of the high tension between the two countries arising out of conflicting border claims and recent political malfeasance – not to put too fine a point on it. The urban center of the town was wholly Italian whereas the suburbs in their turn were mainly Slovenians who had been considered *untermenschen* by the Fascist police. Through the years and without discrimination, they regularly arrested Slovenian business men and subjected them to, at the very best, an unpleasant and degrading experience, forcing them to drink castor oil mixed with engine oil or gasoline or both. These and other forms of torture and torment were practised by the Facists from the time Mussolini came into power.

At the end of the war in 1945 Tito's Partisan Army swept into the area and exacted a brutal form of retribution concentrated on the urban centers of Trieste, Gorizia and Monfalcone and to a lesser extent, Pola, or Pula as it is now known, in the Southern extremity of Istria. Reputedly, some ten thousand Italians were rounded up in pairs, their right hand wrists bound together with wire and one of each couple shot through the base of the cranium and then thrown into bottomless fissures known as *foibas*³⁸. I met an Italian once who had been the victim of one of these *foibas*. He was the last one of that day and the guards were careless in

³⁶ In the Commandos we had an instructor who taught us how to jump into a room with two revolvers and hit two separate targets simultaneously. He was reputed to have been Al Capone's right hand man. A small southern Italian, always with a cheerful smile on his face, he could fire three shots into a target and only make one hole. Goodman was his spitten image!

³⁷ The areas under dispute between Italy and Jugoslavia were divided into two zones, A and B. The former administered by the Allies and the latter by the Yugoslav Partisan Army under Tito.

³⁸ The whole of that area including the Dolomite Range to the North sits on a huge base of limestone, carso or karst, hundreds of feet thick which, by time and water erosion, are split into fissures and cracks, much like the crevasses in glaciers. The local word for one of these bottomless pits is 'foiba', of which there are hundreds.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

shooting him. Any way he had managed to free himself and later climb out of the pit. He had a nasty looking scar across the base of his skull but the bullet had not been deep enough to kill him.

“What a terrible experience that must have been for you!” I exclaimed.. “Yes,” he grimaced, “ The worst was while I was waiting my turn. But there were compensations! You will never guess how many free drinks I got out of it!”

Fortunately for many others the British Army was close on the scene, and General Morgan was able to negotiate a deal whereby the whole of the area back to the Slovenian border and including much of Venezia Giulia to the West, was split up into two zones of jurisdiction. Zone A which was administered by AMG³⁹ and policed by the British and American armies, and Zone B which came under the control of the Partisan Army. The demarcation line which, as I mentioned earlier, was a tad flexible, ran down the east side of the Isonzo River, east also of the town of Gorizia and then swinging south and east to form a loop around the perimeter of Trieste My group was responsible for Gorizia and most of the country from the Austrian Border and down to the Adriatic Sea east of Monfalcone and west to the limits of Zone A. Enough to keep us busy for a while!

Officially our responsibilities involved keeping our finger on the pulse of political activities and trends, and the vetting of the hordes of refugees that daily poured over the border from Yugoslavia and through that country from eastern Europe. In Zone B we had, as I said, no official presence or direct involvement but unofficially, since we were dealing with overlapping political and criminal activities originating over the border and overflowing into our own baileywick, it was not always easy to keep our fingers out of the pie. As is common to most political lines of demarcation, there was a wide gray area where language and political concerns are shaded by ethnic identity and subversive activities and in our own involvement that penumbra did not totally preclude us from activities outside our official *firman*, as will be seen.

We were a visible lot, always ready to turn a sympathetic ear to the sufferings of the *hoi poloi* and the wickedness of their persecutors. Most were voluble but with little to say, some interesting and a very few terse and informative All, almost without exception, were covert in their approach and ingress to our meeting places and, though not actually equipped with cloak and dagger, carried themselves furtively and light footed as if so accoutered. One I always remember used to come to see me with all kinds of information but never said a word. Instead he wrote it all down in mirror image with the instruction to commit it to memory and destroy! In the process I acquired some expertise in mirror image writing and often managed to have a greeting for him in inverse Italian!

³⁹ Originally AMGOT but shortened to AMG. Allied Military Government. Apparently Amgot was a Turkish word meaning something reprehensible, just what, I never found out

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In a way our situation in Venezia Giulia was somewhat anomalous in that we were in the American divisional area drawing PX⁴⁰ goodies, and medical services⁴¹, dependent upon the British Army V Corps (O & A) to whom we submitted returns – mostly fictitious⁴²- for pay, and NAAFI supplies – mainly Scotch whiskey – which we did draw and keeping the peace between the Jugs⁴³ and the Italians. You might say we had a foot in both camps and had we ever been accused of racial discrimination it would have been asserted that the Italian girls were much prettier than their alter egos in Tito's army! However, in those days no one ever talked about discrimination. You paid your money and took your choice!

It will be remembered that the Austro Hungarian Empire extended at the end of the First World War in N.E. Italy to the Tagliamento river which empties into the Adriatic Sea about fifty miles west of Trieste. Under the Treaty of Rapallo⁴⁴ concluded between Italy and Jugoslavia in 1920 the frontiers of Italy were moved North to include South Tyrol to the East of Tarvisio and South to encompass the Province of Istria to Fiume (Rijeka). Most of that area was known as the Julian Marches, the part west of Trieste, for security and intelligence being our responsibility. I had the better part of three years in that area, most of it in Gorizia, one whole Summer in Pola where Tito had his headquarters on island of Brioni which used to be the home of the Windischkretz family, or one of their homes and latterly in Udine where Napoleon signed his famous Peace Treaty with the House of Hapsburg. The little town of Pola, the last outpost of the Italian Empire is situated in the southern tip of Istria which was under the control of Tito's Partisan Army. Surrounded to the South by the Adriatic and to the North by occupied Istria which was not as friendly as we had hoped, it was an attractive sanctuary and sometime stepping stone to the West for deserters and refugees. It was also the target of dissidents and agitators whose aim was to create an atmosphere of support for Jugoslavia when the Frontier Commission came to assess the situation. I was seconded to this outpost on a special assignment, ostensibly to set up a group to keep tabs on the political situation and specifically on the infiltration of agitators from Jugoslavia..

⁴⁰ PX - the US equivalent of the British NAAFI which supplied beer and liquor, cigarettes, etc.

⁴¹ Services of which we didn't avail ourselves overly except dentistry to which arm I sacrificed most of my back teeth, and medical who pulled a bullet out of Phillip who maintained, rather peevishly, I thought, that it was directed at me. The Yanks were definitely strong on pulling things out, it will be noticed.

⁴² One of the documents we were asked to provide was 'Return of Horse Manure' in triplicate. Borrowing some idiom from our American friends, I sent a terse note saying 'Sorry! Fresh out of horses' To which a signal arrived within twenty four hours, 'How many horses do you need'!

⁴³ Short for Jugoslavs

⁴⁴ My comments on the history surrounding the Julian Marches are based on my personal observations and contacts with the local populace. For more detailed reading refer to 'Life-and-Death Struggle of a National Minority' by Dr. Lavo Cermelj, printed in Slovenia by the Tiskarna Ljudske Pravice v Ljubljani in 1945

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

There were only two of us in Pola, and although the Municipal Government was Italian, we had plenty of support from Military Police, Carabinieri, and the local Air Force consisting of one Auster two seater plane and two pilots. Overseeing our own intelligence work which basically covered subversive political activities, was G2 at Corps HQ whose involvement rather more resembled the Sword of Damocles than a support organization. My 'oppo' so to speak, was Bill Makins, a genial Scot who arrived some hours before me having collected several bullet holes in his vehicle while driving from Trieste to Pola through the peninsula of Istria which was controlled by Tito's Partisans. The town of Pola was a small outpost of Zone A and came under the aegis of the Allied Military Government, AMG as it was then known as. It was, in a way, akin to Gorizia in that the towns people were predominantly Italian with the rural surrounding areas almost entirely Croat – rather than Slovenian. Bill had been a journalist in private life and to be fair to him I should say that he was probably better qualified for the job than I, though he never made an issue of it.

I cannot say that anything very sensational happened in those few months I spent in Pola. The odd noisy demonstration with nothing worse than a few firecrackers thrown around; once a stray shot through the windshield of my Jeep grazed the top of my head and the only, at the time seemingly serious, event was when I had a tussle with a partisan agent who stuck me in the stomach with a German switch blade. The worst part of that experience was the drive through the rutted roads of Istria back to a hospital in Trieste, and not knowing if I was going to survive being bounced about in the back of the truck. It turned out not to be very serious, but I was injected several times with the new wonder drug – Penicillin. It didn't seem to do anything for me, good or bad, which was not surprising since, as it turned out, it was *aqua pura* they injected, Penicillin being in high demand on the black market and fetching astronomical prices!

After a few days I was back in Pola to be welcomed by Bill Makins who seemed to have been managing quite well, thank you very much, without any help from me! In that part of the country not much happens in the Summer afternoons. Most of the inhabitants have a siesta but Bill and I, not having learned how to sleep in the afternoon, would drive down to the dolomitic cliffs at the Promontary that plunge vertically into the clear blue waters of the Adriatic. In the thirty degrees-plus temperatures and fifteen feet of transparent water, our only problem was how quickly we could get into it! It became our habit each afternoon to throw into the deep water, a dozen bottles of Birra Dreher, and whoever needed a 'cold one' all he had to do was to dive in and help himself. It says much for our combined thirsts and the low alcohol content of the beer that during the two months or so that we spent there we only lost one bottle and never failed to return each day as sober as judges.

We hadn't been long in Pola before we got an unexpected companion. Emil Pucalka, a self proclaimed businessman from Chechoslovakia, was picked up in the

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

town by the British Military Police who didn't know what to do with him so passed the buck to us, so to speak. G2 didn't know what to do with him either so we were left holding the baby! Came swimming time the first afternoon and we all – there were four of us by then for Bill had produced a girl friend – jumped into the truck and headed for our little Shangri La. To get down to the water level we passed the top of a hundred foot cliff that was a perfect place for diving, if that was what turned you on. Neither Bill nor I had availed ourselves of that facility and had no intention of doing so at any time! However, a bit of leg pulling was not to be carpied at so as we passed by I said to Emil, "Come up here and I will show you where we dive in!"

Emil balanced himself on the edge holding his hands out as if preparing to take off. "Water looks deep enough!" He remarked. Bill grinned at me, "He's not kidding either!" Well, we went down to the water's edge and got into our swim suits, and the next thing, there was Emil heading back up towards the cliff edge. "Hey Emil! Where are you going?" we shouted to him. "Why, up to the diving place of course. Come on, let's go." Bill grinned at me, "I told you he wasn't joking." Nor was he! We got there behind him, a bit shamefacedly, just in time to see him flying through the air in a perfect swallow dive! He looked up to us with a big grin across his face, "Come on in," he cried, "The water's great!" So we jumped off, well, Bill did and that didn't leave me with any alternative! On the way down I planned in some detail what I was going to do with Bill when I caught up with him! Anyway, once was enough for both of us. But Emil was in there like a dirty shirt every afternoon, even doing somersaults, yet!

Eventually Emil was shipped off to Venice and we never heard from him again. I tried many times to locate him but without any luck. If he ever reads this I hope he will get in touch. He was an entertaining chap, good humoured with a wealth of experience. We very much enjoyed his company and were sorry to see him go.

As I said before, nothing of much of interest happened to relieve the tedium of out daily life. Of the two pilots up at the air strip who must have been kicking their heels most of the time, one of them, John Malloy, turned out to be an old school companion of mine and it was not too difficult to arrange with him to adjust his flight schedules and drop me off at Gorizia every couple of weeks, hopefully to see Bozena. As it turned out, other matters loomed large and on one occasion I was knocked out for the count, but more of that later.

John had a bad habit of dozing off at the controls and though I wont say I learned to fly, I certainly learned quite a bit about flying, more out of self preservation than anything else. The Auster, having dual controls, when John was quietly snoring beside me I was able to grab the joystick and put the kite, unwittingly, through her paces. John generally woke up just in time to correct the onset of a tail spin. After all that exposure to seat-of-the-pants aeronautics I figured that if the

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

OZNA⁴⁵ were breathing down the back of my neck I could manage to get the plane off the ground without crashing. As for landing, well, I could worry about that tomorrow.

One of John's favourite tricks was to fly under the high voltage transmission lines just outside Gorizia and then climb up, full throttle, to avoid the hill on the other side! Mostly, stuffed into the duffle space behind the two seats, we had an unwashed - well, not totally unwashed for there were generally several high tide marks below his knees – tough partisan soldier who was opting for the quiet life. Not that there was ever anything quiet about John's flying, except when he was fast asleep, of course! I don't think any of our passengers had ever flown before and I know at least one occasion, following signs of agitation behind us, when the ever present aroma wafting across to us was enlivened by another familiar and less pleasant odour. After that John reserved his acrobatics for the return journey!

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Back in Gorizia it was a bit like coming home again. One of the first things to engage my attention was the experience of an Italian lady who had been approached by a man trying to get Italian currency to promote the Communist cause in Italy. There was a lot of this sort of activity going on and something we wanted to stamp on pretty quickly. We persuaded her to arrange a meeting with this man in her apartment while Bernard Regenstreif and I waited, in the approved Chicago gangster style, behind the curtains. When he arrived we stepped out and marched him at gun point out of the apartment and along the street, Via IX Agosto, in the direction of the office. Suddenly there was some sort of diversion and Willi took to his heels with Bernard and I shooting at him as he ran down the Corso.

One of our shots winged him in the leg and he ran into a nearby American 'Company' headquarters shouting that the OZNA were after him! The Yanks were all for arresting the two of us and locking us up in the 'Brig' but I managed to mollify them somewhat. A sergeant stepped forward and resolved the situation. Turning to the two big MPs he said, "Take them up to that limey spy outfit up the main drag. They'll know what to do with them!"

The *climax* to that little contretemps came some fifty years later. In 1996 I was standing in a small sporting goods store in Gorizia when a man of about my age approached me and asked if I happened to be Signore Michele Naughton, which I couldn't deny. "Well then," he says, looking quite pleased, "I have a hole in my raincoat that was made by a bullet of yours. Two of you were running down the Corso shooting at another man and one of your shots almost hit me. I'll show you the raincoat if you like!" I had to point out to him that if anything it must have been Bernard's bullet. "He never was a very good shot! But I can give you his address in Canada, if you like." Of course he could have made the whole thing up, but somehow his story rang true.

⁴⁵ OZNA. The Yugoslav secret police. Stands for

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One evening I was sitting in the bar of Figl's hotel, chatting and drinking wine with some of my fellow 'limey spies' when a yank PFC⁴⁶ walked in and not too politely asked what the Hell we communist bastards were doing while they were fighting the good fight. Or words to that effect. I said something about 'You Yankee SOBs shooting off your mouths as usual.' And then he punched me in the face. Well, that seemed to constitute a 'call to arms' so I stood up intending to point out his lack of good manner and that was the last thing I remembered.- until fifteen minutes later.

Apparently there were was a truck load of PFCs outside who charged in to join the fray. I got knocked over and kicked in the head a few times but before it got too serious, the big Dalmation, Zick, who was my friend, came to the rescue and saw them all off. I came to, a bit bloody, but no real harm done, shortly after and there being not much to be done about the melee, we returned to our perorations and post Guerra libations.

The following morning a rather resourceful Norwegian chap, Jan Bjornsen by name who had just joined our group, heard about the incident and proceeded to walk around Gorizia punching Yank soldiers in the face. He was eventually brought in to our office by a couple of American MPs, looking quite happy though slightly the worse for wear! The interesting sequel to that event was that Zick appointed himself my personal bodyguard and accompanied me in my Jeep, occupying the passenger seat and making rude threatening remarks to anyone even approaching the vehicle, regardless of rank or racial origin. The sight of Zick sitting up on the front seat with Bernard, Phillip and Henry crushed into the back was an entertaining spectacle greatly enjoyed by the whole of Gorizia!

The story of Jan Bjornsen, the resourceful Jan Bjornsen, would not be complete with some account of his entrepreneurial activities, activities it must be admitted, that were not totally unblemished. There was a disused rail road from Gorizia leading into Zone B that seemed unlikely ever to be put into use again. Bjornsen no doubt felt the same about its future utility and decided to invest it with a degree of profitability.

In a nutshell he regularly borrowed our three ton truck in the middle of the night, picked up a gang of Italian workers, and under the noses of the Jug army and secret police, over a period of several weeks removed a mile or more of track. He paid off the workers with the sleepers and sold the steel rails. To whom I never found out, or how much he realized on the deal. It was enough, however, to finance the purchase of a thoroughbred horse which he ran at Aiello race track and, reportedly made himself a lot of money. I didn't find out about this until after he was posted to, believe it or not, the Pay Corps. Neither was I ever called to

⁴⁶ Private First Class. In the British Army idiom, the lowest form of animal life in the US Army.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

account for his activities. A man who would go far in life! The fact that I never reported his foibles was in part due to some nudgings of conscious fed by a sneaking admiration for his – well, for his resourcefulness!

It had been decided that all war booty within the disputed area of Zones A and B would be awarded to Jugosavia. There was no trouble with Zone B; the Jugs had already got that. But in Zone no Italian worth his salt was going to give up anything to Jugoslavs if he could help it. In recognizance of this scenario a derelict Sherman tank had stood in a field in Zone A to the North of Gorizia and within spitting, literally, distance of the demarcation line, was the source of great interest to certain Italian businessmen!

One day I was walking down the Corso Vittorio Emanuele minding my own business when a man of my acquaintance stopped to salute me. “Ah, Signor Capitano, Buon Giorno,” he exclaimed. He always called me Capitano though he had never seen me in *divisa*.⁴⁷ “I would beg to ask your advice on a small matter. We could sit in the sunshine outside the Café Garibaldi and watch the pretty girls on their *bicicletti*.” I was not averse to the proposal. And we made ourselves comfortable with our *Cinzaninn*⁴⁸ and talked about the weather. Meanwhile, I bided my time.

Presently he said something about the Sherman tank. ‘Aha! I thought to myself. So that’s the lay of the land! He pointed out that as things stood neither faction was going to release it to the other and it would just sit there and quietly rust away. I murmured something about everybody being dead before that came about. And then the light dawned. “Appunto, appunto signore,” he said, “But is not necessary, Signore. All we need is a *permesso* from you and *l’indomani* it is gone.” He spread his hands and raised his eyebrows expressively. I pointed out a few things he had omitted to mention, not the least of which was the fact that if we were rumbled, it would be left holding the baby!

To cut the story short, I went to Trieste and visited the Yugoslav War Booty Commission and made some proposals to the effect that none of the parties involved would lose anything, in fact *au contraire!* I came away with an indecipherable *propusnica* and all concerned were content. The Italian got his tank, the chap in Trieste was far from complaining and I, well I was glad to have been of service to both parties! Needless to say, I was not out of pocket on the deal.

I cannot wind up this chapter without recollecting the story of a rather unpleasant individual called Zvone Devetak whose most endearing act was the brutal killing

⁴⁷ Uniform

⁴⁸ A mini bottle of dry white vermouth with a pull-off cap. A refined aperitif while sitting outside a boulevard café in the sunshine!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

of a White Slovenian⁴⁹ who had been in touch with our group. His body had been found in the Carso with his face and head smashed to pulp with a nearby rock. Devetak was arrested by the local police and brought in to my office for interrogation. Afterwards he was held in the Carcere Militare⁵⁰, but managed to escape by bribing one of the guards.

We had varying reports of his movements, but without confirmation. Eventually we heard reliably that he was staying in a school house a few miles into Zone B, and we laid on a raid for that same night. I took Bernard, and Jim McNulty who had come on strength recently and headed for the Jeep a bit before midnight. That was when we had our first problem. Zick was sitting in the driver's seat, but promptly moved over as soon as he saw me. Obviously we couldn't take him with us on this trip. We tried everything but Zick was not going to be moved. There was only one thing for it. Bernard's Ardita Fiat was just down the road so the two of them sauntered down, leaving me with Zick. Then, as they passed I jumped in quickly, getting a dirty look from Zick who immediately transferred to the driver's seat!

We had planned our route to the school taking a rutted back road that didn't have a control post, and reached our destination without mishap and found a door that was not locked. I had a grenade in my pocket, all of us were armed to the teeth, and we stepped it smartly, guns at the ready, to face two cows looking at us curiously! At that moment there was a loud crash, enough to wake the dead. Bernard had kicked a bucket over! McNulty said, "Christ! I nearly shit my pants!" I thought to myself, 'You weren't the only one.' Presently we found another door and opening it quietly and found ourselves in a bedroom, with a badly scared woman sitting up looking at us. I put my hand gently over her mouth. "Don't be afraid," I said, "We are looking for Zvone Devetak." Then Bernard noticed a big lump under the bedclothes and whipping the blankets off revealed a man in his nightshirt curled up in a foetal ball, not looking too pleased to see us. But he wasn't Devetak! But they told us he was sleeping in a house down the road.

By this time the couple were looking relieved. They had thought we were OZNA, the Secret Police and a middle of the night visit from that lot meant real trouble, or worse! We found the house easily and the front door was not locked. McNulty went in first with me just behind him when I saw, just inside a crouching form facing us. Jim saw the figure at the same time and did a flying rucker tackle – right through a glass door! The moon was behind us and it was our own shadow that was facing us! Bernard was muttering under his breath, something about waking the fuckung dead, for Christ's sake. But it wasn't the dead we woke, but the owner of the house who appeared, also in a nightshirt, wanting to know who was going to pay for the broken glass. Yes, Devetak was here, but only for half an hour and who was going to pay - -. I had brought along some worthless Jug money

⁴⁹ White Slovenian, as opposed to Communist or Red Slovenian.

⁵⁰ Military prison.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

and hurriedly stuffed the notes into his hand and left him hurriedly, trying to count them in the dark. We were just taking off in the car when we heard renewed yelling behind us but didn't wait to see what he wanted. We knew!

Our next port of call was a rather nice looking, well kept house at which we were welcomed by two ladies who invited us in for some coffee and a glass of slivovica – all this, it must be remembered – at getting on for two hours after midnight! They were both about forty and quite good looking. Yes! Devetak had visited us both but had left several hours ago. No, he didn't tell us where he was going. I asked them what was the purpose of his visit and they both looked coy! We searched the house thoroughly but there was no sign of Devetak. Buggeration! It was a wasted night and there was nothing for it but back to our beds in Gorizia. And who do you think was waiting for us when we got back to the Jeep? Zick, curled up on the front seat fast asleep, but not for long. Have you ever seen a dog that was really pissed off? We walked in with Zick behind us giving us dirty looks that you wouldn't believe And therein lies a sad story!

I didn't get much sleep that night, maybe three hours. I woke at the crack of dawn remembering that Devetak had a sister in Gorizia and I had a pretty good idea that was where he had gone. Half an hour later we paid a visit to his sister, five of us with two policemen from the local force. Her flat overlooked an enclosed courtyard on the one side and the road on the other. I left Philip with the two policemen, Joe and McNulty in the courtyard while Bernard and I went up the stairs and knocked on the door of the flat.. It was opened almost immediately by Devetak's sister who told us she had not seen him for several weeks. But at that precise moment, Devetak was jumping out of the front window, right into the arms of the police.

You might say that all's well that ends well. We got Devetak all right but I lost my bodyguard. With a guilty conscience I went to see Zick to make it up with him for pulling a fast one on him last night – and I was greeted with a growl! And do you know? He never again got in my Jeep or took the slightest notice of me, except to growl if I came near him. He never forgave me! It was like losing a close friend only much worse!

This little adventure had a sequel as well. It was twenty years later that Bozena and I were visiting a friend of hers in Toronto when I discovered he had worked with the NKVD for a while when I was in Gorizia, so I told him the story about Devetak saying that their chaps were pretty slow letting us charge around the country like a bull in a china shop. He didn't reply for a moment, and then said, "We were only five minutes behind you after you put your foot through that glass door, and gave the owner all that phoney money!" Well, well! But he softened the blow by pouring me a four fingers of slivovitza. "Zivilimi! And confusion to our enemies.!" And that reminds me of another story.

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

The Yanks had dug up somebody they had been after for a long time, Miro Sfiligoi by name, who was hiding out near the village of Biglia but they didn't know precisely where. The IO from their Counter Intelligence unit came round to see me. "You Guys seem to be into all the dirty work that's going on here.". He told me, " Maybe you could put the finger on this asshole and we can go out and pick him up." It happened that I knew this 'asshole' and had been looking for an excuse to put him away. Now I didn't need an excuse any more! I said I would be happy to oblige provided I came along for the ride.

That evening operation 'Jughandle' consisting of half a platoon, faces corked black, all armed to the teeth with P38s, grenades and a couple of Tommy Guns. They looked ready for trouble! They surrounded the house and the IO and I walked in. Sfiligoi, who didn't seem surprised to see us, was standing in the middle of the room probably listening to the racket outside, enough to wake the dead. When I explained the situation to him, he accepted without demur and poured himself half a litre of water which he tossed back in one gulp. Only it wasn't water. It was slivavica and about triple distilled! Outside, the army awaited, guns at the ready. Faces grim. Action stations! Suddenly Sfiligoi wanted a piss and the assembly opened up around him, nobody wanting to be a target!

At that moment a flash bulb popped, and to this day I still have the picture etched on my mind. Half the Yank army, armed to the teeth, surrounding this guy and ready to take on the Afrika Korps! And I thought of an appropriate title for the picture! Unfortunately I never got a copy.

*

It was in Gorizia that I met Bozena, who was to be my future wife. I was in the legal office of the AMG on some official business when I noticed this very attractive young woman in her early twenties sitting at a desk minding her own business, which didn't include me! However, faint heart never got no one nowhere so I jumped in with both feet and, wonder of wonders, I soon found us walking out together. It was on one of these 'walking out' trips that we had an *incontro*, a meeting, with two very large and noisy mastiffs. We were walking alongside the Isonzo river past a sort of mansion house surrounded by a low wall, not more than a foot high. Suddenly the two dogs appeared behind the wall running level with us and making a lot of most uncomplimentary remarks. We kept on going but I thought to myself that the proof of the pudding would come when they arrived at the end of the wall where it turned away from us.

Well, they both stopped but after a short hesitation, the bigger of the two leaped over the wall and came straight at us.galloping along like a bloody cheetah and stopped with his snout pressing against my shin. Bozena didn't seem to be unduly worried, after all it was my shin that was going to be the first to get it! I told him to bugger off home and stop making an ass of himself. At that he looked a bit

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

puzzled, probably didn't speak English. So I tried him in Italian, "Va a casa, cretino!" Whereupon he turned away without another word and went home."

The interesting part of that little scenario was that Bozena didn't turn a hair and carried on the conversation as if there had been no hiatus. Some women would have had hysterics and started screaming. But not this lass! She probably had more important things on her mind, like, what she was going to wear tonight or was her hat on straight! I guess Janie was the same with animals, absolutely no fear at all no matter how fierce they appeared.

I suppose it is all a matter of common sense. If an animal thinkg you are frightened of it, it is mush more likely to attack, and running away is a direct invitation. Bears make a lot of suggestive noises like snorting and snuffling and waving their arms in the air, but if you talk to them in a friendly way or sing Ave Maria softly they will listen to you, sometimes with their head on one side and then amble off. But during the rutting season or when there young around, best to avoid them!

I remember once visiting a friend in Ontario, Lars Hansen, whose business was breeding Rotweiler dogs – they've got jaws on them like a Hyena. I pulled up in his driveway and stepped out of the car. I hadn't gone two steps before I was surrounded by about ten of these chaps. They didn't say anything, just stood there watching me. I remembered the expression 'Up to one's ass in alligators' and knew what it must feel like! I offered the back of my hand to one of them but he had no interest in being introduced. They just wanted to make sure I didn't move until the boss arrived.

Afterwards I sat in Lars' sitting room with a glass of beer in my hand and all these dogs lying about licking my hand, nibbling my toes and generally behaving like a bunch of pussycats. Just like the rest of their ilk!

CHAPTER XII

POST WAR IN ENGLAND

It was getting on for the end of July 1947 when I found myself on a platform at Victoria station, age twenty nine years, with my bedding roll, a large wooden container home made in Italy and a steel trunk from India, confronted, surrounded I should say, by hordes of people hurrying in different directions at me, through me and around me, all with little patience or sympathy for another war hero. To be fair, I should say that I don't think anybody even noticed me, except one irate lady of, no longer of tender years, who tripped over my conglomerate self. I wont repeat what she said, but a Drill Sergeant could have learned much from her. I felt rather like the time when I arrived in Nowshera, in India standing in the noonday blast furnace wondering what I was going to do next. Only this time there was no friendly Adjutant to wave his magic wand. What was more to the point everybody was speaking a strange language which I subsequently learned was English

I forget my dismal adventures of the next couple of hours. Suffice to say, I found myself on the train to Devonshire, sitting in the restaurant car with a cup of hot tea in my hand and a week old spam sandwich with the corners turned up. Good Lord, I thought to myself, I am back in Blighty again. I closed my eyes and dreamed of sunny Italy!

My mother, two of my many aunts, the eleven year old son of one of them and my grandmother were at the time all living together in a the small three bedroom bungalow belonging to my mother, in Mortehoe on the north coast of Devon. It was into this menage I was welcomed by my family with open arms. Outside was the shining sea under a soft blue sky with a green heather sprinkled headland pointing to Lundy Isle in the distance. In front of me, as if by magic, appeared more tea and bread and butter and cakes. Having consumed everything on the table I leaned back comfortably and surveyed the scene. My mother looked at me, the way mothers look at their sons when they haven't seen them for a lifetime. "I'll show you your room," she said, "I imagine you'll want to have a rest." "Not bloody likely," I remonstrated, "I'm going down for a swim." And for the next two months I didn't do much more than that. Swimming, eating and sleeping. No creeping past Germans or Yugoslav OZNA in the dark or getting beaten up by US Army hoodlums who thought I was a communist agent, and no more skiing or climbing in the Dolomites or swimming in the clear blue waters of the Adriatic either! I wont deny I had my good times along with the bad and yet I would be hard put to figure out which I missed most!

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

However, after eight weeks of the *Dolce Vita* I couldn't stand it any longer and hopped onto the Orient Express and went back to Trieste, partly to see my fiancée, Bozena and partly to ferret around in the sea of intrigue that was still foaming around the fluid borders between Italy and Yugoslavia. As I mentioned earlier things were pretty hot in that area where there were no finite borders, only white painted boulders that every morning were in a different position, depending on which faction was pushing them around in the middle of the night. However, intrigue or not, I no longer had any influence, not any more being a player in that particular game. However Bozena's family made me very welcome and on a social basis I had little to complain about. Wine, women and song were the order of the day - well, wine and song anyway - so I made the most of my short time before facing the music in post war Britain. The music to which I was to dance involved finding a job for which I had no little or no experience or training, and to prepare for my forthcoming marriage early next year in 1948. As far as finding a job was concerned, I was in competition with, literally, hundreds of thousands of men and women in the same position. The prospect was dismal to say the least .

A year later there was definitely some light at the end of the tunnel. Bozenas and I were happily married, we had found a small flat in Kensington and I had got me a sales engineering job with a firm of electric cable manufacturers. It was a start! Though if it had not been for Bozena, now my wife, I don't know what I would have done. I gave some serious thought to the question of starting another war, for which I was reasonably qualified and not without experience but I knew that in that field of endeavour I was not going to get much encouragement from Bozena, you know how women are, they like to keep their menfolk at home. Farming in Kenya was becoming popular, but I was much more interested in going walk about in Africa or exploring the Karakorams but the pay was not too exciting to say the least. So it was Bozena who got my nose to the grindstone and by 1953 I graduated with Honours and was now a fully qualified electrical engineer and ready to emigrate to Canada. During those five years we had bought a small but comfortable house in Isleworth just outside London, Bozena had produced a cute little baby girl and I was working with Handley Page Aircraft on the first prototype of the supersonic atom bomber known as the Victor. It was a great success as an aeroplane and a great success for empiricism. However that was a long time ago and it wasn't long before the US of A took all that business away from Britain, but that's another story.

Meanwhile we were packing up all our belongings in preparation for our hop across to the other side of the Atlantic. It was the 1st of June 1953 that we stepped off the gang plank onto the dock in Quebec City. A new country and a new future awaited us.

60,701 words 116 Pages

MICHAEL NAUGHTON.....MY LIFE

PART TWO

CANADA

Page 2	Chapter I	Getting settled in.
Page 13	Chapter II	Detour.
Page 16	Chapter III	Coueurs du Bois
Page 37	Chapter IV	The Churchill River
Page 51	Chapter V	Back Country Skiing
Page 59	Chapter VI	Five Winds
Page 68	Chapter VII	New Hampshire - The White Mountains
Page 78	Chapter VIII	The Karakorams
Page 140	Chapter IX	Epilogue

CHAPTER I

GETTING SETTLED IN.

We did not see very much of Quebec City for we had hardly disembarked with our hand luggage - hand, being a misnomer! - than we were hustled aboard the Toronto train, together with a few other *wide-eyed* immigrants. In no time at all, we were looking out upon a flat country distinguished only by a profusion of *beaver swamps and jack pine*. There was also a profusion of other facets of the Canadian wilderness; myriads of mosquitoes, and what we learned later were *black-fly*, all trying to get in to our compartment, for lunch presumably! We began to understand why hard-bitten, sorry, Canadians on the train were so unsupportive of our efforts to open windows and let in some fresh air.

Another thing we noticed, though it would have taken a deaf mute to have missed it, was that the local language, spoken with a pronounced nasal accent and sounding vaguely reminiscent of French, communicated itself not one little bit to our unpractised ears. Moreover, and to our surprise given that, as we understood it, we were in an English speaking country, *no one had a single* word of English to embellish their strange tongue. It was only when we were approaching Montreal that it occurred to me to try my execrable French on one of these non-English speakers. Imagine my astonishment when he replied fluently in my own language. A little zephyr began to blow through the mists of my memory, something someone back in England had said of the French-Canadians - it was only later that they came to be known as Quebecois - 'You will find them a little quaint in their customs and in their speech. Something of the Welsh idiom in them.' He didn't know how right he was!

However, in the course of many years in Canada, I frequently came in contact with these French-Canadians and got to like them, even though some of them did not exactly fall over themselves to make our acquaintance. I think I liked most the ones I met in the bush. A taciturn bunch, it must be admitted, but with a turn of wry humour that gave spice to our communications. I love to tell the tale of a backwoodsman I came across up in Haute Maurice somewhere. That was before they started flooding the land so that they could sell power to the Yanks who had more than they needed and anyway could produce the kilowatts more cheaply themselves. I asked him how much time he spent up there each year. "Oh, maybe twelve month," he said. I was surprised, "Jesus Murphy," I said, "What do you do all the time?" "Oh, feesheeng an' fucking." "And you stay up all the Winter. What do you do then?" He shifted his pipe to the other side of his face, "Oh, not much feesheeng."

When we arrived in Canada I was without a job and it was all of a month before I found one with Dunlop Canada. And it was tailor-made for me. Ontario was currently converting its distribution system *from 25 Hz to 60 Hz*. And that meant that every single piece of electrical equipment that was frequency sensitive had to be converted or *replaced*. *My immediate* job was to engineer this operation in the Dunlop plant, from distribution to utilisation, at

all levels. It sure kept me busy that first year and although the job was basically a short-term contract, other projects were looming on the horizon, not least of which was a new tire plant thirty miles to the East of Toronto close to the small town of Whitby.

Most of the towns and streets in Ontario were named after the places of origin of the original immigrants from Europe. At one place in southern Ontario there was a signpost that pointed in three directions to Paris and London and Berlin. You wouldn't have to guess very hard where the settlers in those areas hailed from! The place names that were not from across the water were mostly Iroquois *Iroquois?* or Objibwa, like Manitoulin or Matchedash, or Temagami - an island, a river and a lake respectively.

Back at the mill, as they say, I got dug in with Dunlop Canada, and was working under the direction - *there were only two of us - of the Chief Electrical Engineer, Dinty Moore, who was a gentleman, a first rate engineer and had a great sense of humour.* What was more, after he had shown me around and introduced me to the personnel and explained my duties to me, he left me to get on with it and never interfered unless some new and unusual aspect cropped up. Some six months or so after I joined Dunlop I came across a large pile of electrical drawings and specifications. Nobody seemed to know anything about them or about their provenance, but Dinty looked at them briefly and said that they were to do with the electrics for a materials-handling system for the upcoming plant at Whitby and maybe I might like to make some sense out of them!

Well, I took all this bumf home and spent every evening for the next two weeks studying them. I should have known better than to take on what turned out to be a real time-consuming project. Eventually it became my baby and no one else ever knew, or wanted to know anything about it. The rubber, synthetic or natural, that comprises the major part of an automobile tire, is fed into a giant mixing machine together with a number of other ingredients such as sulphur, lead oxide, carbon black and many others which have to be weighed and measured with accuracies of close to one percent. The scale and delivery system which I was evaluating had to be coordinated with an in-line automatic materials handling complex which had yet to be designed. I asked Dinty Moore who was going to do the design work and I knew the answer as soon as I saw the expression on his face! That was the Summer of 1954 and the total system was supposed to be in full operation in twelve months time, which it was, well, more or less, though by the time we got the bugs out of it, it was closer to 1956.

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In 1958 Dinty retired and I took over his job with responsibilities for the total Dunlop operation across Canada and I can tell you, there was never a dull moment! One of the brighter experiences during my time with Dunlop was a visit from Russia of a trade delegation sometime in the sixties, to study our operational and engineering methods What started as a boring and

insufferable waste of time, ended as, for me anyway, a pleasant and rewarding experience.

At the time, Dunlop Tyre and Rubber Co. in England had been engaged by the Russian Government to act as consultant in the building of a tire production plant somewhere in the Ukraine. The responsibility of the delegation was to inspect the manufacturing and administration methods of several Dunlop plants in the UK and additionally, one in the US at Buffalo and the other our own in Canada. It consisted of three officials who spoke no English or any other language, and an interpreter. The latter was actually a PK - Political Kommissar - and a watchdog to ensure the other three did not step over the line, one way or the other! The delegation was headed by the Minister of Tire Production for Russia, aided and abetted by the Chief Chemist and the Chief Engineer for the Dnieperpopetrovsk power station. And a more miserable and unpleasant bunch of individuals I have yet to meet! By the time we were halfway through the second and, we earnestly hoped, the last day of their visit, everybody was thoroughly fed up with them.

The language difficulty didn't help the situation. All communications between them and us were conducted through the services of the interpreter who was obviously at some pains to give his own version of the questions and answers – which frequently were sprinkled with inaccuracies. Having been exposed to the Croat language in that country for several years, though in no way fluent, I could understand the gist of what the Russians were saying.¹ It was while we were having lunch with our visitors on the second day that they asked if it would be possible for them to visit Niagara Falls the next day. The Political Kommissar was obviously not in favour of this suggestion and threw up a number of '*non sequiturs*'. However, while all this smoke screen was being generated, I caught the eye of the President, John Simon, who was sitting on the opposite side of the table and whispering to Stan Kerr, the Financial VP. Both of them were looking at me with a conspiratorial air. I knew what they were up to and I hastily frowned and shook my head vehemently. But it was no good; I was the only one who could communicate with them, I had a nice big American car and I knew my way around the country. But I insisted. There was no way I was going to spend a whole day with that humourless, unpleasant and taciturn bunch. But I was wasting my time; my doom was settled. John Simon called me into his office in the afternoon.

“Take them down to Niagara Falls”, he said with a grin, “Give them a good time, wine them and dine them, take them to the gift shop. You could even take back some souvenirs for Bozena!”

The following morning I picked up them up at the Royal York hotel and headed out towards Buffalo. One good thing was that their PK was conspicuous by his absence. The three of them sat there in stony silence for a time but as we got away from Toronto there was a noticeable relaxation of the deep gloom that surrounded them like a *pea-souper* fog.

¹ Russian and Croatian languages are close enough to make them mutually understandable in a conversation. Even with my limited familiarity with Croatia, I managed surprisingly well

The boss man was the first to break the silence. "This car," he grunted, "Company car, Eh?" I sensed a corporate interest from the back seat. "No, this is my car." How long you take to pay for it, ten years?" Well, actually, I paid cash for it but I didn't want to be seen laying it on too thick. "No, just two years." Notebooks were out and there was much scribbling for a moment.

Next question was from the Chief Chemist who wanted to know how many people shared the room I lived in. I explained that I lived in a house with my family. "How big is house?" I sort of waved my hands in the air, "Oh, you know, about so big - -". We were passing through a run down rural area with not much more than the odd shack here and there. Right in the middle of a field was a two-holer² outhouse. He pointed to it and said, "About so big?" I was lost for a suitable reply for a moment, then I said, "My house also has two lavatories."

Then it was the Chief Engineer's turn. He was the most uncooperative and unpleasant of all three. He wanted to know about my interests and activities. Well, I make a lot of plum wine and slivovitza³, enjoyed skiing and kayaking and so on. "Which is your favourite sport?" he asked. "Oh, Skiing for sure." I heard a chuckle from his direction. "Aha," he says, "Skiing and drinking slivovica!" He laughed and slapped me on the shoulder. "Karashow!" Very good. Very good." I suddenly realized that they were all relaxed laughing, and from then on they became good natured human beings, a bit heavy handed humour, but never mind. They were all right. I was accepted, and their PK, happily, was conspicuous by his absence.

We had a ball at Niagara and two of them bought Indian snake belts embroidered with little glass beads. The Minister didn't buy anything, at first, but after he saw what his comrades had bought, he weakened and went into the shop on his own and came out with something wrapped up in brown paper. But he wasn't going to let on what he had bought. He had his position to maintain! Later I found out what it was. An Indian snake belt with glass beads!

On the way back we went into the Brant Inn at Burlington to have dinner. When I asked them what they would like to drink they all looked at me, like I had asked a stupid question. "Whisky, of course. What else?" I had to explain that the inn did not have a liquor licence. They looked shocked! "What else do they have?" It was just wine, unfortunately. "OK! We have wine. One bottle to start with. Each." And that included me as well, though I disgraced myself by only drinking half the bottle!

All the way back to Toronto they sang Russian songs, mostly about chasing, having or losing women and getting drunk! After all, what else is there? We were about half way back to their hotel and I asked them if they would like to meet my wife and sample some of my home-made slivovitza. I got three

² With no plumbing facilities it was customary to dig a deep latrine hole in the back yard and place two toilet seats over it. Always facing away from the house. Generally known as a 'two holer'.

³ Yugoslav Plum Brandy

unanimous ‘yesses’ to that, so I cut off from the QE highway and headed for the 401 East and Yonge Boulevard in North Toronto and pulled in to the driveway outside the house. All four of us got out of the car almost simultaneously, me to warn Bozena what was about to happen and them to take photographs of the house.

They were most impressed with our house which was nice but nothing out of the ordinary. I don’t know what they had been expecting, but from their earlier questions I imagine they would not have been surprised to find a single room with two lavatories! Impressed or not with the house what really finished them off was the sight of our daughter, Janie, aged ten, coming down the stairs in her leotards, all ready to go off to her ballet lessons!

They got on like a house on fire with Bozena and Janie. You would never have guessed that they were speaking different languages, Russian and Croat.⁴ We all descended down to the basement and I went behind the bar and poured double slivovitzas for everybody. They kept on asking Janie questions about her ballet and she was telling them about her training over the past four years with the National Ballet school. The Minister looked at her and said, “One day perhaps you will dance in Russia for the Bolshoi Ballet and I will come to see you!” It was a nice compliment and I am sure Janie appreciated it. What the Russians didn’t know was that the Bolshoi had been in Toronto a few weeks back and Janie was one of four girls who had been picked to dance with them on three evenings. However we didn’t say anything about it. It would have been too much of a good thing to face them with.

Janie rushed off to her ballet lessons and the three Russians seemed to be settling down for some serious drinking. However they had hardly got their glasses refilled than the telephone rang. It was the PK wanting to know if they had defected, though he didn’t quite put it that way. They had been due an hour ago and he was not pleased to find them in the house and company of Imperialist swine! I was instructed to return them to the fold immediately.

I never saw any of them again, and the following day they were due to visit the Dunlop plant in Buffalo. My one sorrow is that I am unable to remember the name of any of that Russian trio. They all turned out to be good natured and friendly, each with his own sense of humour, and I enjoyed their company as I have never before enjoyed myself in the company of business men. Bozena too was left with pleasant memories of their visit. After they had gone their way their identities faded, but one thing I always remembered was a remark made by the Chief Engineer of that huge power station at Dnieperpopetrovsk. In a roundabout way he gave me to understand that he had a nuclear background and that he was likely headed for a highly responsible post in a large nuclear power station not far from the junction of those two great rivers, the Dnieper and the Dniester. A nuclear power station that was known by the name of the nearby town – Chernobyl. I always wonder about what became of him.

⁴ My wife of course speaks Croatian fluently and Janie spoke the language before learning English So they had no difficulty in communicating with the Russians

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During the early days of my professional work with Dunlop I managed occasionally to get a bit of fresh air up in Ontario's north country to which Hans Martinsen introduced me, paddling canoes, skiing and sneaking long weekends in the cottage country with my wife and Janie, my daughter who at that time was around four years old. For three years we rented a summer cottage on different lakes up in the Haliburton district, but for me, getting away to spend time with them was always a problem. Bozena, who practically lived in the Adriatic sea for her first twenty years, swam like a fish while Janie at four years old, if she didn't swim like a fish, she as sure as Hell had some fins tucked away somewhere. When I came up there on one of my truncated visits, I'd drive along the bush road from which I could be seen and heard from almost half a mile away from the cottage. So when I came round the last bend, there was Janie running up the road and screaming with her arms held out. And she barely gave me time to get changed before dragging me into the water.

It was while looking for one of these lakes behind the cottage that I had my first experience of getting lost in the bush. Not that I didn't know how to use a map and compass; it was just that I got seduced by a family of skunks that crossed my path about one hundred yards into the woods and I forgot to look where I was going. The mother and father walked in front of me, giving me a bit of a dirty look, though not getting very excited about me and continued their leisurely stroll among the trees. When they were a safe distance off I started walking again only to find that I was now in the middle of the family with three cute little kits coming up on my right. Mother and father were now looking over their shoulders at me, taking aim, I presumed! Me, motionless and whistling Ave Maria which, I had understood from Hans Martinsen, was a favourite tune of skunks, and with one junior stepping delicately between my feet! A scenario for disaster! However I was spared the awful fate of getting sprayed and the family disappeared serenely into the undergrowth..

There was no sun, I had no compass, a map would have been of little use, and all the directional aids such as moss growing on the north side of the trees, an axe to cut down a tree to see where the growth rings were close together were all conspicuous by their absence. I hadn't gone very far before all this came home to me with dismal clarity. I wasn't much more than ten minutes into the woods and I was completely and hopelessly lost without any idea of the direction from which I had come! And my stomach reminded me that it was close on supertime!

From where I was standing, there was an awful lot of country dotted with small lakes and beaver swamps that went on for ever and the one thing I didn't want do was to start thrashing around wildly in the hope of stumbling on some recognisable feature - as if there were any! I figured out that in the circle of woods surrounding me, I had about ninety degrees of safety in terms of getting out before dark, so the odds were against me, three to one.

One thing I did know for sure, I was not too far from the cottage, but far

enough for any domestic noises to be filtered out by the woods. So I thought I'd better do something to identify the spot and use it as a reference point. I looked for and found a young sapling that was reasonably clear of any obstruction and with my pen knife, cut off most of the lower branches leaving one about eight feet high. To the end of this I tied my handkerchief and stripped off some bark from the tree. I then picked a random line and started walking in a straight line marking trees in various ways so that I could see the blazes when I looked back. The purpose of the blazes was to ensure I did walk in a straight line and that when I returned to my reference point I wouldn't get lost again. My system worked fine for most of the time, but I had several scares when I couldn't find my blazes. When I got back to the start point I set off my next spoke by about thirty degrees. That meant that I would have twelve radial spokes to my wheel. The distance I walked along each leg had to be paced out and I wasted a lot of time which was never a constant, blazing each spoke. I figured each spoke was three hundred yards or five hundred paces and at the end of each I listened for voices and shouted my head off. It didn't do me much good though for on the fifth try I heard some saucepans being rattled about in the distance, I figured about another three hundred yards

Well, I got back, though not to our cottage which turned out to be about half a mile away and when I arrived home I got Hell for being late for supper! 'Oh well,' I thought to myself, 'You can't win them all! The morrow was a fine sunny day and I had no difficulty in retrieving my handkerchief, or finding my way back. I took my daughter with me, age five, and followed her back to the cottage. When I asked her how she did it, she said, "I just followed the way we came in."! Tarnation, Kids!

Getting lost is a relative term. Man has no biological sense of direction any more than he has a biological clock, except incrementally. Isolate him for a period in the dark, turn him loose in homogeneous country without sun or other means of orienting himself except his own common sense and within a circle of not much more than one hundred yards radius and he will be totally disoriented. When leading parties skiing in Canada's north country I used to pick a smooth lake, there are plenty of them, without sun and encouraged individuals to ski blindfold in a straight line. Everyone without fail went in a circle of varying radii, some to the right and some to the left. They would go in a dead straight line for a short distance and then suddenly veer off, one way or the other. The interesting thing about this phenomenon is that once programmed, the individual would keep going round in that same circle, for ever one might assume. And yet another time the same individual may well go in a circle in the opposite direction.

It is my belief that, regardless of obstacles such as trees, small ponds, boulders or hillocks, the individual will tend to turn to lower ground. In other words, if the gradient is low to the left the turn will be to the left and vice versa. It might seem that one could quite accurately predict one's course by studying the contours of the map. An interesting exercise for someone with some time to spare.

The topography of the country we travel and *our supposed* sense of direction seem to combine only to confuse the mind and muddle the senses. As an illustration of what can happen in the bush, consider the following: Ralph Elsassauer and I, neither of whom were in the woods for the first time, landed on the southern tip of Giants Tomb in Georgian Bay - that's an island about three miles long with a hump in the middle. The little *snye* where we hauled our kayak out of the water was no more than half a mile from the other side and we decided to walk across. We didn't bother with a compass, after all nobody could go wrong in that distance! After we had been walking for a while without any sign of water I said to Ralph, " We ought to have been there by now." But still no sign and we had been going for almost thirty minutes. Presently I spotted water through the trees. "Ah, here we are at last," I remarked. Ralph wasn't looking at the water though. "What do you know," says he, "Somebody has a boat just like ours."! The radius of our circle was barely two hundred and fifty yards and in a place where you couldn't possibly go wrong.

Another consideration in finding one's way around in the bush, or perhaps I should say, *not* finding ones way, is that the human mind, when it is locked in on a specific bearing, does not easily accept a correction. For example; I had a party of about six on skis, no sun, well out in the bush and in mixed country. I decided to explore a different route and follow the contours. I didn't bother with my compass as I knew the country like the back of my hand! After about fifteen minutes the topography started doing its own thing - not what I had expected. I stopped and looked around, when Haigh Carthew, a friend of mine but one who always enjoyed getting a rise out of me, who was right behind me with compass in hand, says, "What bearing are you on, Mike?" Well I wasn't actually on any bearing at all, but I knew it was a bit short of due West. "Oh, about two eighty, magnetic." There was a pause and I knew he was consulting his compass. That's funny," says Haigh, "I make it due East!" Well I couldn't believe that, "You've got it arse-about-face!" I informed him. He held out his compass; it was one of those fancy things with all the bells and whistles. "Well, look for yourself." I did, and I did not like what I saw so I got my own compass out. I knew I could rely on it. It was my trusty old Army prismatic, weighed about three pounds and you could set half a degree on it. I looked at it, 'Traitor' I thought. to myself, it said we were heading due East!

So we all turned around and I had to eat humble pie. But do you know, my mind would not accept it, not until we came to a *well-known* feature that clinched the deal. Well, it just went to prove what I knew all along, but couldn't accept: *Believe your compass, never mind anything else, believe your compass.* Except when you're close to magnetic North. That's when you put your compass away and try your luck with a star or the sun or whatever!

*

Earlier I was talking about my experiences of skiing in the Dolomites, memories I should say of the days when we got up in the middle of the night to get on a bus or truck at four in the morning. *Six months after I came to*

Canada in the middle of 1953, I found myself with a Slovenian friend, Hans Moritsch, driving out of Toronto at four in the morning and heading for Collingwood and Blue Mountain. *Collingwood, which looks out onto the South of Georgian Bay, a bay ninety miles by sixty wide and part of Lake Huron, is about the same distance from Toronto as that we had to travel to get into the Dolomites.* So four in the morning was the obvious time to start out. Only thing was, we got to Collingwood, thanks to the fast Canadian highways, at six in the morning with at least two hours in hand before we could start skiing. We found an open kitchen restaurant and had a second breakfast, and when we got to the hills they started the tows for us. And for two hours we were the only skiers on the hill!

In those early days in Toronto, when we set off for the hills, we all met at my apartment and organised the car pooling. The very first time, either I was late, or the four guys with whom I was travelling were early, and I was just putting away the breakfast things when they all turned up at the front door, so I shepherded them into the kitchen and gave them coffee. In the middle of all this male gathering the door opened and Bozena, still half asleep and dressed in flimsy nightdress walked in to see what was going on! I took her by the shoulders and led her outside the kitchen. "Who are all those men," she enquired, not seeming to be much put out. I enlightened her and went back into the kitchen and faced a lot of appreciative grins. "I don't know what your hurry was," somebody said. "We were all enjoying the view!" Next Sunday they were all early again, but Bozena didn't make an appearance this time.

It wasn't long after this that that we acquired a two-year old Collie. He had belonged to a friend of mine who was having to move into an apartment and consequently was unable to keep the dog there. I had a place where he could run and gladly took him. The original owners called him Merlin because, they said, he had such a wise look! Of course he wasn't so glad and it was all of a year before he settled down with us. He was a beautiful dog and he eventually took over the house and our hearts. Our daughter, Janie, adored him and frequently the two of them could be found in the garden, curled up together in the sun. She was ten at the time and had a gift of making friends with all animals. Once when she was only three, we were still in England then, and one day in a shop, a big dog jumped up and accidentally knocked her over. The owner of the dog rushed over fearing the worst, but Janie stood up and stroked him saying, "It's all right, Doggie, you don't have to be frightened of me." Next thing, she had her arms around him and they were the best of friends.

The first Winter that we had Merlin we acquired another companion. Bozena and I were sitting in the basement watching TV. It was a cold night, more than twenty degrees below zero Celsius, and suddenly we both heard this scream outside. I went up and investigated, and *eventually located the source in the garden.* It was a little ginger kitten, not much more than a couple of weeks old and I took it down to the basement where it very quickly made itself at home. With Merlin it was love at first sight. If we'd had any doubts about keeping it, Janie *soon overcame them.* Actually we didn't need much persuasion! And as Janie already had a *hamster*, which is a bit like an overgrown mouse, we now

had three animals to *care for*. *It wasn't* long before I came across all four of them, Gigi, the kitten, Merlin, the hamster and Janie all bundled up together and fast asleep in the garden!

I think my fondest memory of Merlin was the time I took him cross country skiing in the rural area around Waterloo in *Ontario*. *Originally* named Berlin because of the large number of German settlers there, it was renamed Kitchener during the First World War. It was a delightful day for skiing with lots of deep powder snow. Delightful if you were on skis but for Merlin, not so hot! I had repeatedly to stop and clean out the packed snow between the pads of his feet, but it built up again very quickly. Finally, looking round to see how he was getting on, the poor old fellow was standing motionless in my ski tracks, looking as miserable as Hell. I went back and gave him some of those rock hard liquorice allsorts that I'd had in my ski jacket for years and it was pathetic how gratefully he chewed them up. But when I tried to make a start again he sat down and gave me his paw! Who can resist that kind of appeal? Blackmail, I called it!

It was the better part of a mile to where I had left the car. Fortunately we had almost completed a big loop so I was able to carry him back, all forty pounds of him. But he helped a lot, licking my face all the way *and when I got the car rear door open*, he was in there like a dirty shirt, stretched out dead on the seat! Only trouble was I got the back of my neck washed for the next half hour!

CHAPTER II

DETOUR

Any one reading this heading might be excused for assuming that the chapter had to do with some sort of departure from precedent which, in a way, I suppose it is. Back the eighties, I was visiting Akron, Ohio in the US of A and as part of this visit I had been invited by a new company who was manufacturing magnetic trigger units for phase control of thyristor gates, to look over their operation. *They* sent a taxi to pick me up. It was about fifty miles down a six lane highway but after a few miles there was a big sign saying 'DETOUR' so we obediently turned off at that point and soon arrived at a thriving little town where we had to stop to ask the way. The driver hailed a passer by and asked the name of the town.

"My map tells me that this town is Carrington," he said, "Is that correct?" The man laughed, "It used to be called Carrington, but when the highway passed us by we changed the name." "So what's it called now?" says the cabbie, a bit irritably.

"Well, " said our informant, "When they finished the highway we didn't get no more tourist traffic and things were looking bad for the shopkeepers. So we changed the name to 'DETOUR' and now everybody, 'cept the regulars,

comes right through the town and most of them spends their money here. Maybe you saw the sign back there?" So whenever I take a taxi, I think of DETOUR', and that's what this chapter is about! Taxis, that is.

*

My first trip in a taxi, at least the first one I remember, was when I was at boarding school and my father took me out with a friend and fed us with chocolate eclairs and cream puffs at a Lyons Corner House. On the way, the driver who was a loquacious and imaginative fellow, as I concluded in later life, regaled us with a saga of his experiences while driving all manner of peculiar people around London. As a boy in his early teens, my ambitions were influenced and coloured by the tales of daring and adventure I read about in various boy's magazines. All this was put on the back burner after my first taxi ride. I dreamed of hobnobbing with explorers and crooks and savants, all of whom listened attentively to my advice and comments on their varied and diverse activities!

For the next forty years I had many other preoccupations, but during that time I never quite forgot my boyhood ambitions to drive taxi in a big city. It wasn't until the late sixties that fate opened a door to these ambitions. It was late October, a time when everybody had locked up their cottages for the Winter and were thinking of going south to catch a bit of sun. I have to say that my leanings were totally in the other direction, but lean as I would there was rarely enough snow to cover the ground until after Xmas. All in all, from mid October until the New Year there was not much in the way of excitement except playing squash and drinking beer - in that order. Or taxi driving!

Don't ask me how I got started; like every other activity I got wrapped up in, although I was a willing victim it was always someone else who introduced me to it. I started skiing because a girl I was dancing with at midnight invited me to join her the following morning in a trip to the mountains. I never thought of scuba diving until I happened across the director of a diving club whose car had broken down on the highway. One night in a pub in Toronto I met a chap who was looking for somebody to play squash with! During the war I even learned enough about flying, in a very chancy way, because somebody who turned out to be an old school friend and regularly flew me in a *two-seater* Auster out of Yugoslavia, also regularly had the habit of falling asleep over his joystick! My opportunities in life, it seemed, followed the pattern set by the Russian lady in the play 'You can't take it with you', who had a typewriter delivered to her by mistake and, *willy-nilly*, became an author!

So there I was in this yellow taxicab, driving along College Street in Toronto and I got my first fare. He was a grizzled old Italian carrying a large brown paper bag full of bottles of wine and, like many of his compatriots, had very little English. But I had plenty of Italian so we got along fine. The fact that he paid me off with a bottle of rather vinegary home made wine did not detract from the enjoyment of my new profession!

There are three ways to pick up a fare. The dispatcher casts his net upon the waters and if you are in the area you call him up. If somebody hasn't beaten you to it you get the details and pick up the fare. If you are lucky you get to know the final destination - thus, if it is Timbuktu, you can turn it down if you want to. Another way is to get in the *line-up* at railroad stations or underground/subway terminals, or Saturdays and Sundays outside churches where it is mostly short trips and minimum fares. Either way the people you pick up are mostly ordinary, uninteresting and uncommunicative. Boring, you might say. The third possibility is simply to cruise around the downtown area until you get flagged down. And that's where you get the action.

Like a horse when a rider mounts it for the first time, you sum up your passenger pretty quickly. Most women get in the back seat and get on with their knitting. If they sit in front they probably want to talk, so let them get on with it. A talkative cab driver is a pain in the neck and there are plenty of them. Male fares are generally OK no matter where they sit. Drunks generally sit in front and spend the time telling *you* how they have been trying to kick the habit. Some will almost cry on your neck and they are all generous tippers. Once a couple got in and he gave me a ten dollar tip for a dollar fare and there was almost a scrimmage between the three of us. Me trying to give it back; he insisting belligerently and she shrieking her head off at both of us and trying to grab the note. Finally they both got out and it was only later that another passenger tapped me on the shoulder and asked if I had lost a ten dollar bill! Female drunks, whether accompanied or not, are to be treated with the greatest circumspection. They'll sit in the back seat where you can't see what they are doing, and make all kinds of crude suggestions with comments on your sexual ability. Once one of them put her arms around my neck, well, one arm anyway for the other hand was in my shirt pocket where I kept all my cash, while *she made suggestions* that would have frizzled your hair. The fares I liked best were prostitutes. They sat in the back, didn't give you any trouble and tipped carefully.

The ones you had to lookout for were the young girls who didn't have to take all that stuff from their parents and were sharing a room that boasted a mattress and an orange box where they could smoke hash and get stoned on the hard stuff. They would get into your cab, a couple of them around seventeen years old, screaming with laughter hysterically, and get out after a few blocks with a 'Thank you cabby.' And then disappear. After I had learned how to spot them before they got in the cab, a couple of teenage girls, I swear they were not more than fifteen jumped in the back and one said, "Just drive around, Cabby, we'll tell you when to stop." So I told them it would be five bucks, in advance and one of them produced a knife which I was sure she didn't know one end from the other. So I had to take it from her before she hurt herself with it!

I gave them a lecture and told them to go home to their parents before they got into real trouble, and left them standing on the sidewalk - and they had the nerve to ask for their knife back! If you ask me why I didn't drive them straight to the nearest police station, I wouldn't know what to say, except that my own

daughter was seventeen at that time. There but for the grace of God!

*

One evening I was driving up Yonge St around Dundas, and I got flagged down by a bunch of Swedish sailors, none of whom looked very steady on his feet. When I stopped, they heaved one of their number into the back and put a fistful of money into my hand. "Take him to *Pier Number Seven*." somebody said, and they lurched their way *towards* the next watering hole. The guard let me in through the *pier* gate and when I came back he pointed to an empty soft drink bottle with a straw in it on the back seat. "They must be putting some pretty strong stuff in those bottles," he laughed "That sailor only came out through the gate a quarter of an hour back, and he was stone cold sober then."

Another time, in answer to a radio call, I picked up an old lady at the *HOME HOME HOME*??? not far from Casa Loma. It turned out she was blind, but that was the only thing that was wrong with her. She told me where she wanted to go and assumed that I knew the way, which I didn't! So after I had driven around the *back-streets* for a while, I decided to stop and check my map. I turned my meter to the 'hold' position and consulted the map telling her why I was stopping. When I found where I was I turned the meter on again and very soon we got to our destination.

That was when I discovered that I had turned the meter off instead to hold, so when I turned it on again it was back to zero .So I just told her the meter reading. But she wasn't fooled. "Young man." she said, "I know how much the fare is and it's a lot more than that. I've done this trip many times. What's more I know what you did. You turned the meter off by mistake." And she handed me the correct fare, and no arguments. A real lady!

I could write a book about my taxi experiences, some of them funny, some you could cry about and a couple I was glad to get out of with a whole skin. I enjoyed every minute of it, driving Thursday and Friday evenings and all day Saturday. One day I made as much as \$35, and I knew it was a lot, for as I was settling up with the dispatcher, another driver came in and looked over my shoulder at the charge sheet. He exclaimed "Hey, Mac, you were really hustling!" *But by the middle of December, taxi-driving was beginning to get repetitive. Anyway, my skis needed waxing, and my wife, Bozena, was glad to see me home for a change. Furthermore, I was glad that I hadn't picked up any of her friends along the way!*

CHAPTER III

THE DOWNHILL ETHIC

At the bottom of Georgian Bay, which incidentally was to become my stamping ground for the next forty three years, the Niagara Escarpment borders the lake with cliffs of up to eight hundred feet. Not surprisingly, it became an El Dorado for ski resorts. In the Winter of 1954 when I took our first, and very early morning trip up there, Blue Mountain had the longest ski runs with a vertical drop of 780 feet. Developed by Jozo Weider, a crazy Czech whom everybody loved, it had an interesting complement of lifts. We were never quite sure which constituted the greatest challenge, the ski runs or the ski lifts themselves!

There were five lifts in all, most of them with the individuality of a Grizzly Bear with a sore head. The 'O' Hill was an intermediate hill with the fastest rope tow I have ever seen. In order to get on it, you had to adopt the slipping clutch principle, and after three trips you needed a new ski jacket and gloves. At the top of the hill, if you got that far in one piece, if you didn't let go twenty yards back, you were *catapulted*, rear end first, into the bushes. As a hazard to life and limb on a scale of one to ten, I rated it 10+. If you really wanted an experience to dine out on, the 'O' Hill lift was your baby. Added to its blandishments was the *real life Jozo*, red in the face, giving Hell to innocent skiers snatched off their feet and thrown flat on their faces, who were holding up the legitimate line-up of impatient skiers.

A couple of hundred yards along the line of the hill was another of Jozo's diabolical inventions: the Apple Bowl double rope tow. The first tow got you to the middle of the hill and then dumped you onto the second one which, if you didn't fumble your ski poles or fall on your face or slide backwards down the hill, hopefully got you to the top. However, getting on the second half didn't necessarily mean that your troubles were over. The gradient of the hill increased very quickly to about *fifty degrees*. *Most of the times*, it seemed, *you* would be leaning back on the rope, when the tow broke down leaving you in a most vulnerable position with your skis *spread-eagled*.. When the tow started again, always with a sharp jerk, you really had to be on the ball and get the skis back in the grooves, *p.d.q.*, otherwise you ended up with *your* body folded in a way it was not designed for. And just as you are figuring out your next move, the fellow behind is skiing over the top of you and yelling all kinds of uncomplimentary things about your tow rope technique.

The Granny was a single rope and mostly straightforward until it got to the middle of the hill which bulged outwards in such a way as to cause the rope to cut a pronounced groove through the earth. What that meant in practical terms, was that as you went over the bump, the rope was doing its best to drag you into the *ground*. *The only acceptable* alternative was to hold onto the

rope like grim death, bearing in mind that you were supporting a fair percentage of the weight of the other thirty or forty skiers ahead of and behind you on the tow.

The other piece of arcane design, though as far as I know nobody ever came to any harm when using it, was the two way sledge lift; one up, one down. There wasn't much room for people on the sledge, so we all piled our skis on the up sledge and walked alongside almost as far as the back forties. Trouble was that, at the disembarking point, everybody was in a hurry to find their skis which were piled up in a haphazard condition with the cables - yes it was long thongs and cables in those days - inextricably entangled. The *ensuing* melee would have given most people something to laugh about for hours on end!

Hans Moritsch was a more experienced skier than I and eventually he went off to look for steeper hills. However I always had company on what developed into regular weekly trips to the hills around Collingwood. In my work with Dunlop Canada and specifically with the new plant, I had to initiate the purchase of a lot of distribution and control equipment, and large motors to drive the mixing machines, calenders and mills. One of the several companies who tendered on this equipment was Canadian General Electric for whom the sales engineer, John Fydell, turned out to be another downhill ski enthusiast so we saw a great deal of each other skiing, drinking and engineering. His wife Joan was a top-rated water skier and represented Canada for many years in that sport. She also was no mean performer on the *ski-hill*. I always remember the time when John and I were standing at the bottom of the hill and we noticed Joan at the top. He was talking about his family and I asked him how many children he had. "Oh, three I think, and one in the oven!" I was watching Joan as he spoke. She was coming down the hill and at that moment she took a tumble, nothing too serious, but John and I were both thinking the same thing. *What about the one in the oven? Fortunately, as we discovered later, there was no damage done. The occupant of the oven, whom I met recently, is now, twenty five years later, a lovely young woman, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with her at all!*

*

In those days in the fifties, Blue Mountain was more of a club than a ski resort and many of the regulars had their own chalets scattered around the bottom of the hill. On a Saturday night there was as much activity as there was during the day on the hill. Everybody knew everybody and it was wine, women and song, with much *gemuetlichkeit* into the small hours of the morning. Sunday mornings were noted for sober skiing, for a while anyway, but nevertheless the hill was always packed as soon as the tows started. Other resorts began to appear close by and the roads from Toronto fed skiers in their *thousands to the hills every weekend*. Georgian Peaks, with a vertical drop of over 800 feet and some quite challenging runs, came on-stream in the late fifties and gave some relief to the already crowded slopes of Blue Mountain. Right adjacent to Blue Mountain, a private club, Craighleith, named after the railroad station at the foot of the hill, was also growing rapidly. To get to Blue Mountain and

Craigleith. one had to cross the rail tracks at the station and then drive up a short 25% gradient which more often than not was iced and worse than the slippery road to Hell. Not to improve matters very much, Jozo was often very much in evidence there, furiously berating the drivers who didn't have snow tires, and also some of those who did but still couldn't get up the hill!

It was about this time, in the early sixties, that I ran into Mike Podborski. A Ukranian born, so he said, but if you'd seen him on a Mongol pony with Genghis Khan's Horde streaming across the steppes you would not have thought him out of place. Short, built like the proverbial brick shithouse and totally indestructible, physically and mentally, he joined Dunlop Canada as Plant Engineer at Whitby. He also was a member of the Craigleith Ski Club and had a cottage at the foot of the runs. One day he invited me *to be* his guest up there and thereby added a new dimension to my skiing experiences! Mike and his wife, Jacky, spent all their weekends on the hill and for ten years I was up there almost every Sunday. Ralph Elsassaer used to come up pretty regularly and together we would often climb the hills before the tows started, our aim being to put a set of tracks down each run before the Ski Patrol mucked up the new snow!

Mike and Jacky had two sons, Steve and Craig, both of whom became World Class skiers. Steve went on to win several medals for Canada, Gold Silver and Bronze while Craig, whom I always thought to be a better skier than his brother, had an early knee injury which put him out of the running on the international downhill championships.

However at the time I met up with the family the two boys were still finding their feet on the hill, *and I remember that we used to wait* for them to catch up with us. My earliest memories of those two young fellows were of them crawling over the grand piano at our home in Toronto. Bozena, at the time was in Italy with our daughter Janie, which was probably just as well! It wasn't long before Steve and Craig were waiting for us on the hill, in fact by the time they were twelve or so we didn't see them at all except when they flashed past.

We covered a lot of ground during those ten years we spent up at Craigleith. A few times we went back to Blue Mountain, but with its long line ups and crowded slopes it had lost much of its attraction. Georgian Peaks was always a draw if you didn't get frozen on the Rogers chair and many was the time I went there with friends whose ambition and speed was different from mine and I ended up skiing on my own and counting runs! One day I fell in with an American woman on the chair and we skied together all morning, each trying to outdo the other. At midday I left her to grab a sandwich, going down in her estimation as she headed back for the chair. She wasn't going to lose any runs just to sit and feed her face in the restaurant! However I was back on the chair with my sandwich in no time at all and when I got to the top of Rogers there she was debating whether to take Rogers or the Minute Mile. I skied over to her and she looked at me in surprise, "That was a quick lunch." she said, "Are you still counting?" Well, I was, and I was still one run ahead of her. "Better get moving, we'll freeze if we stand about in this wind." And she was off and

when they stopped the chair at the end of the day, I was still one up on her. 22/21 for the day, and that was some hustling. At the bottom of the hill, we shook hands solemnly, I gave her a hug and never set eyes on her again. But that was one of the most enjoyable days skiing on that hill that I can remember

In those ten years or so, I must have skied most of Ontario's slopes from Collingwood to Hidden Valley and Thunder Bay to Devil's Elbow and all stops between. At the *line-up* to the O Hill once I found some *rock-hard* Liquorice All-sorts that had been in the pouch of my ski jacket for several years. Actually they fell out of the pouch as I was tightening my boots. I didn't bother to pick them up as I had plenty of fresh ones. It was about 1100 hours - just when one's stomach is remembering how long ago was breakfast! I moved on with the line slowly, tramping discarded sweets into the snow and grit. Presently I heard a bit of a commotion behind me and looking round, what do you think I saw? Everybody was happily eating Liquorice All-sorts.

At Craigeith, lunch back at the Podborski's cottage was always a giggle. Jackie, with her sense of humor never missed a chance to smarten somebody up. One day we were all standing around with a bottle of beer in one hand and a sandwich in the other. There were five men and four of them were 'Mikes'. Jackie, innocently looking out the window up the hill says "Mike, your fly is open."! You can imagine the immediate response! Some time in February they used to have a big bonfire at the top of the Birches and a great cauldron of Gluewein bubbling away all the afternoon. If I say that was the most popular run of the day it would be an understatement! You skied down to the Birches, swallowed a Dixie cup of elixir and then repeated the circuit. By the end of the afternoon most of us were taking the hill straight, and the only casualty was some minor burns when somebody skied right through the middle of the bonfire. On the last run of one of those days, Jackie had all her guests pick up some firewood as they went down the hill. Joe Herwig was on that trip and I remember him going down with a dixie cup in each hand and a bundle of firewood under his arms. He collapsed outside the cottage, followed by Mike and Jacky and Uncle Tom Cobbley and all, in a heap of bodies and firewood. That was the time Joe lost his prescription glasses and though we all gave him a hand in searching for them, I don't think any of us took it too seriously. Of course Joe got really pissed off with us, and the more pissed off he got the more hilarious it seemed to the rest of us. In the middle of it all, the POD as we used to call him, stood there like the Rock of Ages, a charging hippopotamus would have deflected off him, holding out a dixie cup to Joe, "Cheer up Joe, " he said, There's worse things in life. Have another drink."

I wouldn't want anybody to think that we were all a bunch of drunken bums skiing out of control down the hill. In fact Jackie was a sort of self appointed judge and jury for misdemeanors on the hill. She was quick, and rightly so, to reprimand anybody who endangered other skiers. She was the lady skier who always gave me Hell because I liked going straight down between the trees. Mind you, I never hit anybody or caused an accident. Although I once had a narrow escape when another skier did an egg-beater close by and, in order to avoid him, I went shooting through the trees and

ended up unscathed and minus one ski. I was picking up the pieces when a voice said, "Are you alright, Mike?" Well I was, and guess who standing there wagging her finger at me!

One day I was running down the Canyon, a fast, curvaceous piste, when a trailing branch snatched one of my poles from me and I had to climb back up to find it. It took a bit of finding because the branch had passed it on to a friend higher up and totally out of reach. I got it eventually somehow, I forget how, but in the process a little leaf fluttered across my feet. A funny little leaf it was but it turned out to be a baby rabbit. Poor little thing, as cold as a whore's heart on pay day. I picked it up, not knowing what I was going to do with it and at that moment, three little girls with not more than twenty five years between them, materialised around me!

One said "What is it?". Another "Oooh, can I hold it?" The other one, staking her claim with commendable alacrity, cried "Can I have it?" And then, quickly fending off any adult demurs, "My mother loves rabbits!" which I didn't doubt for a minute, of course! What I had to admire most in this scenario was the efficient, speedy way in which it was resolved by these young ladies. One took her skis off and cuddled the scrap of wet fur, another produced some swaddling clothes, the third picked up the skis and poles and off they went in a huddle scheming how to get it past the mother 'who loved rabbits'!

*

I never tire of telling the story of another humane episode when I had a small adventure with a field mouse that had strayed too far from home. I was skiing across an open field over the Back Forties at Blue Mountain when I saw another 'leaf' fluttering across a thin film of crust on the snow. It fell into a deep ski track and couldn't get out so I took off my gloves and picked the wee body up, its two beady little eyes peering out of my cupped hands. It had found a warm billet, I thought to myself. It certainly didn't seem to be in any hurry to get out!

Moving over to the other side of the track I bent down, opening my hands so he could run off to wherever he had been headed before falling into the hands of this friendly giant. He jumped off the tips of my fingers, took a quick gander at the landscape and then jumped back onto my hands. Well, I didn't have to be told twice. He had this nice warm cave, and the Hell with Shank's Mare. We peered at each other wondering about decisions. "What am I going to do with you, Charlie?" I said.. And that was where I got my big surprise. "Take me back to the barn, Mac," *said* this tiny voice, "And thanks for the ride!"

I looked around, and sure enough, two hundred yards away, there was a well chinked barn. Well insulated from the look of it. And when we got there he was off like a shot and vanished into the woodwork. I was just about to be on my way when I heard his voice again, "You will never guess what happened to me!"

*

But if I was asked what was my most memorable and touching experience with wild things, I would say it was a little sparrow that had been stunned by a passing car, probably hit by the windshield, but *with* no apparent injuries. It was lying in the middle of the road, dead, ***I first thought***. I picked it up carefully and put it in a place safe from cats among some *lilies of the valley*. Half an hour later it was still there, with no sign of life, and then one eye opened and looked at me. Suddenly it flew out of my hands, landed on my shoulder and then gave me a peck on the cheek! So what do you make of that?

*

Collingwood was a lot of fun and the ***two-hour*** run up to the hills from Toronto was a small premium to pay for the convenience. However that did not mean that other resorts and higher hills did not beckon. One day I had to pay a business trip to Thunder Bay to look at some hydraulic drives that I was proposing to use in Toronto. It was some time in January in the late fifties and since our work was only going to take a few hours we decided to go early on a Friday and then spend the rest of the weekend on the Norway hill which was close to 1000 feet vertical.

When we landed, it was snowing hard and by the time we concluded our business 17 ***inches*** had fallen. I forget how we got out to the hill, but it was touch and go whether we made it. We did though but nobody else was skiing and there were no tracks to be seen and the chair was not running. The ski operator told us it was shut down until Sunday, but that he was going to run it to get to the top for whatever reason, and if we wanted to get on it at the same time we were welcome. When we got off the chair at the top the operator looked at us, pityingly I thought. "I'm going to be about fifteen minutes up here, so if the chair is still running when you get down, grab it and I'll make sure it doesn't stop until you get back up again."

The snow was up to our knees at least, and neither of us had much experience of skiing deep powder. It was a hilarious run, but we got down in time to catch the lift before it stopped. So we got our second run in but that was it for the day, and we dragged ourselves sadly back to the airport. "Never mind," says Hans, "We got two good runs, which is more than anybody else got did."

In 1960, ***when I was in my forty-second year***, I went out to New Brunswick on a staff visit to Dunlop's operation along the East Coast at Bathurst. It was mainly a tank-lining department and, while the visit was not of much general interest, I enjoyed meeting with the people of the East Coast and seeing something of their life and language. They were for the greater part a mixture of Scottish and French though there was more English spoken there than French. When driving along the coast road to Bathurst, I was struck by the number of large families - you can tell how big a family is from the length of the clothes lines which, on weekdays always seemed to be full. If they wash on Sundays they wait until Monday to hang it out, so Monday's first wash is early in the morning!

It used not to be an unusual thing to see people standing along the road holding up a twenty pound salmon or a lobster with a three foot claw span. On my way back to Toronto I stopped for one of these itinerant fishermen and for a dollar bought a twenty-one pound salmon that within the hour had been swimming in the Atlantic. I tried to give him some more money but he wouldn't take it! Not knowing if it was illegal or not, I bought about a ream of waxed paper in Moncton and wrapped it up well with brown paper to finish it off. But nobody gave it a second glance when I took it on the aircraft.

The following Winter I flew out to Alberta and British Columbia to visit the Dunlop operations which were quite small in comparison with the plants in Toronto and Whitby. At Edmonton there was a string of interconnected small lakes which had been illuminated for skating in the evenings and I managed to rent a pair of skates for a few hours. It was a delightful experience with enough people around to make it interesting, but plenty of space so that you weren't tripping over anybody. To cover all the convoluted channels and snyes between the lakes, none of which was more that a hundred yards wide, you had to skate close to a mile. It made a pleasant change from Haringay Arena where I used to skate in London before the war.

On the way to Vancouver we had to go via Prince George, up in the mountains north of Jasper, where we had to wait for another plane to connect. The departure *lounge, not much bigger than a garden shed, was* the only cover from the blizzard that was blowing outside but we had a pot bellied stove in the middle which kept us pretty warm. We must have been all of three hours in that hut, and once or twice I poked my nose outside to see our Viscount with its engines running in the minus thirty degrees C temperature and wondered if we were ever going to get off.

There was something about that scene that was reminiscent of Ronald Coleman's film 'Lost Horizon' and it wasn't Shangri La that I had in mind. All it needed was a Mongolian pilot to complete the scene. The other plane eventually turned up. It was a bulky high wing plane with a single engine. I thought it was a Norseman, and three frost-encrusted travellers pushed their way into our little oasis, stamping the snow off their mukluks. They had come down from Prince Rupert up on the BC coast.

"Good flight?" somebody asked. "It was like being in an elevator that didn't know which way to go. And there was more blizzard inside the plane than out" One of them said," And most of the time we didn't know which way up we were. Otherwise it was fine!"

At that moment our flight was called. "Hey fellows, better move yourselves. We want to clear that ridge before dark!" We buttoned up and staggered a hundred yards across the tarmac to our plane. The pilot was one of those chatty humorists, you know the type, he stands by the guillotine and says, "The good news is, You won't feel a thing!" We got over the ridge alright, I knew that, but from the view out of my window seat, I figured a couple of inches lower and we would have been scooping snow onto the cabin!

*

Well, the Dunlop place in *B.C.* was like the rest of them. Vancouver had a lot to offer the itinerant visitor but my mind was a bit farther to the North. Another time I thought, but right now I really wanted to get the planks on! I was introduced to John Fergusson, a big Swede and a deep powder snow man. Somebody had been looking over my shoulder! We spent most of the day going over a few of their problems, sorted out most of them and then turned to what had been foremost in our minds all day - Whistler Mountain!

There wasn't any discussion about where we were going the next day, just some details of ways and means! By sheer good luck I happened to have my ski boots and clothing with me and John assured me that I could rent a pair of Heads when we got up there. I forget what time we took off the next morning, but we got there well before the Gondola started. In fact, when it did start there were only a couple of skiers ahead of us and about half an hour later we came off the Red Chair and headed for the Roundhouse to plan our day over a cup of coffee.

John was dead keen to show me the Snow Bowl to the East of the Red Chair, but when I looked at it I knew it wasn't for me. *I won't say I don't* like the white stuff, but I do like to get my head *above* it, at least once in a while. And that snow bowl had more snow in it than I wanted to tackle. However John got me there and I figured that it was going to be easier to ski the bowl and take the Green Chair back, than climb back up to the Red Chair run. John went down before me, as though he was sitting in an arm chair, and loving it no doubt! *I followed, leaning well back as John had instructed me. Lo and behold, I floated to the surface.* It was beautiful. Then I tried to turn and that wasn't so beautiful. But I carefully put my arms and legs back where they belonged and got myself into a vertical position. This time I ended *among the* trees, being rather cautious about turning. *Down* at the bottom several years later, there was John waiting for me, anxiously, I thought. "John," I said, looking at him earnestly, "Don't you have any nice clean ice to ski on around here?"

We took the chair back up to the top and John headed for the bowl again. I skied down to the bottom of the T-bar which took me up to the top of another bowl, only this one was full of *hard-packed* ripple snow which John had warned me against. It was hard and fast and you could do anything on it though it was only a short run - about twice the length of anything at Collingwood. I treated myself to a couple of runs there and then took the Red trail. It was sheer *heaven* and it went on for ever. *Hard-packed* with a couple of inches of powder, it wound its way down through the trees, not a wide trail, like the Sissy Schuss at Tremblant, but twice as long or more. Once I climbed up to the top of the summit ridge where few ski tracks were to be found and wended my way back to another chair and more heaven.

We had agreed to meet at the top of the gondola at 1700 hrs and sure enough, there was John waiting for me. He was in the line-up. "Come on," he said, "I'm

keeping a place for you." "What's wrong with the trail.?" I asked. "You can't go down there, you'll kill yourself." says he, "It is all iced." But I was used to Ontario skiing and ice had no terrors for me. "I'll see you at the bottom." But John felt responsible for me and followed me down. It was lovely. Icy, rocky, frozen mud and the odd branch or two with an occasional patch of crystalline snow here and there. Typical Ontario skiing!

Half way down I stopped and waited for John who arrived looking the worse for wear. "How the Hell can you ski this stuff. You must be crazy." I patiently explained to him the facts of life after which he said "Remind me never to ski in Ontario. You must all be totally out of your skulls!" In our own way we both had an excellent day's skiing, for me, up to that time, it was the best I had ever had, if only because I had better control with my rental Heads than I had ever had in Italy.

It wasn't long before I was able to go down to Vermont and ski at Stowe and Dead River which, though not *as* spectacular as Whistler, *were* every bit as challenging and enjoyable. One of the chairs at Dead River takes you up 2000 feet from where, after a few hundred yards of weaving down through the conifers, the trail points straight down the line of the tow. ***On the left are the steel towers which support the lift while on the right a steep gully, filled with shoulder-to-shoulder jack pine, discourages any familiarity whatsoever. In*** between these two features the trail runs, straight as a die down to the bottom. At the time I came down that trail, the conditions were perfect, plenty of packed snow with a couple of inches of powder on top and a more enjoyable trail you couldn't wish for. When I came to the straight down section there were three guys standing in the middle, a couple of hundred yards down, which was a bit stupid since they weren't bothering get out of the way. However I paid no heed, I had good control and knew I could stop if I had to without any trouble. That was until the nice snow conditions ran out onto ice about fifty yards above these idiots. Right or left was death, for sure, so I chose the softest targets.

Well, that was a bit of a muddle for sure. If there had been five of them I could have called a strike! We sorted ourselves out and fortunately there were no injuries which was a miracle. We didn't get into a fight, but there were some pretty hard words spoken to which I added my complement. After all, as I told them, it was criminally stupid to stand in the middle of a narrow trail. Afterwards I found out why they were standing there. They were beginners and were totally unable to handle the ice - obviously not from Ontario! I reported the incident to the Ski Patrol when I got down who found them walking down the trail which, in ski boots was breakable crust!

*

That trip must have been about Xmas of 1970 and it coincided with the first beginnings of my drop-out from the downhill ethic and my awakening to the delights of wilderness back country skiing, though it was not until 1972 that I finally devoted my activities totally to that sport. What delivered the axe to the downhill was a two-week trip to St Anton and Davos in March of that year. ***It***

was about the beginning of January 1972 that Mike and Jacky were talking about a ski holiday in Europe. Joe Herwig and I listened in to the conversation with great interest. It seemed that the Southern Ontario Division of the CSA - Canadian Ski Association - was organising a charter to Austria in March, but did not have enough support to make the project financially feasible.

Joe held up his hand, "If you want a body, I'm on." Mike looked at me questioningly, "I'm all for it," says I, "'S far as I know, I can get away. Let you know tomorrow." And I did indeed, and by the time we had to put our money where our tongues were we had a score of friends. Enough to fill the plane! Somebody once asked me who was in our group. I can't remember everybody, but of those with whom I had skied over the past ten years or so, there were about a dozen. There were Mike and Jacky, Virgil and Gudrun Curri of whom more anon, Peter Masterton and Barbara Gilday, Joan Shields, Barbara Hasbach, Lorne McIntyre who was Chief Engineer at Dunlop and his wife Myrna, Joe Herwig and of course yours truly.

We landed in Munich and the following day, after a boisterous evening at the Hofbrauhaus, we caught the train for St Anton. As we went through the Hohgebirge we saw no snow at all. *I remember* quite a few skiers getting off the train near Garmisch and as we pulled out of the station I saw them all *despondently looking* up at the hills on which not a single flake of snow was visible. At that moment, as the train started moving, I was still on the platform also looking up. Making a dash for the train I got a foot on the step and was just about to pull myself up when a railway official grabbed my arm shouting 'Verboten, verboten.' There was no way I was going to be left behind. I managed to shake him off and left him sitting on his backside on the platform! The train kept on going and as I pulled myself in, there was Joe Herwig standing there with a big grin. "Damn Krauts," I said to him, "You're all the same."

But we were all on our way to St Anton, keeping our fingers crossed! If the snow conditions there were not going to be any better our only option was to give Davos a try. I think the girls would have preferred Davos since it is more open and with, how shall I say, more escape routes. I had seen some brochures of both resorts before leaving Canada, and Davos, with Klosters *behind, had a lot to recommend itself.*

However, we were all booked in at various places at St Anton so we decided to give it a go. There was about enough snow on the lower slopes, with a bit of hopping over bare patches, to get us down to the village at the end of the day. But the top half gave us all we wanted even though the snow was well packed. We booked an instructor each morning for the first four days and it was well worth the expense. That fellow took us on some trips that normally I would not have given a second look. I always remember one hill that Barbara Gilday didn't like. It felt like about two degrees off the vertical, but somehow we all got down, except Barbara who was left standing motionless at the top. The instructor looked up at her, in fact we all looked up. "Are you enjoying yourself, Barbara?" he called out. "Oh, yes." she says, "All except for this

fucking hill!"

When you get out of the second gondola, you walk through a gloomy tunnel and then come out, not quite at the top of Valuga, *a* mountain which is 3,000 meters high, with the slopes dropping away steeply below your feet. It soon flattens out, sort of, and resolves itself into two ski tracks disappearing round the hill to the right which, if you reach out, you could touch the surface quite easily as you went past. On the left you don't see much of anything except aeroplanes flying below you, but you hope that if you fly off that parapet there will be some nice soft snow down there somewhere. *That* there was, I know, for one of our number came adrift there once, I think it was Joe, though there wasn't much damage except to his pride.

The next interesting feature is a giant mogul hill which is as steep as I ever want to tackle.. As you float over the top the hill drops sharply away beneath your skis. You manage a nice parallel turn only to find yourself sliding sideways down a hard packed slope with little bits of sharp rock puncturing the surface. Far too many to avoid. You scream as you imagine what is happening to the soles of your skis. But it doesn't go on for ever - that's the good news - and very quickly a sort of Cresta run deposits you, a little faster than you had planned, right outside the Ulmer Hutte which is full of beer and drunken Germans. So you join them before finding out what other surprises are in store for you. More of the same!

After a few runs down, - it was time for lunch at St Christoff with silver cutlery and white starched tablecloths. I remember it started off with Knoedlsuppe which didn't touch the sides as it went down, and continued through several courses, all of which were sheer Heaven. It is expected that the instructor is treated to lunch, and by God, he had the best appetite of all. It wasn't until the third day that he took us down the Schindlerkar - a narrow, near vertical arrow which takes you straight n 1500 feet vertical almost to the bottom of the second gondola at Galzig

When the gondola stopped at the end of the day (and wasn't it a race to get that last run in), you tackle the lower hill wending your way down through a labyrinth of mud and grass and gravel and traces of snow. It wasn't the best run of the day, but I don't think anybody ever took the gondola down. So it was a quick couple of beers in the local hostelry, a shower if you were lucky, followed by 30 minutes shuteye and off to the Bahnhofristorant, just behind the Goldener Adler Hotel. Replete with excellent food and wine, we ensconced ourselves at the Mariannastuberl, *Mariannastuebl?* dancing and drinking until one in the morning. Next morning, first on the gondola, and that was our program for the rest of the week

One evening we were all stuffing ourselves with fine food and wine in the Bahnhofristorant, which I believe is a rebuilt railway carriage, when I spotted Anna Weider, one of Jozo's daughters looking for a seat. Some of us spoke with her but she seemed not to be very much of the party spirit and we only shortly afterwards learned of the sad news of the death of her father in a

driving accident. It was my misfortune that to this day, I never again met any members of her family.

I had to do a fast trip to London which took three days but I still had the better part of four days skiing at Davos Dorf when I got back. They had a lot more snow than St Anton after a week of which we were all able to manage most of the runs at Davos. The Gotschnagrät - I was never quite sure where I was on that run - some seven miles long, has much in common with the Sissy Schuss at Mont Tremblant in Quebec or the Red Chair run at Whistler, only much longer and a real knee trembler by the time you got to Klosters.

You can't say you have skied Davos unless you've done the Parsenn; its a bit like the South *Gully* on the Headwall at Mount Washington in New Hampshire. They say if you can ski that you can ski anything. I have never tried it myself but I can say, with pride, that two very good friends of mine have! I thought of the South Gully when I skied the Parsenn from Weissfluhgipfel, and they don't even give you a medal for it!

*

We landed at Toronto airport at about four in the pm and just before we went our various ways the Pod looked at me with his expressive eyebrows, "Coming up to Craigleith tomorrow, Mike?" Well, there was only one answer to that, and Joe and I were up there bright and early. We decided to take the 'Mogul' first off; after all we had some practice on moguls at St Anton! I had always treated the 'Mogul' at Craigleith with respect. Not that it was a really adventurous run, but it had a few jokers up its sleeve if you didn't watch out. This time I was half-way down before I realised that *the hill* was on its best behaviour. Joe and I got down to the bottom and stopped to look up.

"What the Hell have they done to the hill," says Joe, "I've never known it so friendly!" And then it dawned on us! Two weeks at St Anton and Davos had made everything at Craigleith look easy!

That Sunday we had a ball, bombing down all the trails which were in fantastic condition! I can't speak for Joe, but I certainly made the most of that day. *When* the tows shut down in the evening, I wanted to put on my seal-skins and get in a couple more of the same, but the ski patrol threatened to carry me off the hill if I persisted. I wasn't to know that this day was my 'Swan Song' for downhill skiing and that for the rest of my life I was to have only two more days of it, one at Blue Mountain and one at Craigleith. But I don't complain, for it was my choice, and for the next twenty-four years I was married to a different kind of skiing. But of that, more anon.

CHAPTER IV

COUREURS DU BOIS

The history of Canadian exploration and resource development is dominated by the early French settlers who moved inland along the Great Lakes and rivers by canoe and on foot, subduing or befriending the Indians

It was early in the ninth century AD that the first European settlers came to Canada. Perhaps 'settlers' is the wrong word, for it was the Vikings under Leif Erikksen who landed on the east coast of what we now know as Labrador. To this day, a bleak and lonely land with little means of support for the warlike seamen from across the water, Labrador offered scant encouragement to the new arrivals, and though traces of their passage are still to be found, it seems that their stay on those inhospitable shores did not span very many years.

Some five hundred years later, John Cabot, a seaman from Genoa, commissioned by the King of England, landed on the East Coast, following routes established by fishermen from Europe. Soon the first French explorers made their appearance, entering the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1534. Jacques Cartier from St Malo in France was sent on a tour of exploration by Francis 1st, and sailed up the river as far as Lachine Rapids, where Mont Real stands today. Forty years later Samuel de Champlain established the first permanent French Colony in Nova Scotia and built the city of Quebec. His travels were to take him south of the river and as far as Lake Huron in Ontario.

However, the English from Virginia were fast moving into the area and soon after in 1629 forced Champlain to surrender Quebec city. The history of the French exploration of Canada through to the western plains and down the Mississippi Valley where they established the State of Louisiana in the late seventeenth century is well documented. The end of that period from early in the same century until one hundred years later was marked by the Battle of the Plains Of Abraham on the approaches to the city of Quebec. It was there, in September of 1759, that the French and English armies under Generals Montcalm and Wolfe met. It was an English victory but only by default, for both armies committed so many tactical errors that neither general, had they survived the battle, could really claim that much other than luck had won the day! Nevertheless, at the end of that day, it was the English that held the field, and Quebec City into the bargain. But of exploration, many, too many to be enumerated here, have trodden or paddled that route. Jacques Cartier, one of the most famous of the French explorers and one of the first to make his name was succeeded by Champlain and Raddisson, and Grosseilleurs, and not to forget La Verendrye.

Later came men like Samuel Hearne, who walked from Churchill to Coppermine taking nearly two years to do it. Shortly after returning from that trip, Samuel Hearne, who had been a Naval officer, was appointed Commander of Churchill Fort. This was in 1782, and Hearne was approached

by a French ship commanded by Admiral de la Perouse who, with only four hundred men, took the fort without even a shot being fired! Later, when the Hudson's Bay Company could do without his services, Samuel Hearne was dismissed for cowardice.⁵*No macro here?*

David Thompson deserves a mention: he was geographer to the North West Company and explored much of the central part of Canada. Similarly, General Alexander McKenzie should not be forgotten, his writings in 'Voyages from Montreal to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans' are a bible for travellers on the McKenzie River. It has always seemed to me that the French came to North America with the idea of annexing the land to France; in fact large areas were to become known as New France. But their numbers were small in comparison to the vast areas of land that they coveted. Indeed their travels covered so much land that they came unprepared for its immensity and it was left to the English to cope with detailed exploration and cartography and subsequent settlement through to Western Canada. Nevertheless, today one still finds isolated outposts of French culture and religion in many parts of the country. Only in Quebec is their language and culture protected, though with what effects upon their future existence, one can only guess at.

It is not to be thought that, because I did a little canoeing and kayaking and, what was for me, exploring the North Country of Ontario, that I saw myself as emulating the deeds and accomplishments of these early and intrepid explorers and the many others who came after. Since my schooldays, my experiences with the French have not been very rewarding, to say the least, and the impressions I had gained of that flamboyant race have coloured my feelings about them. I am sure that there are many French people whom I would like and admire, it is just that it has not been my lot to meet them. Nevertheless I have to admit that those early settlers, the Coureurs du Bois⁶, *Sorry Mike, I carefully altered your spelling before finding this note.* no matter what my opinion of their descendents might be, have well earned the admiration and respect of those who knew of their exploits, not only in Canada but throughout the world. So if I refer to them as Frogs and they to us as the Sale Anglais it should be accepted that the terms are less of opprobrium than might appear. If we don't always see eye to eye it may be accepted that we agree to disagree. I repeat that the old style French Canadians were not that hard to get on with, in fact they were an accepted facet of life in Canada. Of the present day Quebecois and in particular the ones with a political axe to grind, I say nothing except that they seem to be getting a little too shrill for my liking and, I imagine, for most of the rest of Canada .

So Georgian Bay was to become my stamping ground for many years, though I should say, in the early days, it was more splashing than stamping. If I didn't put as many water miles under my keel as *did* the Courers du Bois and early

⁵ See 'A journey to the Northern Ocean' by Samuel Hearne. It describes his two journeys from Churchill to the mouth of the Coppermine River in the years 1770 thru 1774. Published in Canada , 1958.

⁶ I believe spelt correctly it should be 'Coureurs du Bois' but they were a special breed so the one word got shortened to 'Courers'

settlers, I hope they will not hold it against me if I steal a little of their thunder by naming this chapter after them.

Earlier I spoke about my introduction to canoeing, for which I have to thank my good friend Hans Martinsen who took me around Algonquin Park and from whom I learned much about the flora and fauna of the backwoods. Much as I enjoyed the canoe, by far the greater part of my association with Canadian waters was in a kayak. Again it was Hans who was responsible for my apotheosis from the canoe. One day he asked me if I would like to try out a double kayak with him and the following weekend we were to be found on a stony beach at Honey Harbour assembling the dozens of small wooden and brass parts that fitted together into a canvas and neoprene shell. The result was a beautiful little boat, seventeen feet long, that could be paddled or sailed in water that few open boats could handle. Made by 'Tyneboats of Newcastle' England, they were used during the war by the 'Independent Companies', who were the forerunners of the Commandos, in raids against German battleships sheltering in the Norwegian Fjords.

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My most memorable canoe trip in Algonquin Park was also my last. Tom Gibson our plant engineer in Toronto, Murray Galbraith and myself, mechanical and electrical engineers respectively and Hans Martinsen whom you have met already, planned a few days round-trip in the Park. It was decided that Tom and Murray in one canoe, looking after the commissariat, and Hans and me in the other boat, would all meet up there on Friday evening. This was in the middle of July 1960. The weather was hot and dry, in fact, though we didn't realise at the time, a drought had been declared for the whole of Ontario, and campers and others had been warned about fire hazard. Hans and I turned up innocently at the park gates where we had to book in .

The parks official poked his head through the car window and gave us the once over, " Where are you headed?" he asked. Hans gave him our planned route.

"There is a ban on campfires," he said, "Has been for the past week. Do you have a Coleman stove, or equivalent?" Of course we hadn't; never even given it a thought. He shook his head, "You'll have to go back to Huntsville and get one. You wont be allowed in without one!" So that was when I had my brainwave!

"We are meeting a couple of friends up at Tom Thompson. They have a stove." I said with a straight face, " Maybe you have seen them." I gave them a good description of the pair, thinking they were ahead of us. "OK ! You can go ahead, but remember, NO CAMP FIRES!" Well, we were in and keeping our fingers crossed. But when we reached the meeting place, Guess what! No Tom, no Murray, and nothing much to eat but we were not going to go thirsty. There was plenty of water in the lake.

I don't know how long we waited, but eventually with no sign of the food we dug into our packs and pooled our resources. A tin of Norwegian fish balls,

and some delicious pasta Bolognese. I had a bar of chocolate that looked as though it was suffering from heat stroke and some loose raisins in my pocket. We wolfed down everything except the pasta which we kept for breakfast. I can't say that I enjoyed the fish balls but when hungry you can't afford to be picky.

I looked at Hans who was tucking in with great relish. "They must have been pretty big fish," I said, holding one of the balls between my fingers. "In fact I didn't even know they had any. He looked puzzled for a moment, and then laughed. "It's a misnomer, they are just gnocchi or knoedel if you like, made from fish. Not what you thought!"

What we really wanted now was a nice cup of hot coffee and we got our imaginations to work but it didn't help very much. Just then I noticed a flicker of flame half a mile away on the other side of the lake, and we watched apprehensively expecting the onset of a forest fire. But it wasn't a forest fire, just campers, probably making coffee! It was a still evening and not a ripple on the water, so we had a long distance call!⁷

"Don't you know there's a drought on, and no camp fires?"

"Nope, we've been out for two weeks. Haven't heard anything about it. Where are you headed?"

We managed to explain our situation. They were happy not to know anything about the prohibition of campfires.

"We got some hot chocolate on the go. If you want to come across you are welcome to a cup."

Looking back later I knew what we had not done, but the thought of hot chocolate blinded us to first principles! We jumped in the canoe and ten minutes later we were happily gulping down half a pint of sweet hot chocolate. We sat and chatted awhile and then headed back to camp in the pitch dark - Hans said he could see the horizon.

"Bugger the horizon," I said, "What I want to see is our camp site. Anyway we should be heading more to the left." Voices could be heard across the water. They seemed to be saying something about our direction, but Hans was not going to admit that we didn't know where we were going. Remonstrations were all in vain. Finally we found ourselves among tree stumps and slash. We did not actually come to blows, for obvious reasons, but it would have been easier to deflect a charging rhino than to get Hans to admit our error.

We came sheepishly back to the camp to find that we were 'only' forty-five degrees off course. Eventually we got home, crawled thankfully into our sacks and slept the sleep of the just. It was about three in the morning when I heard the first drops of rain on our tent, and my first thought was that the

⁷ On a quiet evening when the lake is like a mirror voices may be heard as much as a thousand yards away and it is easy to hold a conversation over this distance, allowing of course a few seconds delay for the sound to travel that distance. Hence the derivation 'long distance call'

drought was broken and we could have hot pasta Bolognese for breakfast. A nice thought and I drifted off peacefully. At eight next morning it sounded as if the rain was trying to drive holes through the roof of the tent. I opened the flaps and looked out upon a diluvian scene; everything was wet, the ground, the trees and the sky and it didn't look as if it had any intention of giving up. Hans was lying on his back with his mouth wide open, oblivious to our beautiful rain forest! A fine pair of tonsils, I thought!

"I'll light the fire, I said to Hans, "While you get breakfast." We were on a popular campsite, and just in case you don't know what that signifies, I will be happy to enlighten you. There was no kindling, wet or dry; no large white pine branches lying about, nothing. And anything you touched, squelched. Nevertheless, as my father used to tell me, if you don't at first succeed, try, try, and try again. Seven times I lit that damn fire and seven times it made a bit of white smoke and expired. Hans looked out from the comfort of the tent, with a smile on his face.

"You know what the Indians say?" he asked. I waited with head bared for the blow to fall. "White man, white smoke." I looked across to him, snug and dry in the tent. Me, with water streaming down my face and down the back of my neck. "OK Hans, come and show me how to do it." But he was too wise an old bird to get caught that way. "Treat it as a challenge." He suggested.

There was still no sign of Tom and Murray. Since they were already twelve hours late, our only recourse was to return to Canoe Lake where we had started paddling, to take a quick dash down to the park gates to see whether they had actually got that far. There we would decide our next course of action - to paddle or not to paddle. In the meantime we ate our breakfast of cold pasta, loaded the canoe and wrapped ourselves from head to toe with plastic sheets - it was still pouring with rain. At that precise moment, who should appear from around a headland but our two strays

There were some acrimonious questions and comments from both sides. A bit heated but not too unfriendly. It turned out that the officials at the park gates associated them immediately with Hans and me and sent them back to Huntsville to get a Coleman stove, by which time it was too late to catch up with us. So they put up at a motel in Dwight and here we are. Tom, who came from Nelson B.C., worked in Northern Quebec for *Shawinigan* Falls Pulp and Paper for most of his life, spoke the most atrocious Quebecois and had the best store of comparative bad language that I ever heard. At the time he was about sixty, never gave a damn for anybody and always called a spade a goddamned shovel.

He stood up in the canoe and waved his shovel, sorry, paddle at us. "You two horses hangdowns, get those fucking togas off you and let's get paddling." Murray looked on with a big grin on his face and gave Tom a whack across the backside with his paddle. "Never mind the chit-chat," he said, "Let's find someplace civilised and have some breakfast. I'm starved." And weren't we all!

It did not take us long to find the right place. Mind you, we weren't all that fussy! The rain seemed to be relenting so we stripped off to our underpants, hung up our wet togs to dry and attended to the question of breakfast. Tom produced a forty ounce of Grants Best Procurable - don't waste time looking for a bottle *in the liquor store*, Tom's probably drunk the lot. We drank it straight out of the bottle; I felt all the better for it, and I'm sure everybody else did. Followed four big steaks, a pint of coffee and all washed down with another slug of Scotch. We were on our way!

At the top of Tom Thompson Lake is a three mile portage leading to Ink Lake and an easy paddle down the creek to McIntosh with a neat little island in the middle. In those days there was an old ranger's cabin there, about twelve feet square, quite clean and dry which was used by campers on a first come first served basis. This was where we hoped to settle for the first night. After our breakfast, full of good spirits we headed for the portage and were not overjoyed to find that there were three parties ahead of us. It was a muddy portage with rainwater filled creeks and corduroy⁸ bridges also covered with slippery mud and the way the other parties were moving it promised to be a slow day.

Tom took us aside, confidentially, " Listen," he says, "You young fellows can move a lot faster than me. Grab your stuff and carry the canoe between you and get past all these slow pokes, they'll be all bloody day on the portage. Make yourselves comfortable in the cabin and get a good fire going. Murray and I will be along later." We were off like a shot and didn't stop until we reached Ink Lake. We did get a few dirty looks from the other parties who were resting, but Hans had the *mot juste*, "To rest is not to conquer", he said. It sounded a bit Aryan to me, but it seemed to fit the bill! Eventually we got ahead of them all and found ourselves following the **sinuous** Ink Creek into McIntosh and our coveted island. We were the first there that day with not much to do but pick ourselves the two best corners, and watch the disappointed looks on the faces of the 'slow pokes' when they discovered that the cabin was occupied! The last party to come through consisted of two canoes, two fellows and two girls and they seemed most annoyed at our presence and paddled around the island twice looking at us in a peeved sort way. As they passed us the second time I thought they were going to throw their grappling irons across our bows and try a frontal attack!

Some words of sympathy seemed to be in order. "Sorry about that, Fellows," I said, " But we've got a couple of cripples in the other boat, so we need all the space we have." More dirty looks and the girls were looking really pissed off!! Everything would have been OK, but then Hans had to go and upset the apple cart. Just as they were sheering off he beamed at them pleasantly, "Tough luck chaps," he said, "I guess its no nooky tonight!" At least that's what it sounded like to me and also to the fellows in the canoes, for hardly had Hans' dictum come across than the two canoes did a simultaneous about face and headed

⁸ Three inch diameter logs laid side by side can bridge a muddy patch or a small stream to accommodate foot traffic. In wet weather these 'bridges' get a coating of mud making them very slippery.

straight for our island, the two males saying some quite unfriendly things to us. Well, talk about laugh, you've never seen a better farce. Hans and I took up positions to repel boarders. One came at me in the canoe trying to step past his girl friend who didn't seem to know whether to laugh or cry, and tried to jump onto terra firma. Unfortunately he fell sideways and the girl grabbed him and the two of them fell in the water. Hans, in the meantime was wrestling the opposition, and I was just in time to see the pair of them sinking gracefully into the depths. His girl friend was in tears by this time! I thought to myself that this has gone altogether too far. Up to now it had been a sort of barroom brawl and we were seeing the funny side of it. I guess it was the plight of the girls, a couple of nice looking kids, that brought us all to our senses.

Just at that moment Tom and Murray sort of materialised right in the middle of the fray looking ready to cope with any emergency. "Is this a private fight", shouted Tom, "Or can anybody join in?" We all looked at him a bit sheepishly. One of the two wet fellows looked up damply, "I suppose these are the two cripples you were talking about!"

I saw an answering gleam in Tom's eye and he waded in with a vengeance, verbally that is. "Talk about Fred Karno's bloody army. I told you two stupid buggers to grab the cabin, not to start a fucking war. Mike, get the bloody fire going while we get these people out of the water." Things seemed to be returning to normal; Hans apologised for his remark but asserted that, I can't remember the exact words, it was something about 'no cooking tonight', the girls found some dry clothes, and the bottle went the rounds with good effect. Soon all eight of us were sitting around swilling Scotch whisky and laughing together like old friends.

After fond farewells our friends, as they had now become, departed in search of a suitable campsite while we got on with life. Not a word about cripples, yet! The steaks were history and we were down to hard tack which we washed down with a bottle of wine before sacking out.

"By the way," says Tom looking quizzically at me and Hans, "What was that you said about cripples?"

*

The next morning saw us wending our way across McIntosh to the short portage into Timberwolf and passed a camp with two familiar canoes drawn up, but no sign of life! Next was Misty Lake where we made an early camp in preparation for a little fishing and exploration. It was a lazy day, and a good preparation for the morrow when we planned to return to McIntosh by a circuitous route. Six short portages down the Petawawa River into Grassy, then a swampy slish up the McIntosh Creek and two more portages that I prefer not to remember, and back to our old friend the cabin on McIntosh Island of two nights back. We made it in one day with some time to spare and were relieved to find the cabin unoccupied. Over the past two days we had been getting a tad lethargic what with the perfect weather, eating, drinking and

swimming and no canoeists to fight with! We turned in and were soon asleep under a sickle moon. The last thing I remembered was a faint zephyr caressing my cheek.

The next thing I was aware of was a roaring sound that I couldn't immediately identify. Maybe it was a plane passing over. I poked my head out of my sack and promptly got a bucket of water in my face. At least, that was what it felt like. The roaring noise was the wind and the lake was white all over. My first thought was for the boats but they were OK. We all knew about the Mamagavessy and didn't take any chances. It's no fun swimming a mile across the lake with a paddle before breakfast! The next thing I thought of was the paddle back to Ink Creek, but that was tomorrow and the wind would have probably dropped off by then. I moved into the cabin to find that my corner had been taken, and everybody was sound asleep, oblivious to the storm.

At breakfast time we were glad of the Coleman, for we would never have been able to use a cooking fire in the wind that seemed to be getting worse by the minute. Hans and I had brought a sheet of heavy plastic to cover the full length of the boat and we decided to cocoon ourselves and try for the crossing with Tom and Murray paddling in our lee. Frankly I didn't think we were going to make it and expected the plastic sheet, which was only secured with thumbtacks, to be torn off by the wind.

The password for that trip was 'delicate paddling'. The wind was on our port stern and Ink Creek was on our starboard bow. You would have thought that the canoe would have been blown nicely right up the creek. In actual fact it was we who were up the creek, for the boat was trying its best to head into the wind while being blown onto a rock garden on the lee shore together with Tom and Murray who were hugging our starboard beam. Meanwhile waves were breaking over the top of our 'kayak', but as long as they were not sneaking under the plastic deck there was no real problem - as long as we kept clear of the approaching shore

What we really wanted to do was to make some leeway, but to do this would bring our bows to port and the wind on our beam, with the consequent danger of being rolled over. I was half expecting some *aggro* from the other canoe which we were continually pushing to the lee, but both of them had a lot of experience and no doubt appreciated our situation. As we got closer to land we seemed to be holding our own and I had a feeling that the wind had backed a shade, just enough to keep us off the lee shore. Another half hour and I was looking straight up the Ink River with the rocks of the left bank sliding past us no more than three feet distant. There was a squawk from Tom as we cut across his bows, and he found himself out of our lee with the waves washing right into the boat. They were only exposed to the full force of wind and water for a few seconds, but in that time they shipped about four inches. Another few seconds and it would have been curtains for them, or wet ones *gear?* at least.

We came through the narrows into Teepee where we stopped off for lunch to dry out, finish the Scotch and home to Mother.

Strangely enough that was the last time I visited Algonquin Park in a canoe, and, though I won't say it was the best trip ever, it perhaps certainly the most memorable of all. The company was good, the weather perfect even when it was raining, the route was out of this world and I don't think I had had such a good laugh in years

The reason I never went back there was partly because, well when you have got three parties and seven canoes ahead of you on a long wet portage it does begin to look like Piccadilly Circus of a Saturday night! Also, and perhaps the more compelling reason, the very next week Hans got me with one foot in a kayak and in no time flat I was sold on it - hook, line and sinker!

*

It was early in the Sixties that I began to mess about in Georgian Bay with kayaks and it was shortly after my first trip with Hans out of Honey Harbour that he mentioned a trip he and his wife Berit were planning to the Bustards - a tightly packed group of islands where the French River flows into the Bay. "Why don't you come out and join us," he asked. "We'll be out there for the better part of a week." Of course I did not have a boat or a companion and didn't hold out much hope. However within a week I had found an enthusiastic companion, Ralph Elsassaer the skier, and had persuaded a Slovenian friend, Zvone Hrastnik who had a Klepper, to lend me his boat. Klepper is a German company who makes a boat very similar to the Tyne. A little bit bigger with inflatable air bags the length of the boat and just below the coaming. I always said it looked like a pregnant seal, and so it does but is a rugged seaworthy boat, harder to paddle than the Tyne, but as a gift horse I wasn't going to inspect its teeth

The story of that trip appears in the opening chapter of Part 1 of these papers so I won't weary you with a tedious repetition, except to mention a cute little experience when I woke up that first morning on the Bustards. I don't remember where Ralph was, but Hans and I slept in the open with his wife Berit between us. The sun's rays were just glimmering over the horizon and a shaft of light fell upon Berit just below her chin. Two inches away was a little kangaroo mouse sitting upright and peering into her face. A cute little bundle of fur. Not wanting to disturb the tableau I held my peace and hoped Berit was not going to have hysterics when she opened her eyes, I needn't have worried! Presently a finger crept slowly out of the sleeping bag and gently tickled the mouse's tummy. For a moment he looked down his nose at this intrusion holding his little paws out on either side. I only had time to think of my camera, but it was a forlorn hope! A second later he just wasn't there any more. Berit looked at me with a tear in her eye, I thought. "What a lovely awakening!" she said.

After that trip there was no turning back for me, nor was there for Ralph and it wasn't more than a couple of months before he bought his own Klepper. Cost about \$1,500 at that time and if you wanted to buy one now, nearly forty years

later it wouldn't leave you much change out of \$5,000! And don't ask me what it would cost in the UK. An arm and a leg no doubt, if you were lucky

Eventually Hans sold me his kayak, but in the meantime I was thinking about a little trip across the open waters of the Bay. Zvone said he would lend me his boat again, together with main and jib sails, and I planned to paddle/sail from Dyer Bay near Tobermory to Honey Harbour, a distance of about eighty miles. If we could get a favourable northwest wind and it held through the day, we should be able to do it in fifteen hours. I figured that if we didn't make it to Honey Harbour there should no problem in getting to the Western Islands⁹ that had a manned lighthouse on the southern group which is a tad over fifty miles from the starting point. Our course to Honey Harbour would take us within eight miles of the nearest of the Westerns and at that point in clear weather we should be able to see the top of the lighthouse.

Trouble was I was short of a bow man. Hans was tied up, Ralph was in Switzerland and I needed some muscle in the bow because, wind or no, we were still going to have to put our backs into it. Eventually I found someone, a young fellow, John Sleeper by name, whom I had known for some time, strong and willing and dead keen. I took him out in the Bay a couple of times and he seemed just right for the job. Meantime, I studied weather forecasts and statistics and soon enough it was all systems go! Paul Langley, a non paddling friend and highly sceptical of the project, undertook to drive us to Dyer Bay and then bring the car round to Honey Harbour to wait for our arrival, hopefully about ten that evening. Paul was just finishing his dinner at the Delawanna Inn at Honey Harbour when he was called to the phone!

*

We set off from Toronto shortly after midnight with plenty of time in hand, John and I with our heads down in the back. It was still dark when we arrived at Dyer Bay and while the other two were getting the boat and equipment, including a 4 watt 2 way radio, down to the beach, I got a driftwood fire going. In no time at all we were tucking into a huge plate of bacon and eggs and fried bread with lots of hot, black, sweet coffee to wash it all down. We pushed off at 0625 just as the first rays of the sun glinted over the horizon. The water was calm but with a slight swell, promising wind later when we cleared the lee shore. John held his finger in the air speculatively. "Hey, Mike! Where is all that wind you have been promising me?" Of course, there wasn't any wind because we were in the lee of the land, but it wasn't very far away. "There it is John." I said, "See the dark water ahead? That's the wind. We'll have it on our backs in about five minutes!" And in no time we were hauling up the main sail and the little jib, and were on our way doing about 6 knots on a bearing of 122 degrees true. That was allowing two degrees for the drift plus a shade of port to make sure we didn't miss the Westerns .

⁹ The Westerns. Two groups of uninhabited islands, the East and the South, of which only the former is, under ideal conditions, visible from the Twelve Mile Bay area of Georgian Bay. The South Group only becomes visible after Hope Island has disappeared behind the horizon

John leaned back comfortably. "This is great. At this rate we'll be there for lunch! Wake me up when we get there." The wind was steady on our port quarter, blowing about 25 knots with the wash of our bow wave rippling along the water line. John had the radio and was talking to Paul who was standing by the car, a diminishing figure in the distance and I knew it wasn't going to be long before we lost him to sight and sound. I don't know how long it was, but it seemed barely an hour before we were alone in the middle of a great circle of water riding along in great style with the wind behind us.

*

It was about 1030 hours, four hours into our trip, when I noticed a soporific sort of vector creeping in to our progress. The wind was dropping and not a cloud in the sky! "What's happening?" came the enquiry from up front. "Did you switch off the fan?" Well, somebody switched it off and it wasn't me. But it could have been one of those dead calms you sometimes run into; with a bit of luck we could paddle out of it. We dropped the sail, eased her a shade to port to correct for increased drift and started paddling but after about fifteen minutes John's wetted finger was up again. "I think we have got a breeze. Let's put the sail up again" I didn't argue, well, not too much. The jib was flapping gently against the motion of the boat and I knew the main was going to keep it company, which it did, flapping against the mast. However, John didn't give up easily. "Look at my cigarette smoke, its going ahead of us." and he leaned back comfortably, waiting for Honey Harbour, which was still at least 55 miles ahead of us, to appear over the horizon.

I started to lower the main. "Come on John," I said, "We are going to have to paddle hard if we are going to reach even the Western Isles before dark, at this rate. You may have the wind where you are, but as sure as Hell, the sails don't know anything about it."

We paddled for about fifteen minutes and then up comes the finger again. I could see that John's non-existent wind was blowing on a fifteen minute cycle! "Never mind that Zephyr of yours, John. I can see the wind up ahead. If we paddle like Hell we can catch it up in half an hour." I had my fingers crossed though! John looked at his watch and made no comment but my heart sank for I knew he was figuring the odds! But we did start paddling though I doubted we were making as much as three knots against the one knot current¹⁰ that was flowing against us.

I reckoned by that time - it was about 1230 by then - we had put about 25 miles behind us. If we paddled steadily, the earliest we could reach the Westerns would be 2000 hours and with an early start next morning, get in to Honey Harbour in time for lunch. But we had to paddle. Meanwhile we were drifting in a northwestern direction at about one knot. If there was one thing I was not

¹⁰ The Coriolis Effect, which is due to the earth's motion, is a well known phenomenon in large oceans and in combination with certain cyclonic conditions develops opposing currents in the two hemispheres. In smaller bodies of water it is less pronounced, but in Georgian Bay, in conjunction with its larger neighbour, Lake Huron, it can be as much as one knot peripherally.

going to do, it was to sit out in the middle of Georgian Bay all night. The water had a lazy, oily look about and I knew for sure we weren't going to get a favorable wind this side of sunup. Our position then was pretty close to half way to the Westerns but for most of our course we had a good wind behind us. Now we were into paddling and three knots was our best speed. At that rate there was no way we could be sure of coming within ten miles of the Westerns before dark ! If it clouded over we wouldn't see them a hundred yards away and then, well, that would be another story. Heading back with the drift we ought to be able to do five knots and we had a lot of land that we couldn't miss. To me the choice was clear. It was 'Home James and don't spare the horses!'

And as if to confirm the decision, I heard the sound of ¹¹Georgian Bay Thunder rolling across the oily water from the West!

It was 1300 hours when we headed back, not to Dyer Bay, but feeling our way in the dark to Lions Head about 18 miles further south. John was pretty pissed at turning back, though I felt he saw the wisdom of not continuing. But we made good time and we hauled the boat up on the beach at Lion's Head just as the stars were coming out. John flung himself down on his face like the shipwrecked mariner, dead to the world, so I left him to it and went and looked for telephone. We were in luck's way! Not only did I find a telephone, I also found a kindred spirit who had no one to share all his home made beer with him so I went back to John. I didn't think he was dead but he hadn't moved since I left him.

"John!" I said. Groan. "Wake up, John!" "I'm dying. "Renewed groans."
"John!" I said, a little louder. "Do you want some home made beer?" I was amazed at the instant recovery. Well, not all that amazed! John was on his feet in a flash. A new man. "Lead me to it." *So you see, things* are not always what they seem!

*

If I seem to be talking on the subject of the movement of large bodies of water acted on by wind and tides I must affirm that my calculations of drift were made a mockery by the mysterious and totally irrational forces that were at work behind my back. The fact that, in the end, we managed to make our landfall, was, I am convinced, entirely due to a benevolent though inscrutable intelligence that took pity upon our puny efforts to control our destiny. I was reminded of a passage in Hillaire Belloc's book 'The Cruise of the Nona'.

No man living can understand the tides. And the mystery of the tides is a good corrective as one could find to our deadening pride in exact measurements, and to the folly of attempting to base real knowledge upon

¹¹ Often heard from the West on a hot, humid afternoon accompanied by an oily swell, that seems to presage a major storm. I have often heard the thunder, but the storm has never seems to materialize.

mere calculation: Our pretence to a universal science, and to a modern omniscience upon the Nature of Things.

*For the tides behave **in the inexplicable**?????. They follow of course, certain habits, which we know (from the observation of liquids everywhere) to be in the nature of a liquid movement. They pile up higher as they rush up funnels. They are checked by ridges, they form eddies, and all the rest of it. But they are continually playing their anomalous tricks and anyone who tries to work up a theory of the tide makes a fool of himself.*

I have stood outside the old piers at Newhaven in a little boat, with a northerly wind, expecting the first of the flood to help me to beat up and still have seen the sluggish surface water running out to sea against all the tidal laws that were ever written down, running out to sea, though the level of it steadily rose.

But there is no end to the mystery of tides. Why is there a tide at Venice? It is not much of a thing, but it is there. And for that matter there is a tide in the lake of Geneva. Here again the learned come rushing in and tell us all about it. Closed basins (they say), like the Adriatic, even quite small ones, like the Lake of Geneva, have their little tides after the fashion of water swung in a basin. The explanation is given in some simile like this: 'If you shake a basin slightly, the water will begin to swing with a regular movement back and forth.' And so it will. But who shakes Lake Geneva? Or who catches the Adriatic at either end, and gives it regular balance at either, and gives it regular balance up and down, exactly so often, every so many hours?

There is also this about tides which we all know to be true, but which I defy any man to rationalise: When a tide runs up a narrow river, it will still be running up, say ten miles from the mouth, when it is running down again, say five miles from the mouth. What happens in between? Slack water, of course. But how is there slack water? How can the running down be going on at one point and, immediately beyond, running up without a division? How can the water go on running up from a reservoir below which it is running down? It does so and it is all in God's providence and I accept it as I do teeth, or any other oddity. But I will not pretend to understand it.

In any of life's endeavours, not only when crossing deserts or seas or mountains but in ordinary day to day circumstances, somebody must count the odds and make a decision. I suppose a lot depends on where the Devil is. If he is ahead of you, and there is not much to be gained by opposing him, it would be foolhardy to push your luck or risk life or limb.

On the other hand, faint heart never won fair lady, in any endeavour there is always a modicum of risk and anybody who goes through life with a safety rope is missing the satisfaction of personal achievement against whatever odds are ranged against him.

These days of instant communication people take risks, which normally are unjustifiable and out of all proportion to hoped-for achievement, simply because in the event of a life threatening emergency, rescue services are available at the touch of a button. It is my view that expeditions or other such undertakings entered into for personal gain, its members should be prepared

and equipped to cope with foreseeable emergencies. I often wonder at the rationale behind expeditions to raise funds for some charity or other, which themselves are funded by contributions from corporations and associations which one way or another are funded from the public purse. And of course the question, to which there is never any satisfactory response, is what is, on the average, the ratio of grants to, say, a mountaineering expedition to the actual amounts paid to the end recipients! *Prefer "what is the cost of the expedition compared with the final amount that the charity receives?"*

But the question on the table is: 'When is a risk justifiable? I would say that a risk is not justifiable when it is ignored in order to satisfy personal ambitions and without regard to the personal safety, or reference to the wishes of others involved. And in the case of the exercise I have just described, there could have been no justification, under the circumstances, for risking a night in an open boat in the middle of Georgian Bay.

But what is unjustifiable in one situation is acceptable in another. Take the case of a shorter trip undertaken by Ralph Elsass and me to the Western Islands starting from Cedar Point at the bottom of Georgian Bay just south of Beckwith Island. A distance of about nineteen miles plus or minus four miles to account for drift. We calculated the round trip back to our starting point would be pretty close to forty miles. Not excessive for a day trip.

We were lucky with a following wind and made it to the lighthouse on the southernmost island in four hours with the jib. We weren't so lucky with the return trip; with the wind in our faces it took close on six hours and we only got as far as Beckwith Island with four inches of water in the boat and five miles more to go to get back to Cedar Point.

We did take a risk but it was one we both were prepared to take. There was plenty of land to fall on and if the worst came to the worst, the Klepper we were paddling *was not only able to handle heavy weather, it was unsinkable.* And nobody was going to start looking for us, not for a few days, that is.

We camped on Beckwith in the open, on the little sandy isthmus between the north and south sections of the island. What I remembered most about that campsite was the sand. Wet sand. Everywhere! In the boat, next to our skin, in our hair, between our teeth and for breakfast, you can guess what everything was seasoned with! In a way, for me anyway, it had quite a bit of nostalgia about it, taking me back to my days in the North African desert!

There was one thing about that trip that I remembered with much pleasure. For maybe an hour we were out of sight of land where the waves were seven feet high, crest to trough, and a good hundred yards apart. It was like a gentle roller coaster, pleasant and soporific, and in my quiet moments, sitting in my chair at home I can feel the movement still.

Of course we could have overnighted on Double Top island where the lighthouse was located and where two the keepers lived most of the year. But

it was a joint decision and one that, in the light of events was well justified. Though, it must be admitted, not very much of a risk!

*

I often felt that in Georgian Bay there were few islands and features that I was not familiar with. Certainly on the east coast from Honey Harbour to the French River I was at home among ninety percent of the outer islands and got to know and cope with many of the eccentricities of weather and water. In the area between Franklin Island and the McCoys, the wind and water currents often combined to produce a lumpy three-wave *system that made paddling* rather like playing Russian Roulette! You never knew where the next wave was coming from!

The only thing I was ever sure of in Georgian Bay was that on a fine clear day a northwest wind could generally be banked on to spring up about eleven in the morning rising to a brisk 30 knots by early afternoon. In the shoaling waters of the east coast this combined to produce steep waves of anything up to four feet high.

Once with a party of some four or five double kayaks we paid a visit to the North Wooded Pine Islands about four miles off the eastern shore of Georgian Bay. Only the south island which was privately owned had any trees on it, so we visited the north one and after lunch we all stretched in the lee of the island to enjoy the sun. Barring my bow man, Zvone, who was visiting from Slovenia, all of us were experienced in these waters but nevertheless I had my weather ear open, fortunately. As I lay there I felt a faint zephyr playing over my face and I looked up to see the serried ranks of fair weather cloud scudding across the sky from the West! Fair weather! But that also meant wind, and when I climbed to the ridge all I could see to the West was white water. It was time to go!

I was the last one off the island with Zvone who was in a kayak for the first time. Ahead, the wind was blowing us directly onto a cliff of granite with the waves breaking at the foot. Once we cleared the lee of the island we found ourselves in some fair sized water which we had to keep behind us for fear of broaching to. Of the four other kayaks which were mostly obscured by the waves, I saw little except an occasional bow that seemed to break the surface of the water like a submarine surfacing! I told Zvone not to paddle and to keep his paddle clear of the water. The wind and waves was taking us fast enough towards the shore anyway.

I managed to ease the boat to port and just missed the cliff without too much to spare. I was holding my breath as the rocks came streaming past on the starboard side only a few feet away. As for Zvone, he was an absolute brick. He sat there rigidly holding his paddle clear and didn't say a word until we were in calm water. "Well done, Zvone." I said. He looked round and grinned at me, "Can I stop holding my breath now?" he asked!

*

Three years later, Ralph and I were sitting at home after one of Bozena's excellent lunches when he sat upright with a start. "What's the matter, Ralph?" I asked, "Do you want another helping?" He looked at me with a puzzled frown. "You know," he said, "I have just been thinking. You remember that trip we made up to the Bustards? When Hans and Berit were there? We took six bottles of wine with us, and we had one at dinner each evening." "That's right," I said, "It was excellent wine. I thoroughly enjoyed it. So what?" "But we were only there five evenings," says Ralph. The light dawned. We had left the other bottle behind under a big bush of juniper. "I bet it is still there, all in one piece."!

I looked at Ralph seriously. "What you're saying is that we have to go back, two hundred and fifty miles and see if it is all right?" Well we couldn't leave it there for some other bugger to drink and next week there we were at the dock at the end of Key River having another of Mrs Trott's huge breakfasts. And outside, who should we meet but the same guy whom we met the last time. When we told him the purpose of our trip he laughed. "You guys have got a hope. If the Winter didn't bust it, someone was bound to have found it. I'll bet you a cup of coffee on it!"

The bottle was still there and the wine was the best we ever tasted. Unfortunately we never collected our cup of coffee for we paddled down to Shawanaga Inlet and up to Point O' Baril to pick up the car, and never saw the Old Fellow again!

*

Talking of Shawanaga Inlet, pronounced Shoor'nagah, ten miles long by about two wide, it points north east straight out of Georgian Bay and is a funnel for wind and water that has to be experienced in a paddle boat to appreciate its eccentricities. On the inlet itself *the wind* is quite straight forward; it either blows strong enough to knock a streetcar over, not that there are very many up there, or it is a pussycat. I remember once paddling down Shawanaga against the wind - dont ask me where it came from - and were just about breaking our backs. Though I was conscious of the wind my mind was on the islands in the distance at the bottom end of the Inlet, which didn't seem to be getting much nearer. Presently Ralph turned his head back to me and yelled something about a tree. "That tree at nine o'clock. We passed it half an hour ago!" We must have been paddling into the eye of a forty knot wind and despite our efforts were slowly being blown back.

We camped there behind a small island for the night during which a rather insistent thunderstorm, spewing torrential rain down on us, seemed intent upon our destruction. It gave up in the wee hours and in the morning, the wind having relented somewhat, we headed down past Twin Sisters Islands which sit squarely like a couple of loose chockstones, right in the middle of the mile wide outlet from Shawanaga. The wind was coming from the Northwest now and was pushing us to port round the southernmost tip of the islands. Once clear I pulled the kayak round to head for the McCoy Islands and that was

when I remembered what Hillaire Belloc had said about man's puny efforts to catalog the combined effects of wind, water and tides.

Across the open water to the West is a three-mile long chain of bare rocky islands called The Minks, with the big four McCoys at their northern end making the combination look like a huge hambone. Where the Minks met the McCoys, the southeast angle between them nursed an area of shoals that a kayak in calm weather could get through, carefully. Now the shoals were a welter of white water, half a mile in diameter but cut off, like with a knife, by the storm-bred swell that was forcing the water through the narrowing channel between the eastern side of the McCoys and the rampart-like rocks of the mainland.

Sitting there in our kayak like a couple of dummies, with the top half of us sticking out of the, fortunately waterproof, cockpits of the splash deck, we surveyed the scene. The interesting part of it was that there seemed to be three separate wave systems, none of whom were talking to each other, but all combining to create the sort of sea that came at us randomly from all points of the compass. I was going to say that the kayak was behaving like a corkscrew, but that would not have been fair to corkscrews which, after all are reasonably symmetrical. We had everything out there, but symmetry was not one of them!

One episode in Georgian Bay that I always enjoy reminiscing about *concerns* the power of tears! I was paddling with Virgil Curri while Joe Herwig and Brenda were in the second boat. It was about noonhour, when, as usual, the wet stuff was beginning to get lively. We had just come across the open water between the Minks and Franklin Island, and hoping not to have to go round Henrietta Point until it quietened down a bit, we tucked into little sheltered snye and stretched out over a leisurely lunch and an hour's shuteye.

When we took another look it didn't seem much better, but we hadn't far to go and time was pressing. *Virgil and I led the way. What we should have done was to head out to deeper water* But there was a big crag of rock sticking out of the water with a nice quiet channel about twenty feet wide between it and the island and we made a beeline for it. What we hadn't seen was that the shoaling water ahead of the channel was producing steep three foot waves with an unfriendly curl at the tops. But it was too late to turn back. The first wave came at us with a nasty grin on its face and I thought to myself, *en passant* so to speak, 'This is it, for sure. Over we go!' And it lifted us up and over until I could have sworn we were ninety degrees off the vertical. How we didn't turn over, I'll never know .

For a moment we were in sheltered water and I chanced a look back to see how Joe was getting on. Well, they weren't getting on at all. In fact they were on their back back to shelter! Of course Joe, of himself, would never have turned back and I knew Brenda must have been leaning on him. Virgil and I rounded the point without too much trouble and pulled the boat into a little creek We found them eventually, portaging the boat through the bush, Joe looking disgruntled to say the least! Later on when Joe was somewhere else, I

buttonholed Brenda.

"How the Hell did you persuade Joe to turn back?" I asked. "Oh!" she said, "It was easy. I just burst into tears!"

*

I could talk about knocking around in Georgian Bay and many other parts of Canada in kayaks and indeed I have many happy memories of river trips - from the South Nahanni in the Northwest Territories to The Fond du Lac and Reindeer Lake to the Seal River in Northern Manitoba. ***Make clear which of these places belong together, or are they all separate destinations?*** No words of mine could do justice to the beauty and mystery and loneliness of these lands and waters. Sometimes I would stand in the early morning mists looking out over the country and would get an awful sense of the aeons of time before it saw the advent of man, and the flicker of light that illuminated his story upon this earth. The long shadows of jack pine a hundred yards away would lie on the water pointing at me. I was a grain of sand in the desert, a micron in a million miles, a speck of dust in the Cosmos, and yet I was alive and part of the land that seemed to be awaiting my footsteps. Sometimes I would take out my camera and snap the shutter. A million years after the film had turned to dust the land would still be there, unchanged, immutable

CHAPTER V

THE CHURCHILL RIVER

No one river trip can be like another and yet to a reader who had not experienced its diversities, there would seem to be little to choose between the one and the other. Not because of any lack of imagination on the part of the reader but because the words available to me, the writer, to describe what I saw and felt in my heart and mind could not begin to paint the pictures I have in my head. So I will let the Churchill River paint a picture for me and leave your imagination to fill in the gaps for all the other rivers.

One day I picked up a book in the Toronto Locke library entitled *The Dangerous River*. It was written by a man called R.M.Paterson; originally from England; an ordinary man, wise in the ways of the North and in the ways to survive in it. He took up ranching in Alberta where he learned a lot about the land and its rivers, with which, it seems he fell in love. He learned nothing about how to destroy the world and in his own words, 'added little to the world's biggest curse - its stock of scientific knowledge'. An ordinary man who loved and respected the, now no longer, so lonely lands of northern Canada.

When visiting London in the early part of this century and suffering its 'fog and soot laden sleet and rain' Paterson picked up a copy of *The Artic Forests* by Michael H.Mason and was so enamoured of its stories of the Yukon and Northwest Territories that he had no peace until he could get into that country himself, which he did in July 1927. It was after reading, and rereading Macpherson's book that I also began to dream of his river though there were many other rivers that laid their claim on me before I ever saw the canyons of the *South Nahanni*. In a way it was the Nahanni that was the catalyst for my burgeoning interest in the northern rivers of Canada and it so happened that *The Churchill* was to be my first big river though on the section we travelled it was nowhere as grand and awe inspiring as the Nahanni.

In 1968 I pored over a map of Canada's north country and its many rivers, all with magic names like Nahanni, MacKenzie, Fond du Lac, the Seal and inevitably the Churchill, sprawling halfway across the country and emptying into Hudson's Bay in the North. In the meantime, a letter had arrived from Bill Rom Jr. of Minneapolis who had recently paddled a section of the Churchill from Pukatawagan Falls to Churchill itself. His description is revealing:

Last year New Hampshire students did the Churchill in kayaks: two turned over in Mountain Rapids and one person drowned. Leader of the trip was Dennis McAllister of Laconia N.H. Once a kayak turns over in rapids as powerful as those in the Lower Churchill, there is no chance of righting oneself in time. The currents, whirlpools, white waves and rocks make this part of the river a dangerous challenge.

We used an eighteen foot Grumman canoe with a load of three people and four packs. This canoe has a low beam so that water would come in over the bow in high white water as found in Portage Chute. Our canoe filled here, but luckily we bailed out before our gunwales were under water. A seventeen foot Grumman has higher bows and more freeboard.

Concerning time, three of us paddled our canoes from Pukatawagan to Churchill in ten days, travelling fourteen hours per day. The worst rapids are Mountain, the top of Mountain Chute, and two complexes by Fiddlers Lake. Portage Chute we shot: Mountain, we lined down completely, and most of the others were portaged.

Thus encouraged, we settled for the same trip. However a conversation with Malvina Bolus, editor of the Beaver magazine, revealed a less suicidal alternative to the Lower Churchill in a diversion to the South terminating in Thompson, Manitoba. Sigurd Olsen, the author and wilderness traveller, attempted this route with Eric Morse whose feats on Canada's northern rivers are required reading for all canoeists. I was fortunate to meet Eric Morse, when in Ottawa just before setting out for our trip, but he was unenthusiastic about our choice and tried to persuade us to change our plans. However, by this time we were too far down the road and not even the great canoeist himself could dissuade us.

My three companions on this trip were Joe Herwig in my boat, and John Wiley, who bought an identical Tyneboat for the occasion, together with Johnny Johnson, in the other. It was August 1969 when we took the train out of The Pas, Manitoba at noon, disembarking in the rain at Pukatawagan Falls at seven thirty the same evening, with an audience of Cree Indians eyeing our pile of food and equipment with great interest. We lost no time in getting loaded up and pushed off into the river, not having bothered with the spray covers, only to find ourselves, a couple of hundred yards downstream, facing an unexpected riffle produced by the opposing forces of wind and current. However we did not ship more than a gallon or two, and soon found ourselves tucked away in a cosy little spot eating medium rare steaks washed down with the rain and plenty of Chianti - our last for the trip!

Above Pukatawagan, the river flows mostly over limestone, rendering the water clean and easy to read over rapids. From here on, we were over Canadian Shield, which is much indented and interspersed with small islands and lakes, which do not facilitate route finding. So close were the islands, and so narrow the snyes and channels between them, that viewed from any distance it all looked like a solid wall of pine and spruce. For better or worse, everybody was content to leave the question of route finding to me, though I have to admit that some of my decisions were more Russian Roulette than good map reading. Only once did I get us off the straight and narrow, and that was on the first full day. We had lunch in the boats while I searched uneasily for a channel through what looked like a solid impenetrable wall. of conifers right under my nose. I remembered an advice from an old Indian friend, "Read map, get lost!" Well, I can't say we got lost, but, as sure as Hell, we ended up

in a dead end creek about five degrees off the one we were looking for.

To the delight of two of our company we camped there for the night, and the following morning, returning to the scene of our yesterday's dilemma, Joe and I paddled straight for that impenetrable wall. Just before we seemed to be going aground, Joe leant back towards me, "Where the Hell are we going! There's no channel here!" The other two were lounging about, a hundred yards across the bay, waiting for us to return with our tails between our collective legs! Just then I noticed some pine needles moving past the boat, not ten yards away to our left. And they were heading straight for the shore, or so it seemed! We had both stopped paddling, but the boat was now moving of its own accord, following the pine needles and a little dead end bay which we had paddled past more than once showed a faint sparkle of water in the distance. We were through and in no time we had a good stretch of open water in front of us! Half an hour later John and Johnny turned up, looking somewhat abashed!

The following day we pulled into Highrock Lake, running about eighteen miles due north, with a spanking wind on our backs. It was a crisp though warmish day with the sun lighting up the lively water around us. The waves would lift the stern of the boat and propel us forward at a great rate, with several inches of water flowing over the deck and leaving us at the bottom of the trough with a slump until the next one came along. All we had to do was keep her from broaching to each time a wave passed by. I swear it didn't take us more than one hundred and fifty minutes to cover those eighteen miles. In fact we were so caught up with the exhilaration of it that we completely forgot about lunch until we got down to the end of the lake. We also forgot about John and Johnny who by that time were a couple of miles behind us. However we could see the sun flashing off the blades of their paddles so we pulled in to a snye and watched their approach from the top of a small cliff while we ate our belated lunch.

We were getting close to our first portage at *Twin Falls* and our main concern was to find a good campsite before it got dark. The trees at this point came thickly down to the waters edge and we arrived at the portage as the light was fading, without a sign of a clearing. We had been paddling for the better part of twelve hours and had put a good forty miles behind us that day. John, who had some reservations about what he called 'marathon paddling' arrived shortly after and addressed himself fluently to the situation. "You two sods - - -" he began, and continued along the same lines at some length. However, honour satisfied, he applied himself to the job in hand while there was still some light left.

That night we slept within a few feet of the roaring torrent, the sound of which made conversation difficult if not impossible. All four of us slept the sleep of the just until the sun roused us at six the next morning to see a miniature *Niagara* shaped like a horseshoe and nowhere to portage. The problems were mainly horizontal, but what it lacked in verticality it made up for in sheer unpleasantness. Water rushing around in circles with big eddies and standing waves and certainly not a situation to be tackled by twin kayaks. However we

managed to line the boats around the shore until we reached the crux - about ten yards of vertical rock sitting on huge slimy boulders just waiting to break somebody's leg. At the other end, the water dropped off vertically into a maelstrom that repelled us all. There was nothing for it but into the boat, dip the paddles three times, out like a shot and dragging the boat behind us before we got caught in the roller coaster. John and Johnny showed us how to do it and Joe and I just made it by the skin of our teeth. But we all made it without spilling too much milk. In fact we were quite pleased with ourselves - until we saw what was waiting for us round the corner, not three hundred yards away!

In comparison with other rivers in the world, the Churchill ranks low in vital statistics. Close to 1000 miles in length, with few rapids that cannot be run by intermediate canoeists it is rarely more than fifty yards in width, that is, before the Manitoba Hydro dammed the Southern Indian Lake at **Missi Falls*. At the point where we were approaching the second of *Twin Falls* I wouldn't have given it more than thirty yards in width. But the speed that its banks were passing us, and the roar of water a few hundred yards away, with its concomitant spray cloud rising to the heavens, was a fair indication of the huge amount of water going down. Mid-stream was not where I wanted to be and we pulled over to the left bank which promised a nice landing in a gentle upstream eddy.

Fifty yards downstream, the other boat was pulled up well clear of the water. John was standing over it with a look on his face that seemed to indicate a paucity of good news. As indeed was the case. There was no portage. Leastwise, there was no carrying place for the boats and a pretty chancy route on foot through the trees which overhung a twenty foot drop into the boiling waters below. At first sight it was a bit of a facer but it was John who saw a way out of our dilemma. There was a ledge immediately to the left of the lip of the falls and about five feet above the eddying waters. To the left of this ledge and about a foot above it was a convenient place where, if one had a mind for it, two paddlers could leap into a boat immediately below. Of course there was no boat below, but John's idea was that he and Johnny could throw the boat forward from the first ledge. Joe and I could do the leaping, paddles in hand and, not wasting any time taking photographs, get the Hell out of it before getting sucked back into the maelstrom of eddying currents and boiling water.

I suggested that John show us how to do it, but he pointed out succinctly that I was the leader, so why didn't we get on with it? Joe looked at me. Man of few words! "We go?" We went, and ten seconds later we were pulling the boat out of the water, only slightly damp, onto a sweet sandy beach. A short scramble through the trees and we got the other boat launched, home and dry! All we had to do was carry to carry our duffle bag through the gauntlet of trees that seemed to conspire in trying to push us over the edge. However the Gods had not quite finished with us, for after an early lunch on that sandy beach, we pushed out into Allen Lake, some ten miles long by about one at its widest, and were surrounded by towering thunderheads which promised some lively weather.

It wasn't long in coming. In a few minutes the whole sky turned black and the heavens opened, raining so hard that that it cut into our bodies like darning needles. We found a relatively sheltered little bay and covered there in our boats for half an hour before the elements relented. Strictly speaking we should have got out of the boats, for lightening loves nothing better than a wet head sticking up above the level of the water. Problem was that getting out involved pulling off the splash decks and by the time we would have put them back in place *and* fastening plastic covers over the cockpits, the boats would have been half full of water. I have only once seen rain so concentrated and that was in the Monsoon in Kashmir which, in scarcely a minute, transformed the hillsides into raging torrents that would sweep a man clear off his feet.

That night we camped, not too uncomfortably, on a small island in the middle of Allen Lake. Lighting a fire was not much joy with every bit of wood waterlogged, but sheer doggedness won through in the end. After our dinner, as we lay out there under a curtain of stars, we were rewarded with a show of celestial fireworks put on for our sole benefit. I have often seen the Northern Lights but never so brilliant, encompassing the entire horizon with life and colours to dazzle the mind. The following morning we awoke to a mist that shrouded our boats like a blanket and with visibility no more than six feet we would have been fog bound for several hours without a compass. Even then it was an eerie sensation feeling our way past little islands that loomed up out of the murk.

Up ahead, a mile or so, was *Devil's Rapids* and by the time we reached that ominously sounding feature the mist had lifted to reveal a narrowing channel with the water accelerating rapidly into a black gap not more than twenty feet wide. Beyond that point the water disappeared completely. It was a bit like the *Manito Falls* on the *Fond du Lac* where the water is reputed by local Indian lore to disappear into the bowels of the earth. I was for scouting the rapids but Joe talked me out of. In the event, the Devil was a pussycat, but the rate we went through the gap and the huge boils below it bespoke some interesting paddling had the water level been much lower.

A couple of miles or so downstream was *Granville Falls* and we wondered what sort of unwelcome surprises waited on us. In the event there were plenty of surprises but all of them very most pleasant. The falls themselves, sixty yards or so in width, though not much more than about twenty feet high, go over the top in huge undulating sweeps of smooth water, dashing itself to foam on the gneissic rocks below. Watching this spectacle, I was reminded of Bill Rom's comment about the power of water going down *Mountain Rapids* further along the river. I realised that this was the first time that we had been able to appreciate the magnitude of the seemingly placid river we had paddled on the past few days.

It was an easy portage around the falls, mostly over flat moss covered rocks with deep pools of clear water sparkling in the brilliant sun. Growing from the bottom were slim green weeds that looked like miniature trees in a Japanese

garden. On the surface of the water, Jesus flies sat motionless in the sun, each with four little circles where their feet touched the water. And below, their shadows made a sort of fairy panorama that Aesop would have delighted in. I think that day which started in the mists and took us through Devil's Rapids and Granville Falls to an early camp was one of the best of the trip. After supper we lazed in the cool clear water of the Churchill while the pines behind us leaned confidentially over us and invaded our senses with their aromatic fragrance.

We came out of the water and lay on the rocks, still warm from the afternoon sun, until the last glimmer of the crimson sky had faded through the blue and purple into the Northern night. During the day a gentle zephyr from the Northwest had fanned our faces and ruffled the water around us, but as night descended it dropped, leaving a silence so profound that a single leaf fluttering to the ground a hundred yards away could be heard. We lay there sipping our late night coffee with a tranquility of spirit so foreign to the city life that we knew. The whole world around us lay breathless and quiet, listening perhaps to our alien voices as they floated across the water to islands unseen in the dark. ¹²Somewhere in the far distance a wolf called and the sound, so redolent of the wilderness, reminded us of the transient nature of our tenure in this unspoiled and beautiful land.

Our next obstacle was Leaf Rapids of which the look I liked not one little bit. However we eventually found an easy portage where we ran into a party of Cree coming in the opposite direction. While the others were unloading our duffle I asked one of the Indians how long was the portage. "Oh," says he, looking back with a frown, "No more'n five mile, maybe six." All with an air of imparting information of a trifling nature! I knew that most Indians are prone to have a little fun at the expense of the white man, but I also knew from the map that it could not have been more than a hundred yards. Hearing our voices, Joe looked up. "What did he say?" he asked. So, without a word of a lie, I told him! "Better get on with it, then." Typical 'Joe' response, but John and Johnny looked a bit stricken! I did get called a few names when the end of the portage appeared round the next bend. Couldn't have been more than seventy five yards! But nobody was really complaining.

The funny thing about that portage was the expression on the faces of the Indians when they saw how we loaded the boats. They must have thought us complete greenhorns. We had picked out our next campsite which was an ideal spot clearly visible from our loading point, so we didn't bother packing the kayaks very carefully and just threw the stuff in, higgledy-piggledy. A bit top heavy but we made it! That evening we ate pickerel - the Yanks call them Walleye - till we were fit to burst. There were so many fish there that they

¹² 'Somewhere in the distance a wolf howled' or 'the warbling song of the loon called to us over the lake' are expressions of many writers who puts their collective noses outside the back door and the reader may be forgiven sometimes for feeling it is a bit of 'old hat' or even not quite believable. However, up there in the North wolves and loons were our constant companions and were talking to us, or more likely about us all the time. So if I don't mention them too often, it doesn't mean they weren't there

were fighting to get on the hook!

That night was our sixth camp and the whole of the time the weather had been perfect. Some of the time breezy, always sunny and comfortably warm, and not a bug in sight since leaving *The Pas*. Ahead of us, a couple of camps away, lay *Opachuanau*, at this stage no more than a name to us. Not a big lake, say about eight miles by two, and on the day four innocents arrived there was a gale force wind blowing out of the two clear miles of flats from the Northwest. And of course *Opachuanau* had nicely lined itself up with the wind. Our course to the furthest point of the lake was exactly at right angles to the wind, which didn't make it any easier.

My boat had taken me through livelier water than this but I was not keen on putting John and Johnny, who had never experienced conditions like this, to the test. I decided to hold off the crossing for an hour in the hope of some improvement. However it wasn't long before John got ants in his pants and Johnny didn't raise any objections; so we got our splash decks and life-preservers on and headed out into the battle. I don't remember asking Joe's opinion, for even if it had been *The Styx* in full flood it would have made no difference! After crossing the lake with the wind on our port quarter, we pulled behind a friendly island only to find that our only exit from the lake was through a narrow channel not more than ten feet wide with the wind and water on our beam. It wasn't a long channel, 'bout a couple of hundred yards long and I swear we touched bottom a few times. The other boat wasn't far behind us, but there wasn't much we could do if they got into trouble.

At the far end we pulled into a nice lee somewhere and there was John coming along in great style, though I thought they looked a bit pale, both of them. John looked at me with a relieved grin.¹³ "Piece of Cake!" he said.

We were into the second week of our trip and yet we had still not made any real contact with either Indians or white, but that night made up for it all. We were camped on the downstream side of the narrows between *Opachuanau* and the big stretch of water that was South Indian Lake. I suspect that, before sleep overtook us, not only one of us gave some thought to what we might have to face tomorrow across those several miles of open water if today's conditions were repeated.

As I drifted off, the sound of an outboard motor could be heard in the near distance. Not coming directly towards us, but going backwards and forwards and it was soon evident that the boat was curious about our camp. Suddenly the motor was cut and I knew we were going to have visitors. Obviously the others had been listening too and, like a school of fish responding to some innate command, all four of us were standing in a line in our underpants wondering perhaps if we were going to have to repel boarders. I looked

¹³ On the occasion of Amundsen's expedition to the South Pole in 1914, the cook turned out a large cake with the topography of their trip detailed on the icing. This was cut into slices, one for each member of whom one said "Piece of Cake." Hence the comment which makes light of a gruelling experience.

sideways along our line and saw that Joe was the only one to have come prepared for any eventuality. Behind his back he was hiding a big Bowie knife about twelve inches long!

There were three young Southern Indian braves, but our scalps were safe! They were all friendly, though somewhat curious, and we had the usual itinerant travellers' chat about who we were and where we were from, our destination and were we wanting for food equipment or information, etc. Meanwhile I noticed that Joe's knife had disappeared, surreptitiously, though to where I never found out. John had an unrepeatable suggestion which found favour with all except Joe .

Next morning we awoke to a windy day that gave us some lively but enjoyable paddling and in the middle of the lake we were approached by a Ranger in a big eighteen foot Grumman canoe with an outboard. His opening gambit was not encouraging. "What the Hell are you guys doing out here?" he demanded, "You must be crazy coming out in a thing like that!" J & J were still a tad behind and he hadn't seen them yet. I explained that we had come from Pukatawagan and had started out from the narrows a couple of hours back. In fact Joe and I were racing ahead to an inviting looking island to prepare breakfast for us all.

The ranger looked at us suspiciously. "How'd you get across Opachauanau? You as sure as Hell didn't paddle across it, not in that wind. And not in that thing either!" I felt strongly that honour demanded I refute such slurs upon my lovely, seaworthy boat. "Piece of cake," I said, avoiding John's eye who had just come alongside, "This boat could handle anything Opachauanau could dish out. But I wouldn't be seen dead in that thing." I said, eyeing his canoe balefully. "Well!" he said, ruefully though with a friendly grin. "I guess you know what you are doing if you came all that way. Nevertheless, I'll stick to my boat, but I wish you luck, wherever you are going. " He frowned, "You are not going down the Lower Churchill, are you?" I told him about our plans to tackle the marshes at the head of The Rat¹⁴ He gave us a funny look. "I've known some that have tried it. S'far as I know, the only fellow who ever got through that mess was Andrews. Ask for him up at the settlement, maybe he'll put you right. Maybe! Good Luck anyway." And off he went bouncing through the waves in a cloud of spray.

A couple of days later we headed out of *South Indian Lake* having found Andrews who turned out to be one of the *Rocky Cree* members of the Settlement. I can't say he was a font of information. Somehow I got the feeling that he wasn't going to lose any sleep if we didn't make it through to the *Rat*. At least he gave us one piece of information that was factual if not topographically correct. He said that the route through the swamps was marked - that was all! Somewhere in the middle of those swamps the Rat River was

¹⁴ The Rat River, so called because its swamps and muskeg are home to the Musk Rat, a big hefty fellow about a foot long, who is as much at home in the water as he is on solid land. And he can be seen peering out of his hole at the waterline, wondering what's in it for him. Once I looked around at the stern of the kayak and there was a big one, sitting up and enjoying a free ride.

born, but finding it was not going to be easy

*

Between the Churchill watershed at the South Indian Lake level and what lay to the South was the Height of Land *a height of land?* which didn't amount to much more than a step over a big hunk of rock to the Southwest of South Bay, about five miles across open water. The night before we crossed over South Bay, it rained like it was going out of style and barring a five minute spell of sunshine later next morning, that was the last we saw of the sun on that trip.

With the Churchill now behind us, our route lay south and east down the Rat, if we ever found it, and the Burntwood river to Thompson, Manitoba which was our destination. In between, lay some wild and beautiful country rarely, if ever, visited by white men. As we stepped over into a different watershed, a different country and a different climate, it seemed, we had little idea what lay ahead of us. We loaded our boats and pushed off into a stretch of placid green water fifty yards wide disappearing round a bend to the right, into infinity, for all we knew. On either side was thick green grass and rushes bordering an impenetrable bank of Black Spruce with barely a foot of separation between them, but through them, I could sense open country. Shield country! But how to push through, let alone carry a boat and all our duffle through those hard, black spiky branches that tore at the skin and the eyes, was not an encouraging prospect. We paddled on, up this snye, hopefully, for a short distance, when I thought I saw an opening in the repellent thicket. "Over there, Joe," I said, "Look.! There's an opening. Someone's been through recently." I crawled out of the boat into the undergrowth, still soaked from the previous night's downpour. But the opening had been made by an animal, about the size of a small bear, I thought. But it was an opening and a few minutes later I stood on blessed moss covered 'shield' that stretched away to the South, just where we wanted to go.

Half an hour later, we sat there munching bread and butter, salami and raisins, washed down with hot sweet tea. And if anybody had the taste for it, a handful of large black ants, of which there was a surfeit! All looked at me, the fearless leader. John spoke for them, "Well, Mike. Where are we and where do we go from here?" The fearless leader rose to his feet! "Hang on here, fellows for a while," I said with a show of confidence which was not backed up by the sinking feeling in my stomach, "I'll have a bit of a recce. Don't go away." There was no sun, no prominent features. Nothing but more of the same as far as the eye could see and I didn't want anybody wandering around and getting lost

There seemed to be some sort of a trail, animals probably, leading a bit west of South which was the direction I felt most comfortable with. After about ten minutes or so the ground started to slope down and that meant there was a decision coming up pretty soon, as there was!

After about a hundred yards the brush all disappeared and the ground ran out

into a vast area of swamp and muskeg. There was a bit of open water which lead into the morass and after that there wasn't much to choose from! Not a pretty sight, but it was what I was looking for - the gateway to the Rat!

I didn't tell them much. I thought I'd keep it as a pleasant surprise for them! Joe and I got there first. We stopped at the water's edge. For a while Joe didn't say anything. Then, "Is this it?" I guess my reply was in the affirmative. Grunt! "We'd better get on with it then." Typical Joe. He never wasted time on words, but his thoughts would have been of interest! Meanwhile I could hear the others coming up behind. Someone was singing, but not for long. They stopped right behind me, taking in the scene. There was a deafening silence as they stood there forgetting even to put the boat down, and then John made his comment on the situation, straight from the heart!. "Christ!". I forgave him the blasphemy!

Somewhere out there, maybe half a mile away, was a bank that resembled the prow of a ship with trees growing over it. It looked like a good place for a camp though not the best but beggars can't be choosers! It was what was between us and camp that got our total attention. The first part, a hundred yards or so, was fine. Nice deep water and ideal for paddling. As we proceeded however the water got noticeably thicker with all the floating reeds until we had to give up paddling and start pushing. However there didn't seem to be much bottom to push on, so we jumped out into the mush and splashed and pushed and kicked our feet and slowly advanced to a patch, not more than fifty yards wide of open, clean water. Beyond that was some fairly solid looking muskeg that we managed to pull the fully loaded boats onto. We were on a water-bed, and when we jumped, not too energetically, up and down, the whole area oscillated like a slow swell coming off the sea. Of course there was no way we could portage the boats fully loaded, and we couldn't unload our duffle for fear of losing it in some pretty little sink hole. Eventually we grabbed the coaming, four of us to a boat and 'heave-ho' , inch by inch to the solid ground that was to be our campsite. It took all of half an hour per boat to cover two hundred yards, but by seven in the evening we had the tents up and supper simmering over a wood fire.

On the other side, the swamps went on inexorably, not so bad as the one we had just wrestled with, but no sign of a marker, anywhere. After supper - I was the cook and as such was excused washing up and other chores - I took the now empty boat and paddled around until it got dark looking for a way out. I didn't find anything but at least I knew where *not* to look on the morrow. Had we known what the morrow was to bring, we might have done an 'about turn' right there. But then, on the other hand we would probably have gone on regardless.

After our struggles yesterday, the following morning didn't look all that bad, at first. There was still a helluva lot of swamp, in fact enough of it to daunt most people, though I never heard a single word of complaint from anybody. I guess the feeling was that from now on, once we had found the Rat, our worst troubles would be over and for most of that morning there were enough leads

of deep water to make paddling bearable. Well, we covered a lot of ground and found nothing but dead end creeks and piles of brush from Winter run offs. And no markers!

It was getting on for noon hour, and I think everybody was getting pissed off. But still no complaints! Earlier, about an hour back, we had come across a sort of hedgerow that partly obscured some more swamp that didn't seem to go anywhere. And in any case there was no way through it with the boats, but now we came across it from the other direction. Lo and behold, there was a gap. A very wet one and about half the width of the boats, but somehow we squeezed through, up to our knees in mud and water and found more swamp that stretched away to the East for ever. Suddenly John comes to life. "Hey, Mike! Is that a beer can upended on that dead branch?" He pointed to a rusty old can that looked as if it had been there since Adam was a pup! After about five minutes of paddling and half an hour of cursing we found a lead with all the underwater reeds pointing to a gap in some low bushes to the South. But how to get the boats through all that mess was our next problem. A wet and weedy problem but we got through in the end. We had found the Rat! Our troubles were over. Or were they?

As it turned out, our troubles were far from over, and the Rat was still going to get the last laugh, but it was two more days before we got the bad news. Immediately, though we were on deep water, the banks of the Rat were inaccessible. The banks were lined with alders, the long thin branches of which did their best to impede our progress, and we could not reach land unless one was prepared to step into water that came up to the waist and to sink into cloying mud two feet deep before finding a firm bottom. Added to our problems, the meanders of that stream were so tight that we had to get out and manoeuvre the boats around the bends. We found out what the mud could do when Joe stepped into it, hoping for a secure foothold. Instead, he went down into the mud which held onto him lovingly and when he eventually escaped its grasp, he was minus one boot - which we didn't look for! I did offer to hold onto his feet while he went down headfirst, but my thoughtful and considerate help was declined

While this little scenario was being resolved, though not to everybody's satisfaction, one of the alder branches had succeeded in entangling itself with a ring at the stern of the boat, and nothing we could do would dislodge it. And we couldn't reach it in any way without getting out of the boat, which was not a popular option at that moment!. I was nearest, unfortunately, and it was up to me to get my feet out of the boat, turn around and worm my way on my stomach to release the branch. These kayaks are very stable if you are sitting in the normal position close to the bottom, but the rear section, the top of which is shaped like an isosceles triangle with an eighteen inch base and coming to a point at the stern about four feet away, is not very stable when a grown man is spreadeagled on top and not wanting to fall in and lose his boots! However the mission was accomplished without further mishap, though Joe's helpful advice and comments at the time did not significantly facilitate the operation!

Lunch was a little late that day, for reasons that may be guessed at, but fortune smiled upon us, though smirked might have been a better word. A three foot by six inch rocky bar appeared which completely blocked the stream and over which the boats had to be hauled - unloaded! Don't ask me where we put our duffle, I don't want to think about it! Suffice to say it was also our lunch place, not the most comfortable one of the trip, but it was all we had.

That day and the one following was more of the same, and I am being kind to Dame Fortune. The absolutely best I can say about it is that the campsite was dry and that it was not raining. As we proceeded down this thing that thought it was a river, I was struck by the fact that, though the water was deep enough to float the boats, there didn't seem to be any current! In other words, it wasn't going anywhere! However by the next day we had left the mud banks and alders behind us and were able to do a bit of scouting through the adjacent countryside. Not that it did us any good!

It was four in the pm. John and Johnny were up ahead somewhere, and Joe who had been doing a recce of the country ahead returned with the news that our way was open to us, and 'Let's get moving!' Which we did. And half an hour later, there was John with an expression on his face that boded no good. "Where to now, Mike?" he asked. There are two kinds of deadends; one you get after sitting on your backside for hours paddling, and I was familiar with that, and the other needs no explication. We were in the latter! The Rat had disappeared completely and around us on three sides, or three hundred degrees, rising steeply into dismal black spruce covered, draped, with Old Man's Beard was what looked like the end of the world. Just ahead, where I had expected to see the Rat opening out into Issett Lake, was a great heap of Spring runoff mud and timber locked in among the spruce and completely blocking what once must have been a pronounced cleft between the hills through which, no doubt, the Rat flowed to destinations unknown. Right now it wasn't flowing very much and if and where it was flowing we had no idea.

Well, if ever I came across a deadend, that was it. In a way I suppose we could have got through somehow if it had been a matter of life and death, but though we probed the blockage on foot there was no sign of a let-up for a hundred yards at least, and one slip could have meant a broken leg or worse. Trying to carry a boat through would have been plain stupid, like beating one's head against a brick wall. However nobody wanted to give up at this point when we were so near to the crux, especially after all that we had gone through and surmounted. But the obvious was staring us in the face. There just wasn't anywhere to go. Neither was there any place to pitch a tent and hardly anywhere, even to stretch out for the night. Cooking was out of the question though I did manage to make some tea. A dismal night, all in all.

We resolved to look for an alternative route on the way back, but I knew there wasn't going to be any other way. We were on the Rat; of that there was little doubt, but I figured that somewhere in the past where the stream had flowed through a narrow cleft between the hills, a heavy run-off must have carried

dead branches and other debris through which the water found its way under and over and each time there was flood water the worse it got. But we did not find any way across our Rubicon. Two camps later we were back to the Height of Land and over into South Bay in the pouring rain which kept up all night and well into the morning. Camping at the top of a protected snye, we could hear the wind but had no idea of its strength. Several times during the night we heard the sound of helicopters sweeping back and forth but it wasn't until we were well into the open water that we realised that we were in the middle of a fair sized storm and we wondered who they were looking for.

It looked pretty daunting out there with five foot waves coming at us on our port bow, but the boats were handling the water quite well, rolling and corkscrewing with each wave but very little solid stuff coming over the decks. The other boat was right behind us and though it was difficult to twist around to see how they were faring, I managed to pick up a couple of 'thumbs up' from John'. The wind was coming round onto our beam, not making paddling any easier and I suppose it was five or ten minutes before I realised that John and Johnny were nowhere to be seen. By that time we were about at the middle of the bay with a good two miles to go before we reached shelter. We stopped for a while and screwed our necks around, but no sign of the truants!

We went about and returned to the sheltered snye where we had camped but they weren't there. If they had turned over, we would have seen their duffle floating but there was no sign whatever and we guessed that they had headed for cover somewhere along the windward shore on the south side of the Bay. In the far distance there was a small island, probably not more than twenty yards across. If they had been there we would have seen them and in any case I figured that if they were in trouble they would have made for the mainland to the South. Finally we gave up the search and returned to the Settlement where we found a big rubber raft with an outboard. Half an hour later, wet and bedraggled they were back and no worse for their adventure. It turned out that Johnny had lifted the splash deck to get something out of the boat, and couldn't manage to replace it - whereupon the water started to come in.

So we never did get on the Rat proper, and by then we were running out of time, and food, so we hitched a ride on an old Norseman which flew us into Thompson and got back to Toronto a day earlier. Before we left the Settlement we ran into Andrews who did not seem very surprised to see us back empty handed, so to speak. I guess he knew a bit more than we did about that route. At all events, regardless of how the others felt about it, though we didn't see much more than the upper reaches, I would not have missed the Rat for anything. Looking back on that experience it was something to be remembered and it was some satisfaction to feel that not many parties would have stuck it out right to the bitter end where finally we had to admit ourselves beaten.

And if its any consolation, it is highly unlikely that anybody tried to follow our route, ever, for the following Spring, Manitoba Hydro started damming up the

Churchill River at ¹⁵Missi Falls at the end of South Indian Lake. Today the whole of that area is under eighteen feet of water including the upper reaches of the Rat as far as the Notigi Dam at Lake Isset which we didn't miss by more than half a mile!

¹⁵ The word 'Missi' - big or large, is in common usage among the Cree, Obijwa & Iroquois tribes and, I believe, in many other tribes across Canada.

CHAPTER VI

BACK COUNTRY SKIING

I suppose it was around the middle of the Sixties when the foundations of the apostasy from downhill skiing was beginning to change my outlook. Although it was not until the early seventies that I finally put away my Rossignols and buckle boots, for about six years I had been getting more and more involved with back country skiing. A lot of it at first was little more than farmers' fields in rural Ontario and scrambling over wire fences and tackling some of the quite steep hills between Peterborough and Orangeville. The catalyst for change, the crossing of the Rubicon so to speak, was a trip we made one beautiful crisp sunny day to see what the country, that we were so familiar with in the Summer and Fall, was like in mid Winter. My friends Virgil Curri and Brenda Maile accompanied my that day and right from the start there was no doubt in our minds that this was the way to go!

We left our car on the edge of the, then #101 highway, one hundred miles north of and less that two hours drive from Toronto and took off in the direction of Georgian Bay towards McCrae Lake. It was about fifteen below with some three inches of powder on a solid base of a foot or more. We skirted around the narrows and past beaver dams, across a couple of small lakes, and schussed down a long wide open slope and onto a small circular lake not more that a hundred meters in diameter. Here we found a dry piece of rock to stretch out and enjoy our surroundings, framed by a curtain of white pine holding tenuously on to a bedrock of the gneissic Canadian Shield. I had paddled through this area from the chute that led into McCrae Lake, and had passed this lake not more than twenty yards distant without the faintest inkling of its existence. A sun trap and a little piece of Shangri La. A jewel in a silver setting! On the way back we found out what the strange roaring noise was that we had heard on the way in. It was the chute, which in Summer is barely a trickle of water, but now was literally a small Niagara Falls, the thunder of which made speech impossible. But separated from it by a few hills the silence was so complete that the rustle of a falling leaf could be heard within a stone's throw

From that day's trip until 1970, though still downhill skiing each Saturday with the Podborskis at Craigeleith I spent each Sunday with a growing number of companions following our noses ever deeper into that wilderness country for which there was little more than hydrographic detail on the government topographical maps 1:50,000 scale. A little closer to home at Horseshoe Valley an Estonian club had put in a few miles of trails and occasionally we skied in this area, though for the most part off the trails. On one occasion we were joined by the TRANZAC¹⁶ a down-under club with whom I used to play squash. That day we has forty five people skiing in the McCrae Lake area and,

though I had split them up into as many parties as I had knowledgeable leaders, most of them did their own thing, disappearing into the bush in parties of two or three.

We were very lucky. No one got lost. There were no injuries and everybody got out in before dark. And the only comment I can make about that was that we were lucky, damned lucky. It could so easily have turned into a complete catastrophe. Fortunately - we were pushing the season into April - the weather put a stop to any further trips, and by the time it relented there were too many bare patches and open water in the beaver ponds and streams to make skiing feasible in the McCrae area.

However we did have one more trip before putting our skis away until next Winter. Further to the North, a tad south of Twelve Mile Bay which is less a bay than a twelve mile long inlet not more than a ten minute swim in width, is Big David Bay which looks out on Georgian Bay. To get an idea of the scale, Georgian Bay measures a good hundred miles North to South and about fifty wide. On its west side it opens out into Lake Huron which is much bigger. On the landward side to the East is Moose Deer Point, a small natural sheltered harbour known as King Bay, the Tadenac Bay, and Tadenac Lake which is surrounded by private land and home to a rich man's fishing club, and the southern arm of Big David which is a mere five miles wide by about three deep

Sitting in the middle of big David, embraced, I should say, by the two outer arms is a little group of islands, privately owned unfortunately, known as Wawatessi which is an Objjwa word for firefly. Within the Wawatessi group, and on its outer fringes, is a haven of peace and beauty and in Winter we often visited it on skis. We were made very welcome by the owner, an American, who was glad to have somebody to check out his property during the winter months when he wasn't around. It was the end of March that, with a dozen or so of people from Tranzac, plus as many again of our regular group, we swarmed out to the islands accompanied by the sound of our skis rattling about on the ice which by then was entirely devoid of any snow cover, but more than a foot thick. Enough to take a horse and carriage loaded with pig iron.

I have never known Georgian Bay to freeze over completely and I always remember looking out from Georgian Peaks, where I often used to ski and from where one could see the whole of the southern part of the Bay.. Around the edges was a white 'frame' of width, varying in time and location up to ten miles or more, surrounding the blue open water in the middle, like a jewel set in a silver sea. In those days the ice went out far beyond the islands and many was the time we skied out to look for the edge of the ice but never found it, maybe just as well! Sometimes a storm would break up the edge of the pack which would refreeze leaving huge floes sticking up edgewise with artistic dendritic formations in the clear ice. I once measured the thickness of one of these floes at eighteen inches.

Often when skiing across ice you would hear a deep 'woomph' as it settled, and I remember once hearing that noise and shouted to the people following me to fan out, just in case. You never know for sure! And of course they all converged on me to see what the trouble was!

Well, that was 1969, the year four of us paddled our kayaks 400 miles down the Churchill River and ended up with mud in our faces! We got back to Toronto middle of September and the first thing I thought of when we arrived was that Winter wasn't far off and something had to be organised, pdq, before we ended up lost in the bush with our pants down, in a survival situation. I didn't have to be told that, come January, all those nuts of last season were going to be coming out of the woodwork again. And I didn't intend to be the one to pay the piper when the statistic caught up with us.

And come January, we weren't too badly organised. A new club to be known as Four Winds Ski Touring had seen the light of day. A rough constitution had been drafted out together with what we hoped were common-sense rules of behaviour in the bush to which all members would be required to adhere. At that time we had no less than thirty members of whom the very first to join was Prue Ralli, now Prue Allonsius, who to this day is the most familiar face on the trails. On the board of directors, Joe Herwig was in charge of Membership and performance records, Goetz Koechlin, a friendly bear of a man, was Financial Director, though we didn't have much in the way of finances. Haigh Carthew was Vice President and being an old army man, made sure everybody toed the line! I was *a shoo-in for President, though they didn't succeed in shooing me out for ten years or so, after which I was Life Member and President ex officio for another fifteen years*

One of the things that I had learnt through the years, perhaps I should say through the Army, was about responsibility towards those under one's command. In the higher echelon that responsibility is for groups such as platoons, companies, battalions, brigades, divisions etc. A general has little contact with the rank and file, his command being exercised through his staff all of whom he deals with on an individual basis and through whom his decisions are transmitted, from strategy to tactics, to the soldier in the field. However it is interesting to observe that whether we are talking of a section of seven soldiers so or a division of several thousands, a commander rarely deals directly with more than seven subordinates. And whether it be military or business or recreation, if you have more than seven persons responding directly to you begin to lose control.

And so it is in the field, or the bush. A party of, say, seven skiers - to my mind a party of seven is a large party; I'm happier with five - is manageable and the leader can keep track of them. Within the other six, a responsible person can always be found who will bring up in the rear to make sure that nobody gets left behind for whatever reason. And it was upon this premise that we organised our trips, on the basis of a leader with a party of seven or less. Stops for rest, relief or refreshment to be scheduled by the leader or by common need and if one person stops the whole party does so, or slows down.

Timekeeping was important since individuals had to know before starting out in the morning, how long their day was going to be and, most important, if they were late in coming out, their non-appearance would alert organisers and other parties to the possibility of mishap.

Fifty skiers coming up on a day trip would mean six or seven parties going in different directions and at different speeds and it was important that each party should have a schedule showing the makeup of all the parties, their access and egress points and times and the facility for exchanging information and people whenever groups crossed tracks in the bush.. Thus, at the end of the day, the if a party did not come out on schedule some information as to their route and situation would probably be available.

That was the skeleton of our organisation and not only did it work well but it was accepted and observed with little complaint by all the club members. I suppose the ultimate accolade would be the fact that until this day, thirty years later, it is still in operation and with only minor refinements. Further, though there have been five or six minor instances of short term disorientation, we were never faced with an overnight and only twice with a debilitating injury.

In one of our early newsletters we printed an article defining and summarising the basis of the new organisation,. The paragraphs below which are a short extract from that article discusses the philosophy behind the organisation and security of running parties in the bush. I have included it here as it may be of interest to those whose interests are similar to our own when travelling in the back county..

There are many people, not all of whom are Five Winds members to whom our group is an unknown quantity and for whom the discipline of an organised party is restrictive to the freedom of movement enjoyed by small group of friends. Such a group can start when they like, go where their fancy takes them, make their own decisions on the spur of the moment, and plan the routing and return time based on the strength of the party and the vagaries of weather, terrain and snow conditions. For a party whose individuals are significantly matched in ability, experience, physical condition and ambition there would seem to be little need for what might appear to be a big brother approach to wilderness skiing. That most of Five Winds members who ski regularly with the club subscribe to this premise could be taken as a negation of it.

Why then, one might reasonably ask, if they agree with the philosophy of the small intimate group do they bother to join the club at all. Doesn't make sense, or does it? When an individual gets on the bus, he knows what sort of party he will be skiing with; he knows that most in the party he has already skied with; he either knows the trails and the surrounding country well and doesn't mind very much where he goes, or it's all new to him and he's glad to have a few people around that know what they are doing and where! The practice of splitting everybody up into small parties as Five Winds does each weekend means that wherever you go in the bush there is always another party somewhere not too far away, or its spoor, which tells a lot about its speed and

direction. The day's schedule, of which each party has a copy, identifies the members of each group, it's starting point and approximate routing. This information together with a knowledge of the various personalities and skiing philosophies plus a little bit of bush telegraph, which we all know about but would have difficulty in rationalising, enables each party to know what everybody else is doing and where. And at the end of the day if a group does not get to the rendezvous on time there is an abundance (sorry, Mike, one of my pet peeves is that plethora means an excessive amount) of information available, from which the missing party's location and situation can be estimated with surprising accuracy.

One cannot say whether all of this makes the case for what could be called organised freedom of action, but it might serve to ease the concerns of individualists who feel that joining Five Winds could destroy the thing that they value most in the bush. On the other side of the coin, there could be little dispute that in the case of emergency such as injury or disorientation, we would be much better placed to resolve the situation than would be a party of friends doing their own thing in the bush.

While on the subject of getting into trouble in the bush and the sort of help you could expect from the club to get out of it, the question of not getting into trouble in the first place is worth thinking about. Carrying a map and compass is a start and knowing how to use the combination is even better, but the best of all is to do it, all the time, so that you could identify your position on the map at any time. The first is a sensible precaution, the second a matter of training, and the third a combination of the second and the application of common sense.

Membership with Five Winds is conditional upon a number of requirements, one of which is that everybody carry a map and compass at all times when on the trail. It would a good thing that all members be required to demonstrate some minimal proficiency and experience in the use of these two items before going out with the club, and that the club would offer a program of instruction in which the needful ones should be encouraged to participate. Amen!

A few years before all this was going on I happened across some earthworks in the Craighurst area of Southern Ontario, that turned out to be the first stages in the development of the Horseshoe Valley Ski resort. That was in the Fall of 1963 and it has since become a full blown recreational, year round operation comprising a golf course, swimming pools, and about fifteen miles of cross country ski trails. All serviced by plush hotels and chalets to match. To judge from the size of the parking lots, it must be a paying project, and then a bit.

In 1963 when Horseshoe Valley was in its infancy, a small Estonian group had built some cross country trails which I and a couple of friends had stumbled across when exploring the country on skis. Eventually, during the late sixties, we built about nine miles of our own trails in the same area. We had hand shake agreements with the various landowners and farmers and each weekend we car-pooled up to Horseshoe with never more than ten or fifteen friends, for a day's outing in the area. After a few years we started building the Gibson River system which now totals close on 150 miles of trail in a wilderness area

of about 200 square miles and I was beginning to realise that keeping up the two trail systems was getting beyond our finances and human resources. The decision to abandon the Horseshoe area was facilitated by the fact that the big commercial resort there had taken over the best five miles of our trail! So it was Gibson River or bust, and I don't think I ever heard a complaint. Mind you, there was not much to complain about. Horseshoe was, well kinda civilised, if you know what I mean. Mostly rural with a lot of reforestation, crisscrossed with small roads and many farms and private houses. Why, in a days skiing, it was not uncommon to meet people and to hear automobiles in the distance. Up on the Gibson you'd hear a wolf or two, sometimes meet a bear who didn't know what time of the year it was. Plenty of signs of fox, and jackrabbit. Occasionally you'd see where a porcupine had met his nemesis in the shape of a fisher, and now and again your wits would be startled out of you as a wintering grouse would break out of the snow, almost under your ski tips! Otters were in abundance though you didn't often see one, and when you smelt a *sulphurous odour associated with methane gas This chemist is pulling rank here, methane is odourless.* you knew you were close to a beaver dam and iced up skis.¹⁷

By 1975 we had three discrete ski areas. A 17 mile loop around McCrae Lake, a dendritic system totalling about twenty miles, south and east of the Musquash River and Go Home Lake, which became known as Coldgray, and Mid Gibson with two trails, one on each side of the river. Very soon we completed a fourth complex to the West of Nine Mile Lake. All four are now connected and topographically mapped at a scale of 2" to the mile, or 1:32,000. It was, and still is, a good system and people could hike and ski without anybody breathing down their necks

Around 1990 we built another 21 km of trail, adjacent to but separated from the main system, by the Musquash River. This latter adjunct became very popular because of its comprehensive water system which opened up a hydrographic network; a veritable maze of interconnected creeks and streams and beaver ponds and a challenge to those with a bent for exploring and off the trail skiing. We called it The Marsh. It belonged to the beavers who built the dams and flooded the low lying areas thus drowning the trees that grew there. In many other areas, dams are regularly blown up to release the waters held up behind them. The effect is to leave the beavers high and dry making them an easy target for the guns of the hunters. And of course, by the time the cavalry gets there, the poachers are long gone. Somebody once said that blowing up the beaver dams was only doing what nature did. Eventually most beaver ponds were silted over providing a base for fresh growth and through the years the white pine would take over with a little stream flowing down the creek in the middle. Eventually, a beaver would come along and the process would repeat itself. That is, if there were any beavers left. What made the activities of the poachers particularly reprehensible was the fact that after destroying a dam, the

¹⁷ Close to beaver dams there is always shallow water and except in very cold weather a ubiquitous trickle of water. Both conditions create thin ice which is often obscured by a layer of crusty snow which skis easily break through to the water beneath, causing them to ice up. Marsh gas or methane, rising from decaying faeces and food left by the beavers, escapes through access holes and dams and thus constitute a warning of thin ice. Hence the connection between thin ice and methane

waters receded leaving impassable mud flats over the surrounding area. Not a pretty sight, and if you were in a canoe, or any other boat for that matter, there was no way one could get to solid ground without sinking up to the withers in cloying mud. It could take as long as ten seasons before the flats could be walked on.

Talking of beaver dams, I heard an interesting story, a while back. Just above Long Falls on the Gibson there is a rocky bar which bridges the river at low water and Art d'Angio, who eventually became well known to the club, had built himself a log cabin just next to the bar. He lived there for years, mostly on his own, for the better part of each year. We came across him for the first time on a hot Summer's day in 1970, paddling down the river from Nine Mile Lake. You didn't see many people up in that country, in fact other than Art the only people we ever met around there were an Estonian middle aged couple paddling a runabout near Portage Bend. Of course, we stopped and had a chat with them as people do in the bush. There was no easy way that I knew of, to carry in a boat of that weight and width from the nearest road which would have been a tough portage through some pretty rough country.

I asked them "Which way do you come in?" The way she looked at me, I almost knew the answer! "You come in your way," she says, "and we come in our way!" And that was that! But we never met them again unfortunately.

In those days, it must have been about 1970, we had no trails in that area which was the most remote part of the Gibson River. In the late eighties we were looking for an easier access to cut trail between Portage Bend and Shaw's Creek and found occasional signs of foot traffic from Lost Channel to the river and after an easy kilometer came out at the bend. And what did we find there but this old runabout hidden in the reeds! We had found the Estonian couple's secret route to the Gibson.

Anyway, back at Art's cabin we were having a chinwag about the country, of which there wasn't much he didn't know.. In the middle of it all Art said, "Hey! Would you people like some cold beer?" Well, there was only one answer to that! Art arrived with four bottles of Export with frost on the outside! He told us they came straight out of the fridge, but he did not tell us how he got his supplies in, let alone a fridge.

It was several years later we were wandering through the bush and came across what looked like a tractor trail. Following it for a good hour, we eventually ended up at, guess where, Art's cabin. And that explained the ancient old tractor that we had seen at Lost Channel. It was big enough to carry half a ton of equipment, though how Art managed to drive it through that country without overturning, I'll never know. Nowadays the tractor is disused and Art goes in on an ATV from the end of Muskoka Road 33 which is an easier route and doesn't encounter any water crossings.

At the time I was talking to Art, I told him about the trail we were building over Shaw's Creek. We had one helluva job finding our way across the creek.

It was all of a hundred yards wide and lots of water in it. Eventually we had found, with the aid of squinting at stereographic pairs of aerial photos, a slim beaver dam with a knife edge to it. It was at a narrow part of the creek and all of sixty yards wide. Deep water on the south side and downstream some wispy alders that might have supported a couple of robins. Not an ideal route across, but the only one and two of us managed to get across without falling in.

Art listened to all this with a big grin. "You want to know who built that dam? It was Clarence Marshall." I didn't ask the obvious question. It was a beautiful piece of engineering and a thing of beauty with a delicate curve to it that could only come from a painter's brush - or a beaver. "I was walking along the east side," continued Art, "And I saw Clarence throwing rocks into the water, building a bit of a spit at the narrow part. It wasn't much, no more'n a couple of feet, maybe three at the most. "I asked him what the Hell he was doing." he went on "You are not figuring on building a bridge across there, are you? You silly old sod!" Well apparently Clarence was just showing the beavers where to build their dam. Art laughed and I thought it was a good joke. "It weren't no joke," said Art, "Two months after that I passed by and - there it was. Couldn't hardly believe it. And as sure as Hell, it wasn't Clarence who was the 'silly old sod!" Well I haven't been that way for several years, but I think the dam is still there for it's our only connection to the other side of the creek. On skis, when everything is frozen up, like I said, you steer well clear of beaver dams. But when hiking or trail clearing, we'd have had to do a lot of swimming without them!

CHAPTER VII

FIVE WINDS

I had intended to devote this chapter to the formation and activities of the club and not least to the contribution of its members through the years without which nothing very much could have been accomplished. Though the original nucleus of the club was made up from my own circle of friends and acquaintances, almost all of them have by now gone their own ways, but without whose help we could never have got started. Of Joe and Lucia Herwig you have heard much already. They met through the club and married shortly after. Brenda and Goetz Koechlin met in the same way and were our secretary and accountant respectively. Honorary members of Five Winds they no longer ski with us but living in Ontario we are still in touch. Goetz, a German and a big bear of a man; gentle as a puppy but I'd as soon argue with a charging hippo if his dander was up. In a kayak with a sail he reverted to boyhood and I remember once he and Haigh Carthew borrowed my boat and sailed around the rocks in Georgian Bay. It took me the better part of an hour to get them out of it! Linda Dolan, once secretary and regular participant on the trails and waters, left us in the seventies and was living in Vancouver for some time. Maybe one day, we shall hear from her, wherever she is

Perhaps our best remembered friend and long standing member was Rea Bauman. Originally from Finland where the country so much resembles the Canadian Shield, she was brought up on skis and coming to Canada in the late sixties she took to our way of life with enthusiasm. As club secretary and a member of the executive for many years she kept our meetings in order. She was an integral and functional part of the group, until one day she had a heart attack and, though she made a good recovery, never felt herself able to return to her former activities

The only one of that group still remaining and an active and regular participant in our back country activities is Prue Allonsius who, incidentally, was the first to join what was then Four Winds. She married George in the early days, but where she got him I'll never know. It certainly was not on the trails, though she tried her best to convert him. An ex French Foreign Legion officer and a good man to have around in a scrap, he never took to cross country skiing. One Christmas, Prue bought him a pair of skis but he resolutely refused even to try them out. I said to him one day, "I hear Prue bought you a pair of skis, George. When are you going to come out with us?" "I was wasting my time! "I put de' skis in de' cupboard, and dat's where dey are going to stay!" And to this day, to the best of my knowledge they are still there, gathering dust!

I could talk about these and the many other friends I met through Five Winds and never do them justice. In the old days I hardly ever missed a weekend's skiing and I think I was on first name terms with them all and not only knew their skiing history and ability but most of their life story as well! In fact I could probably write a heterogeneous biography about them that would double

the length of this book. Maybe I will, one day. That is if I live long enough to complete all the other projects I have in mind!

Our trails are all identified with names, many of which relate to the topography and history of that part of Ontario going back into the last century, but in the main only one skier ever had a trail named after him, sadly, posthumously. Emil Vautier, originally from the Channel Islands, was lost together with his young son and a friend in a storm on Lake Ontario back in the seventies. Their boat overturned somewhere out there and the only evidence of the disaster was his son's body which was washed ashore at the west end of the lake near Burlington. Emil, a likeable man and competent skier in his early forties, had become a regular skier with the club and could be seen on the trails each Fall, hacking and hewing with the best of them.

His favourite trail was the 'Go Home' in the Coldgray area. We renamed it 'The Vautier' as now it appears on our trail map. The northern end where it joins the 'Monks Path' and the 'Spartan Trail' is known as the 'Vautier Junction' and the cairn at that point was built to his memory. I hope that Rainer Leibrecht who maintains that section and those who follow him, each year will enlarge the cairn and tread lightly as they pass.

One of the early and unforgettable figures in the club history was Graham Housam, though his story would not be complete without Klarissa, his girl friend, and his Doberman Pinscher, Wolf. Graham came to us from a cross country ski club operating in rural country not far from Toronto. The only thing I remember clearly about their operation was the portable pissoir - to avoid red faces when knocking at a countryman's door - that was towed behind somebody's car, never farther from skiers *in extremis* than the width of a farmer's field! Apparently the facility and privacy of hedges had not been fully appreciated by that particular organisation. On our own trails, the convenience, sorry, of stopping in the middle of the track to admire the scenery, was observed by at least one of our (male) leaders with all his party behind him standing patiently waiting while he marked the trail!

Graham was famed throughout the club for his habit of not getting at all excited about things that most normal people did get excited about. But then, nobody would ever have called Graham normal. He was an individual, through and through. I won't say he did things his own way, it just never occurred to him that there was any other way to do them. Once he came up behind me in his Toyota on a bush road and signalled me to stop. This was Muskoka Road 33, which in those days was a convoluted single track with delusions of grandeur, that is, it really thought it was a roller coaster! "Are you going down to The Sleepers?" says Graham, "Oh, good, I'll just get my gear and ride with you." I looked back at his vehicle, sitting there right in the middle of the road. I said "You'd better move your vehicle. Nobody will be able to get past." But there it stayed while we had a nice day skiing in the bush. Six hours or so later we got back to the Toyota and there it was, where we had left it. And none the worse for wear. On one side of it the verges were covered with wheel marks and signs of much spinning wheels and footprints - presumably of pushing

passengers, all of whom would unquestionably and cheerfully have hung and drawn Graham and no doubt quartered him as well.

Klarissa had the habit of smoking evil-smelling cheroots when skiing on the trails and it was always said that had she ever become disoriented there would never be any trouble finding her. All you had to do would be to follow the smell of her cigar. It seemed to hang around for hours after she had passed that way! Once, maybe more often, we would come across a set of tracks intersecting our own, with the lingering smell of a cigar in the air and we all knew whose it was!

Graham's dog, Wolf, while not allowed on organised skiing trips - who wants a boisterous dog leaping around in front of when your attention is directed to avoiding trees on a steep hill - he often came with us on trail cutting trips. That is to say, he started with us in the morning and reappeared at the end of day, but in the meantime the only trace of him was the occasional dark streak in the distance, accompanied by frantic and joyful yips and barks as he chased but never caught any of the myriads of small animals that abounded in the bush. At lunch time we were all sitting at the top of the hill that we called Nindebab which we believe to be the Ojibwa word meaning 'I see afar', and were discussing an appropriate name for the trail we were cutting. Prue, who was with us that time, though unaccompanied by her Legionnaire husband, George, suggested that as the dog had covered more of the terrain than anyone could have done in a month of Sundays. it should be named after him. And thus it got its name, The Dobermann.

Graham's profession is medical doctor specialising in anaesthesia and since I have known him he has been working in that profession as a Reserve officer with the British Army. It was 1971 when he joined with our skiing group, and one of the first things he did was to co-opt the services of a section of soldiers in the building of two bridges over the Gibson River. One about three hundred yards from the bottom of Nine Mile Lake, and the other at the downstream end of Brotherson Lake where it runs through a small chute into Indian Pond. Since then, but only recently, they have been rebuilt at slightly different locations by a Five Winds work force under the direction of Bruce Geary who is an engineer with the Ministry of Transportation

It must have been in the early 1980s when Graham transferred to Wales where he was working at a military hospital in Aberystwyth. Now a Full Colonel, he tried to retire from that work in July of 1999, but after not much more than a month, the Army made him an offer he couldn't refuse and shipped him to Cyprus for a couple of years. But no doubt he will turn up again soon, either in Canada or Britain, or both!

Haigh Carthew, an old and valued friend of mine, if I may claim him as such, surfaced on a High Park Ski Club trip to the Adirondac Mountains in the state of Vermont, USA. The bus I was on arrived at three in the morning and I crawled into bed to the accompaniment of a chorus of male snores around me. After climbing into my bunk I remembered nothing until I was woken by someone who was insisting that I move myself, real sharp, if I wanted any

breakfast. It was Haigh, having arrived at a decent hour the previous day and got a good night's sleep into the bargain. His exhortation to 'Rise and shine' filtered through my befuddled mind and I felt myself to be back in the army in 1939 expecting to hear the hated tones of early morning 'Reveille' It turned out that Haigh was an old Artilleryman from the British Army, though a good ten years behind me, and had come to Toronto in 1969 from Montreal where he had met a lovely English girl called Caroline who was a skiing nut and incidentally is now, some thirty years later, editing my memoirs. But more of her later.

Haigh became a regular participant in our back country skiing trips and for a time was Vice President of the club. Besides being a first class outdoors man and a competent skier as well, I always felt that his two main priorities in life was to have a family and to teach. Having a lot of 'Mr Chips' in his psyche, his unrealised avocation would be to teach in a boys school which he would have done well and probably ended up as headmaster. His family ambitions were certainly achieved, for he now has a wife, three grown up children, two dogs and a cat who bosses the dogs around mercilessly, in the manner of cats and others of that ilk. That he didn't achieve his other ambition was due to no fault of his own for he had the knowledge and the training and the 'know-how' of handling men and boys. His misfortune was that he came on stream at a time when the teaching profession in Canada was in decline and suffering severe cut backs in personnel. It was, I am sure, a very big blow to him though I never heard him complain. He would have done well and the educational system lost a valuable man.

I always say that he had me to thank for his marriage to Barbara who was a good match for him both physically and in intelligence. One day he confided to me that he didn't seem to be meeting the right kind of woman, the sort he would want to marry. So I said, "What about Barbara Reid? About the right age, nice looking girl, strong, single, good head on her - - -." But Haigh shook his head and pulled a long face. But evidently he thought it over, for three weeks later they were engaged! They left Toronto some fifteen years later and lived and worked in Yellowknife and finally, in 1999, settled down in Nova Scotia.

And then there was David Horsley, an eminent lawyer and Queens Counsellor, originally from New Zealand. Besides being a regular skier with Five Winds he looked after our legal problems, or perhaps I should say he made sure we didn't have any. *Eventually he* found himself a wife from the club, Gabriella, an English girl. I was never quite sure who found who, but one thing I was sure of, he did not have much difficulty finding her for she always wore a bright orange ski outfit, very becoming. I know that not a few *eligible* males had long faces when she got engaged to David!

They used to live in Lawrence Park and their house was always open to the club. In fact we used to organise a slide show there come February, everybody bringing their own slides. More than a couple of times there'd be up to a score of people there and nobody with any slides! But all was never lost for David

would bring out his own; hiking in central Africa, climbing Mato Pichu, or swanning around in Tierra del Fuego. Sometimes I wondered if everybody didn't leave their slides at home on purpose.

Sometimes we would take our charter bus down to Georgian Bay and ski out over the ice to the islands off Moose Deer Point. On one of these trips I took my party, consisting of the Horsleys, Betty and Joe, Liz Jaarsma and somebody else I can't remember, out as far as time permitted. One day we were to go to the Western Isles, where I paddled once with Ralph Elsassaer, qv., but it would have been a long haul- some 28 clicks there and back - and we never did make it. With the ice cover shrinking as it does, more and more each Winter, any aspirants to that trip would have to take their kayaks with them to get over the last few *kilometers*.

Any way, after a good day's skiing, I took my party back by a circuitous route - I knew that country so well that I didn't need to consult my map - carefully calculating the time we would need to get back to our starting point.. I explained all this to my party who all looked impressed. After a while David comes up to me, map in hand, and asks me to pinpoint our position. That was when I realised that I had been skiing along happily - and day dreaming too! To be certain of our position would have taken half an hour, and another half hour to return to the same point. We did not have time to do any guessing so we retraced our route for the *previous* half-hour and got back to the bus an hour and twenty minutes late. And to this day I can still see David's confident smile, confident that he would sleep in his own bed that night. And not a word of criticism did I hear, but I knew that I had been rumbled and in later successive seminars that I gave on the subject of 'How not to lose your way when in the wilderness.' (!) I used this experience to illustrate what could happen (even) when you do know the country like the back of your hand.

I used to stand up at the top of the bus each Sunday morning looking down at all the forty eight or so familiar faces. Some skiers were putting on their gaiters - about which activity Rainer Leibracht wrote a delightful and humorous article, qv, *some having a second breakfast, some checking their equipment and routes. Others were reading, sleeping, and comparing notes with their tour leader and above all comparing the different schedule sheets for the day.* And always, in the middle of some discussion group in the middle of the bus was Ray Mandel and not far off, his wife Judy. Their home was called the club house for it was always open to the club and directors meetings were held there. Both keen and competent skiers and popular with all, I don't think either missed more than a couple of trips since they joined Five Winds back in 1972, from which time, twenty seven years ago, they have produced the club newsletter four times each year.

They say that no one is indispensable and I won't argue with that premise, but I hate to think what we would have done without the Mandels.

One day , I think it was in the Fall of 1990, my front door bell rang just as we were finishing off one of Bozena's excellent lunches, and in walked a pleasant smiling individual whom I had never met before and who sounded as if he had just found the end of the rainbow. Sitting at the table were our guests, Ralph Elsassaer and Virgil Curri, *qv.* munching away at Mozart Kugeln and washing it down with red wine. The visitor turned out to be a Rainer Leibrecht, an Austrian who had been trying to find Five Winds for many months. Well he had come to the right place at last, and we all sat round the table talking about the club and frequently replenishing the supplies of wine and Kugeln. Eventually the party broke up and Rainer became one of our most enthusiastic club members.

Not very long after this *incontro* Rainer wrote an article for our newsletter in which he expresses his first impressions of the club. It says everything I would have liked to say and I can do no better than reproduce it below:

*Impressions of a New Member
After One Year with "Five Winds Touring Club."*

My first exposure to members of the "Five Winds Touring Club" - except for the founder - was the Fall meeting in November of 1990. Entering the foyer of the auditorium in the company of a friend who was also new to this, I did not feel completely lost amongst the crowd of people conversing animatedly in little groups.

It was in the air, it was palpable that most persons wished to be identified with the outdoors. This was manifested by clothing and general habit which certainly did not give away any clue to daytime occupations or professions. I looked around wondering if I would fit into this crowd - anticipating the coming Sundays on the bus and on the trails. Was it a closely knit circle of esoterics. Would I be accepted; would I be comfortable among them?

The official part of the meeting took place in the auditorium. Speeches were made outlining the purpose and activities of the club, its rules and regulations including advice on clothing and equipment. At the end slides were presented.

The highlight of the evening was what to me seemed a magic show. It was performed by the club's president to demonstrate the obligatory backpack and its contents, required on all our outings. To that end he placed a moderately sized day pack on the desk. From its innards he produced an endless array of articles, pulling out item after item and containers holding more things and giving explanations of their use.

There were spare and repair parts for skis, tools, waxes, containers for food and drink, safety and protective equipment and, for the most part, extra clothing. The pack's contents seemed to expand as he piled them around himself on the floor - if I remember correctly, right up to his hips, until he was

completely surrounded and unable to move.

It was scary; will we have to lug around all that stuff? To be fair, no. Many items were in multiples of minor variations to suit individual preferences and different circumstances.

For the finale, the gathering moved back to the foyer for refreshments and socialising. On the elevator down I met an acquaintance from several years ago who had been a club member for some time and that seemed to be a good omen..

Then came January 1991, my first time with Five Winds on the trails. I was already awake when the alarm went off. There was plenty of time to get ready, but at the end it became a race with the clock. The packed pack and the waxed and bundled skis were in the hall way - it had hours the night before to make the necessary preparations, driving my wife crazy - but everything had to be checked again. Some of last night's decisions were overthrown and last minute changes were made. I was, in my own way, making breakfast, preparing lunch and listening to the weather report at the same time, while the water kettle was whistling and the refrigerator door open with the drawers sticking out.

I made it to the parking lot at Highway # 7 and 400 on time, in spite of first taking the wrong turn and having to back out against the traffic on a one way highway interchange lane - which was not funny! Luckily there was little traffic, and no police in sight! Hardly had I taken my skis out of the car when a bus arrived and came to a stop at the north end of the parking lot. The wrong bus of course - I am glad I asked first, otherwise I would have spent the day with the 'Marauders'¹⁸. A few minutes later another bus arrived, stopping at the south and - from where I stood - the most remote spot on the tarmac. As I was approaching it, trotting somewhat out of the wind, balancing skis, pack, gloves and car keys, a voice, obviously out of Heaven, addressed me. "Coming with Five Winds?" It asked, "Hurry up!" The voice belonged to a commanding figure with cords for whistle and compass dangling on his chest, who was standing inside the open bus door. I deposited my skis on top of the others in the hold and climbed aboard behind the other skiers. I pushed my way through the narrow to where, five rows back, my friend was holding a seat for me. I was looking mostly at sleepy faces in whom the new arrivals hardly aroused any sense of curiosity. The atmosphere certainly was not a lively one; some people were having hushed conversations, others eating slowly or reading. Some were searching through their packets, searching for some essential item hopefully not forgotten, others staring ahead with unseeing eyes,¹⁹ but hopefully not dead..

Soon the mood began to change when the, to me, not yet familiar bus routine began. The aisle became a busy place with people going up and down,

¹⁸ There was rarely any problem with skiers from other groups getting on our bus since most of our drivers could spot a Five Winder a hundred yards away. No others could ever get past the driver of the Five Winds bus.

¹⁹ Actually, very much alive

squeezing by each other to collect fares and to distribute lists to the tour leaders, and the tour leaders in their turn contacting the persons on their respective lists belonging to the group in their charge.

Announcements were made giving the selected ski area for the day and about news in general regarding the club. With increasing intensity people began to come alive, visiting each other and comparing notes and schedules.

Time went fast until suddenly a general excitement could be felt. We were getting close to our destination and it was time to get ready, time to put on the gaiters. Putting on gaiters is not just an act of applying added protection to the lower extremities; it signifies a ritual of final preparation to face the snow covered trails in the wilderness. This ritual is magnified by the difficulty of its execution, which requires near-acrobatic skills, contortion of body and limbs, to perform in the narrow and dark space surrounding one's feet in the crowded bus, packed with people and gear

Then the word got around that the 'fast group' would be getting out on the first stop very soon. Who were these men and women of skill and endurance who could ski faster and farther than the rest of us? They were left to their fate, and the bus went on. Stop after stop, one group after another was dropped off at various points of the trail system.

I was assigned to a very interesting group of first time members, ungraded and of varying ability. An energetic young woman, scholar of philosophy, was storming ahead, throwing up the white powder high and wide, but two gentlemen, somewhat more middle aged, could not keep up. One, a mathematician, was out of shape and had the wrong wax on his skis; the other, a naturalist, was in no hurry and also got his skis iced up every time we crossed a creek. Thanks to our tour leader, a charming woman of great patience, and some cooperation from all of us, we experienced a beautiful and memorable day on trails called 'The Sleepers' and 'Lone Lake'.

A happy and exhausted crowd of skiers was reunited on the bus rolling home to Toronto. In reverse order of this morning's trip north, the activity level was high at first, decreasing noticeably as time went on. An excited exchange of the day's experiences gave way to a more tranquil atmosphere. Everybody returned to his or her seat to relax; some were conversing, some eating, some reading and quite a few were dozing off. Taking off the gaiters was symbolic of the return to civilisation and was a much easier task than had been their earlier application. It was dark when I changed from the bus to the car at the parking lot and I was already looking forward to next Sunday going north.

So came and went many wonderful Sundays, until one weekend at the end of March the inevitable happened: the snow had melted and the ski season was over. Impossible! Unbelievable! Unbearable! An absolute emptiness, but at last I had time to tidy up the basement, ending a long standing procrastination.

*The emptiness did not last long because the telephone started ringing. It occurred to the grounded skiers, as if it were a novel idea, that a year has three more seasons, all suitable for outdoors activities. So it happened that smaller groups would get together during Spring, Summer and Fall for hiking, bicycling, swimming and sailing, and also for non-sporting events and socialising. One highlight was a midsummer evening walk through some of Toronto's parks and ravines. Unforgettable were the orienteering exercises on cold and rainy October days, through swamps when drainage holes in our boots would have been more practical than waterproofing. **Another experience was to return from trail clearing after nightfall, when we had to find our way out of the pitch dark forest while we heard crackling of branches and snorting nearby; imagining a bear's breath on our necks.***

My first year with 'Five Winds', full of unforgettable memories, came to a close at the 'Fall Meeting' in November of 1991. Going up in the elevator to the auditorium, looking forward to seeing friends and anticipating another exciting year with the club, I decided to write down my impressions. (It took a long time!).

I wish to dedicate these pages in gratitude to the man who created 'Five Winds Touring Club with its trails, a cause of so much enjoyment and resulting in many friendships'

To Mike Naughton.

And with my thanks and appreciation for his kind words, to Rainer Leibrecht

I have mentioned a few of the people who have been 'Founding' and 'Long Time' members and one or two of whom are still active with the club. I suppose I should include myself with in that list and though I can't claim recent many points on the activity side of it, I am certainly way ahead of everybody in the number of years I have marked up

There are however many other members and friends who made what Five Winds what it is today and I would dearly like to pay them homage individually and write a short story about them all. Unfortunately space is at a premium and my words are inadequate to the task, but their names and faces and exploits, to say nothing of their accomplishments, will always be bright in my mind. I will never forget them.

Since I plan to have my ashes scattered around the trail area after I have put my skis away, I hope, at least, that when somebody is lost down in the South Coombe or up in the swamps around the Upper Haymarshes they will remember me, hoping, maybe, that I might guide their footsteps!

CHAPTER VIII

NEW HAMPSHIRE - THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

In or around April of 1973 I took a small party on a camping and kayaking trip to Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. Emil Vautier and Liz Jaarsma were with me in my car and Greta Anderson and her husband Erik, a Swedish couple who recently had been driving around Australia, in a huge RV. We went through Montreal in Quebec and into New Brunswick just in time to see the Spring floods that inundated huge areas around Fredricton. There was no official detour but we managed to follow the map round to the North to Moncton and Amherst, barely over the border in Nova Scotia after fourteen hours behind the steering wheel. A few miles out of Amherst we all piled into the RV and though I can't speak for the rest of them, I know I slept like a log until nine the next morning.

The first thing I noticed when we were on the road for Cape Breton was the rich red soil brilliantly lit up by the morning sun, like an artist's impression of some Martian landscape. Emil did the navigation, Liz talked all the time and I shut up and concentrated on the driving. A fair distribution of responsibilities!

We took a trip up the east side of Cape Breton on the Cabot Trail. Up towards Wreck Cove it was very much like the east side of the Isle of Arran. Cormorants, and ice slush rolling like a giant water bed.. We knocked *up* (*see the British not the American slang dictionary*) a family in Ingonish who put us up for the night and the next morning drove round to Cheticamp on the other side of the cape where big ice floes half the size of a football field and rising out of the turgid water by nearly three feet. We couldn't wait to get our boats in the water, though having got there we were overawed by these huge blocks of ice moving implacably, grinding up against each other, crushing smaller ones. Though they were relatively slow moving and we could avoid them fairly easily, I didn't like to think what would happen if we were to get caught between them. Then I noticed that the gaps between the floes were closing up.. We hadn't been able to wait to get in the boats, but now after barely two hours we were in one helluva hurry to get them out of the water!

We spent a couple of days walking the trails up in the hills behind Cheticamp but found them little used and poorly maintained. A lot of nonproductive scrambling among scrub and boulders but with a good view of the ice floes with, by this time, hardly more than a crack between any of them. If we had left our retreat much later, the boats would have been matchwood by now and us with them more like it. So we decided to head back along the highway again. Instead of taking the same route back we thought it would be nice to drive through New Hampshire and keep our minds open. It was when we were approaching a town called Gorham we saw a sign that said 'Mount Washington and Pinkham Notch. 12 miles.' So we took the left turn, just to have a look! I didn't know what I was letting myself in for

In my introduction I mentioned how I came to stumble across the White Mountains 12 miles from Gorham. The Carriage Road is for cars but at that time in April it was only open to hikers. So we all walked up as far as the Nelson Crag trail just past the 5 Mile Post but it was getting on for 1600 hrs and time and stomach were pressing, so we headed back to the cars. That was a round trip of ten miles and 6,000 vertical feet after which we all discovered some new muscles!

Greta and Erik left us at this juncture and went south to Arizona. They were to have come back to Toronto to join with Five Winds for the skiing, but in actual fact we never saw them again. Emil said they had probably taken a wrong turning and ended up in Tierra del Fuego. That trip was an unusual experience. The Swedish couple vanished without a trace and for all we knew they might have come to a sticky end. Emil died a few years later in a boating accident. Liz passed away after a heart attack in Hamburg, Germany, where she was looking after my ninety-four year old aunt – who at the time of writing, is only a couple of years off her Centennial, hale and hearty and in her right mind. I was beginning to wonder if my turn was just around the corner, so I am keeping my fingers crossed!

After we had said goodbye to the Swedes, the three of us found the Appalachian Base Camp at Pinkham Notch, a few miles up the road. We also found Tuckerman's Ravine and walked up it as far as Hermit Lake, half way to the Headwall below Mount Washington. We were as stiff as three boards after our exercise of the previous day and we gave up at this point and staggered down to Pinkham Notch and back to Toronto the next day. I don't think Emil ever went back there,.

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I think it was Fall of that year when I made a ten day trip to the White Mountains, staying at the base camp at Pinkham Notch. For breakfast and dinner plus a sandwich lunch – augmented by leftovers from breakfast(!) – and housed in rooms with either two or four bunk beds, plus showers and library, the bill came to about US\$20 per day per person. And the food was varied, wholesome and all you could eat. On that first trip there were Brenda and Goetz Koechlin, Elisabeth Jaarsma, Barbara Reid, who eventually married Haigh Carthew, Margaret Gray and Willard Kinzie who was then Mayor of Barrie. The latter three were strong hikers and even better conversationalists. In fact I don't think they ever stopped talking, their voices following us all day and every day on the trail and I wondered how they found the breath and stamina to keep at it for nine hours each day! At all events Willard had the energy to stand on his head in the middle of a cloud at 5700 feet on the top of Mount Jefferson. But he must have been weakening for he had to stop talking to do it! ***According to a recent interview with Willard Kinzie, broadcast on CBC Radio, he has slowed down little, despite two artificial knee joints, and he celebrated his 79th birthday while climbing Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.***

The first time that Willard ever came down to the White Mountain we started

from Crawford Notch on Interstate Highway 302 about a mile to the North of a 3000 foot hunk of rock in New Hampshire State Park named appropriately, Mount Willard.. The Crawford Path, which was to be our northbound route, took us through some *three thousand feet of ascent, miles*

I THINK YOU MAY HAVE ANOTHER MEANING HERE, A.M.

past the Mizpah hut to Mount Clinton. At this point we stopped for a break and refreshment, and Goetz Koechlin had some back trouble that wasn't getting any better. The weather was ideal, the mountain scenery stretching away to the North beckoned to us and no one really wanted to turn back. I looked at the faces around me and I knew exactly what everybody wanted. I said to Goetz and his companion Brenda, "How would it be if you returned to Crawford Notch (where the two cars were parked) and drove them back to the Base Camp, while the rest of us walked back along the ridge and down Tuckermans?" Well, that was fine with everybody including Willard, the unknown quantity, who was looking like a child waiting for his Xmas present!

So we took the ridge route past Eisenhower and Franklin and Monroe to the Lakes of the Clouds hut a few hundred feet below the west side of the ridge. At the time I was carrying a big squarish back pack which topped my head by about a foot – an ideal sail for a square rigger – but there was no wind to speak of so I wasn't anticipating doing any sailing. However, as we came round the northeast bulk of Mt. Monroe a wayward eddy of wind rising from the Monroe Brook decided otherwise and lifted me several feet in the air with the unfriendly intention of dumping me on top of the hut below. Fortunately Willard saw my dilemma and managed to grab the end of a cord that was hanging from my pack. It pulled out to about ten feet and then snagged. Afterwards Willard claimed he had been flying me like a kite before I landed on my rear end!

As I picked myself up I looked down over the krumholtz that covered the steep terrain down to the 'Lakes' as the Lakes of the Clouds' hut was known, I noticed several large wooden crosses sticking up at differing angles. It didn't seem likely that they were marking graves – anyway, digging a hole big enough to take a coffin would have needed dynamite to excavate it in what was little better than solid rock – but we were told later that the crosses marked the places where people had died, presumably of hypothermia, only five or ten minutes from food, warmth and shelter.

If you are up there in low visibility, tired and wet with cold seeping into your bones, *even in Midsummer*, you are a good candidate for hypothermia which causes cooling of the core of the body and disables mental processes. An easy death, they say, but if caught in time, the remedy, in fact the only remedy, is to warm the body as quickly as possible. And in that sort of environment where there is not much available in the way of heat sources the recommended action is to get into a polar sleeping bag, victim and *resuscitator* both naked – until one or the other dies, some cynic once said!²⁰

²⁰ Standard procedure when hypothermia is suspected is to ask the person his name or something similar and if his response is hesitant, to take action without delay

It was a dream of a day up there from where we could see all those peaks, named after bygone US presidents, Adams, Jefferson, Clay, Washington, Monroe, Eisenhower, Clinton, Franklin and others too numerous to enumerate, stretching into the blue haziness of distant horizons. But it was time to go down, down to the abode of mortal man and his works. But tarry awhile! We still have the col between Washington and Bootspur, gold in the afternoon sun and then the gloom of the Headwall dropping into Tuckermans Ravine to enjoy. And finally that headlong rush, jumping from rock to rock, two kilometers and 1500 vertical feet down to the Base Camp where we had the high light of the day – taking off our boots!

Mount Washington, 6,300 feet dominates the Presidential Range, of which most of the peaks and connecting trails are above the tree line which is about the four thousand foot level, give or take a bit, depending on exposure. The area enclosing this range is in the order of 120 square miles. It is accessed mainly by four trails from perimeter roads averaging 1800 feet. So to get above the tree line, to God's country, you have to walk a distance of not more than two miles and climb 1500 feet. What I call 3000 foot/*miles is* an easy three hours for a reasonably fit individual. The four main access points are Randolph at the North on route 2, which leads you to Mount Adams and the Madison Hut (known as the Mad Huts) – through the Randolph trail and King Ravine. On the West you have to drive round to Jefferson Notch and take the Caps Ridge Trail. Only 1000 feet vertical from that point. Not a long trail and only 2000 foot/*miles*, but *it's* up all the way, and then some! Crawford Notch to the South is a giggle, with the Mizpah hut after a two hour ramble. And then there's Tuckermans which takes you on a straight – well, almost – line right to the top. Do the return trip in a day, but not the first day or you'll be tuckered out for sure by the time you get back to Pinkham Notch.

There are four huts in that range, Mizpah, Lakes of the Clouds, Madison, and Carter Notch and all are close to the 4,000 foot level but the distance between them is about four hours, steady going. So you see, if you are doing a hut-to-hut trip where the trail between the huts is relatively level, you would be hard-put to earn your evening meal.

When we first came to the White Mountains we stuck to the Presidentials and overnighted at various huts. But we soon found that we were kicking our heels at the end of day, having arrived at the adjacent hut soon after lunch. So the next time we visited the White Mountains we stayed at the base camp, in comfort and with dry blankets and always back by five for hot showers and a drink before dinner at six. That gave us, each day, nine hours on the trail or three hours up, four on the level, sort of, and two back to base, a good 12,000 foot/*miles*. And that was fair payment for our overnight comforts.

The best route after a week on the trails was the round trip covering five peaks, though not everybody participated. Start at Old Jackson Road, walk up the Carriage Road for about four hundred yards and then up the Madison Gulf to Mount Madison and Adams, and down to the Emergency shelter on Edmands Col for lunch. Once while we were eating our lunch there, Willard

Kinzie turned up. He liked that area so much that he was running a week long commercial hut-to-hut trip with about a dozen hikers. He asked us about our route but made no comment when we told him though he did look a bit envious. After all he must have found his hut-to-hut a bit pedestrian. Later he became quite well known for his trips in the Rockies and other parts of the world..

From there our route took us along the Westside Trail, over Bigelow's Lawn and down Tuckermans to Pinkham. It was a good stretch though the hut boys used to carry something like a hundred pounds of supplies up for the huts and still have the energy to make midnight raids on neighbouring huts! The story goes, and I didn't doubt it, that, some years *ago*, one of the 'boys' for a bet carried a 250lb urinal from the top of Washington down to the Lakes hut! Some 'boy'!

*

One day I had a big party, at least a dozen and I think more than half of them were women. A couple of miles down the road from Pinkham Notch and about eight hundred feet up the hill is a rock face called 'The Imp' because its profile from the West looks just like a *leprechaun's* Irish face. The climb up is quite steep and on the day in question the temperature was climbing faster than we were. It wasn't long before everybody was soaked to the skin with perspiration and we decided take a cooling break. Suddenly I noticed all the women had their heads together, presumably planning something more than a rest and then they all disappeared up the trail with an injunction to the males to follow not too closely. So we hung around for five minutes or so and then walked on up the trail. It was a quarter of an hour before we heard their voices at the top of the 'Imp Face' at close to 3,200 feet. They were all waiting for us there with a funny sort of expression on their faces. I was first into the clearing and out of the corner of my eye, though I didn't look too closely, I had the impression of a sort of magnolia tree with white blossoms on it. I forget who all the women were, certainly there was Brenda, and Jean Tromblay and Liz Jarsma. I remember now, there were six of them because there were six white blossoms on the tree – only they weren't blossoms. And it wasn't a magnolia, it was a 'brassiere tree'! And for quite a while it seemed that more than one of the male group had their eyes elsewhere than on the trail; in fact one of them walked slap into big tree and another one almost off the edge of a cliff. Much more of that, I thought and I would have to get the women to observe regulation dress rules – and make myself most unpopular with the male contingent!

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The Imp trail continues up from there for couple of hundred feet where it joins the North Carter before dropping down 1,400 feet to the road close to where we left the cars. Some of the party took this route while the remainder chose the longer switchback route to Zeta Pass at 4,000 feet and thence down Nineteen Mile trail to the road. That trail is not nineteen miles, or anything like it – in fact it is only about three miles – but when coming up it feels like

nineteen!

The arrangement was that transportation would be waiting for us when we got to the road but there was no sign of it and we resigned ourselves to the uninteresting four mile walk back to Pinkham Notch where we listened to the five different reasons for not being met!

A couple of miles beyond the Nineteen Mile is the summit of Wildcat Mountain from which the 'Lookout' affords a view of the Base Camp below and the eastern slopes of Mount Washington and Bootspur and beyond into the blue distances. The west side of Wild Cat is a challenging downhill ski slope. Very steep indeed and it seems to be the most sought after hill on the east side of the States. The Appalachian Trail starts somewhere down in the Ozarks and runs through the middle of the White Mountains and over Wild Cat to the North of New Hampshire, a distance of some 1,500 miles. I used to run into hikers that were doing the end to end trip and if they didn't look dressed for formal dinner there was no doubt that they were in good shape and as fit as fiddles.

During the few years that I came down to the White Mountains there were very few trails that I had not tramped at least once. Tuckermans of course was a popular route, the quickest to the ridge, and if I had a dollar for each time I tramped it I would have had a small fortune to carry around. The greatest pleasure Tuckermans ever afforded me was the sheer joy of taking off my boots at the end of day, after running like a ballet dancer down its rock strewn surface. And the unvarying routine at the bottom, after taking off the boots, was the hot shower and double scotch, followed by a huge all-you-could-eat dinner and the rattle of the bell to get you out of the sack at six o'clock the next morning. What happened in between nobody ever knew!

*

The 22nd July 1978 was my 60th Birthday and I had quite a large group of Five Winders. We must have numbered a round dozen for we occupied a whole table for dinner – a table seats a maximum of twelve. This particular evening I *sat* at the end of the table munching away still while everybody else had emptied their plates. Sitting next to me was Jean Tromblay who seemed to me to be in somewhat of a hurry, in fact I thought she was a bit out of countenance with me for she kept jogging me with her elbow which was no less sharp than other womens'.

"Come on, Mike," she urged, "We'll be here all night if you don't finish your plate soon." I know I'm not the fastest eater, but I couldn't see what all the hurry was. Finally Jean lost her patience and grabbed my still unfinished meal. I was about to remonstrate with her when I noticed her frantically gesturing to someone at the back of the room. When I looked round, one of the cooks was standing there holding a huge birthday cake and to judge from the candles which had almost completely burnt down, he must have been waiting for at least ten minutes!

I will always remember that trip, not because it was my birthday, but because of a tragi-comedy in one of the larger bunk rooms. Haigh Carthew shared the room with Frank Tromblay and another whose name I can't remember. The fourth occupant was Reino Trass, a likeable fellow and good company but he had one characteristic which did not enhance his popularity, at least with the other occupants of the room.. He snored all night and there was nothing anybody could do to stop it. Haigh said that a chain saw would have been poor competition for Reino's snoring. Even on the other side of the bunk house and further down the corridor it could be heard, and felt – the solid wooden construction acting as a sounding board..

After three sleepless nights, Haigh came to me at breakfast time with a happy smile of his face. "Reino has a bad attack of piles," he said, "And he is returning to Toronto this morning!" Poor old Reino, I thought to myself, but there was definitely a silver lining to that particular cloud!

Earlier on, I mentioned the Carriage Road by which automobiles and service vehicles could drive to the summit of Mount Washington where there is a weather station operating twelve months in the year. There are also a few shops and other facilities for the visitors but only between May and, I think, some time in October. It is said that the highest winds ever measured on Earth were measured here at 230 kilometers per hour. In mid Winter the weather station is serviced by heavy duty snow machines. Once we reached the summit on skis and that was on the carriage road all the way. The surface was iced and covered with banks of hard packed snow and, though it was a hard grind to the top, we all used blue klisterwax which eased our passage, particularly on the eight mile run down to the Glen House at the bottom. Just above the old shelter about half way down there is a sharp U-turn at the 4000 ft mark and several of us took a tumble there but fortunately managed not to clear the parapet beyond which one would have needed wings.

It was an exhilarating run, that eight miles and I think the ones who enjoyed it most were Roger Goodwin and Mike Dandy who never seemed to be happy with any slope less than ninety degrees! However, when getting toward the lower end of the road, where packed snow was being replaced by the underlying asphalt on which skis do not slide very well, studied care and attention became the order of the day!

I cannot say that the back country skiing around the White Mountains, as opposed to downhill which Wildcat Mountain provides, has much to recommend. It is either suicidal or pussycat with not much variety in between. The Sherman trail which parallels the Tuckerman is the only serious run and not in much use except for racing. Very steep, more or less straight down and not more than about thirty feet wide with trees on either side it is better left to skiers like Roger Goodwin and Mike Dandy. And they didn't come down unscathed either.

On the other side of Wildcat, and you had to go up in the gondola to reach it, was a good intermediate trail that descended 3,300 feet and ten kilometers to

Dana Place. The local map describes it as being for experts only in top physical condition though we didn't find it all that trying. The biggest hazard on that trail was, in my opinion, the many deadfalls that had to be negotiated in deep snow on steep and exposed slopes.. Some of us including Mike and Sandy of course, went back for more punishment another day, but I rather felt that had it not been for the very welcome hospitality at the Dana Place Inn at the bottom of the trail, not to mention the delightful Michelob beer after a hard day up in the hills, few would have tried it a second time. Speaking for myself, anyway!

During the few years that I went regularly down to the White Mountains I must have walked close to a thousand miles and skied about half that much. All in all fifty or so of my friends from Five Winds came down with me at different times and other than chafed feet and a few grazed knees we had no casualties. Well, bar one but I'll come to that presently. Mind you, I did have a narrow escape from what might have been the end of me. We were scrambling down over the carapace of ice that mantled the headwall It was early Spring and the rains had washed the ice clean as a whistle so I was being very careful, only, as it turned out, not careful enough.. Suddenly the ice broke through beneath me and I went in feet first making a neat round hole

I guess somebody must have told me to throw my arms out on either side for there I was, head and shoulders sticking out and my feet dangling over a torrent of water disappearing into a black hole. Fortunately no damage was done and by the time the others caught up with me I had managed to extricate myself. But it was a valuable lesson to all and sundry.

I remembered reading about a climber who had fallen into a crevice on a glacier in Switzerland. One moment he had been standing still waiting for his companions, and the next he had vanished without a sound. There was a neat hole where he had fallen and down in the blue depths there was another hole in the ice no bigger than the size of his head but not a sign of him. He must have been crushed to death as he passed through. A grisly way to die, I thought, and there but for the grace of God - - -!

I may not have fallen through any more holes but the following year, sometime in January 1977, I had quite a serious accident though laughable in some ways There was a wind blowing up the Peabody Valley that it was hardly possible to progress against it. I remember watching Gord MacGregor, one of our party, trying to make headway against it and was being blown backwards on his skis, but he didn't realize it until I caught his attention. It seemed a good time to have a short day and we all went back to the Base Camp and ate our sandwiches.

Afterwards I tried to generate some interest in the Avalanche Brook trail that runs out of Pinkham rising to about 3000 feet and then down to some 1500 feet below. About eight kilometers in all and none of our group had ever set foot on it. But there were no takers, not even Sandy or Mike. So without telling anybody, I put on my skis and back pack and took off, intending to do a

little exploring, just to have a look at that trail. If I had read what the Jackson Ski Touring had written about the trail – well, I don't suppose it would have made any difference; after all I was only going a few hundred yards.

The climb up the trail was quite steep but not unduly strenuous and as I went along I had a pleasant sense of well being and was really enjoying myself. I could hear the wind roaring around in the tree tops like a wild animal but I was well insulated from it and warm and comfortable. However time was passing rapidly and I decided when I arrived at the point where the trail dipped down toward Dana Place to turn back. But I had a thermos with hot sweet tea and the remains of my lunch so I made myself comfortable and enjoyed my repast. I remember thinking at the time that I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else, and I listened to the wind without any feeling of disquiet.

And after that I didn't remember very much more for quite a time. I seemed to be in a bit of a daze, with consciousness coming to the surface now and again, when I wondered what had happened to all my companions. Most of the time, as I realized later, I was out on my feet and yet still coming down the hill under control, only in the wrong direction. Somehow or other I came to my senses and found I was back on level ground. I hadn't the remotest idea where I was but fortunately spotted a couple of skiers coming towards me and asked them if I was near Dana Place. They gave me a funny sort of look and said, "It is along the trail, about a mile." But they kept on giving me this funny look, like I was something the cat brought home, then "Are you alright?" one of them asked. Well, of course I was alright, I just couldn't make out how I had got down so quickly. Any way, they buzzed off and I eventually arrived at Dana Place, took off my skis and knocked on the door. I could see myself sitting in front of a roaring fire with a glass of Michelob beer in my hand.

The door opened and a young girl appeared, took one look at me, screamed and rushed back into the inn..Well, I was pondering my next move when the proprietress appeared, took one look at me. "Oh, My God!" she cried and led me to a couch and made me lie down. It was that moment that I saw myself in a big mirror. I was covered in blood from head to foot and never knew it, I did know that I had been bleeding from the head but was not too concerned because it seemed to have stopped. To cut a long story short, an ambulance turned up and bore me off to a hospital where they stitched me up. Thirty six stitches the doctor counted as he worked from the front of my head to the back cracking jokes all the time about the Redskin who didn't do a very good job of scalping me. In fact, as he confided in me, he could have done a better job himself! While all this was going on most of my group had turned up and were watching the show: I heard Liz Jaarsma's voice. You know how it is with women; when something of the sort happens they always claim to have foreseen the worst.

"When I couldn't find Mike, I went down and knocked on his door," she was explaining, "But he wasn't there and I knew immediately that he must have had an accident." The next day we were due to head back to Toronto, but first thing in the morning Roger went up the hill and found a fallen tree and lots of

blood under it just where I must have stopped for some tea and a crust. And of course the ski tracks went straight on down the hill towards Dana Place

It seemed that the tree fell down just as I was standing up and a branch hit me a glancing blow on the head, knocking off my wolf skin fur hat, I think I owe my life to that hat for it must have cushioned the blow considerably, and not only that but I apparently picked up the hat which was a tight fit and crammed it back on my head, thus eventually stopping the bleeding. I always remember the questing fingers of the lady at Dana Place touching the hat but not daring to remove it. For which I was most grateful

They kept me in the hospital over night with some sort of drip, and didn't want to let me out until the next day. But everybody, including me was gung ho for Toronto, so they made me sign myself out before giving me my clothes all caked with blood. My friends made me comfortable in the back of my car and Gordon MacGregor drove me home.

I have to say that although there was a lot of fuss and pother and blood all over the place, at no time did I feel sick or even suffer any discomfort. The thing that did faze me quite a bit was that I had managed to ski five kilometers and at least a thousand feet vertical down a far from easy hill in the middle of a considerable windstorm without further hurt and didn't remember a thing about it! You might almost say that I quite enjoyed the whole experience. One thing I do remember about that trip was the sound of the wind tearing around in the top of the trees like a hurricane but a benevolent one and somehow it wasn't looking for me. But whenever I think about that experience it is the wind that comes immediately to mind.

When I got back to Toronto I took great care to ensure that the dressing that covered the top half of my head was well concealed under my touque. Whenever I come home with some blood showing, be it only a scratch, Bozena immediately attributes it to some suicidal activity on my part, so I thought it best to keep it under my hat, so to speak! But subterfuge got me nowhere. She took one look at me as I came through the front door and that was enough

"Dio Mio" she exclaimed, "Cosa ti e successo questa volta?" Well, I managed to live it down eventually, but she just added it to the long list – Bozena's long list – of various bent and broken parts of my frame that I had inflicted on her ever since we first met in Jugoslavia in 1946.

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Any account of my activities in Canada would not be complete without some reference to tennis. For twenty five years or so up to the time we returned to England I played tennis, successively at three clubs, Davisville, North Toronto, and St Clements on a street of the same name just north of Eglinton. I might eventually have made a good 'A' player for I generally put in sometimes as much as twenty hours a week through Summer and Fall with the occasional Winter events at various indoor clubs. That does not say very much for my ability in that sport for any reasonably active person who plays as much as that

should soon progress to the top level in most clubs. That I rarely got much beyond the 'B' level was not for lack of effort but more to do with the fact that I spent much more time kayaking than playing tennis. Unfortunately, kayaking, like swimming results in relaxed muscles which are not able to cope with the quick response and coordination demanded in tennis. I found that, at my age, which was over fifty, when I started playing tennis after a weekend of paddling it was as if I hadn't hit a ball in months. Not a complete rabbit though, and I was able to get a lot enjoyment out of the game.

At the Davisville club most of the members were half my age and their interests and activities had not much in common with my own, The conversation around the tag board was often a bit scatological, to say the least, and particularly among the young women. I remember the time I decided to look for another club after listening to half a dozen girls comparing their sexual experiences and criticizing the performance of their partners. North Toronto was a different proposition altogether. One third was composed of what I called the Yugoslav Faction. Fiercely competitive, they mostly played among themselves and argued each point almost to the point of fisticuffs. It was not uncommon to see a doubles match with all four combatants on the same side of the net waving their arms in the air

Most of the time I played at St Clements which had clay courts and with people that I could relate to. I was of course much older than any of them, and no doubt some regarded me as an old fogey. But I had the advantage of coming from Five Winds where not only was I the Founder but also the originator of the trails and a system that was not only highly successful but one that, to the best of my knowledge, has never been duplicated. I think all the Five Winds members looked on me as a father figure who, in the early days at least, could ski faster than most and knew the country better than anybody. They were all, of course, half my age but I was comfortable with them as I was with St Clements, only for different reasons.

Strange to relate, Charles Portanier, who was with my Intelligence group in Italy, turned up one evening as a member of St Clements. Almost forty years ago and some five thousand miles away and he had to drop into my own backyard! He had aged in the interim as everybody around me did, and got himself a pretty young wife – I will leave someone else to put in the commas where they seem to fit – but unfortunately he died a few years later.

One other unexpected occurrence, though of a different nature, marked my time with St Clements. There was an katabatic storm coming up with a weird straight line dividing the sky from horizon to horizon. The leading half of the sky was brilliant blue whereas the trailing half was as black as Toby's asshole. At the time I was playing a doubles match to the accompaniment of distant thunder muttering threateningly in the background at the time. Obviously something unusual was building up, but we played on. You never leave the court until you need an umbrella. I was about to serve when there was a blinding flash of lightening. If there was thunder I was not aware of it. What I was aware of was that the other three on the court had stopped playing and

were staring at me with as if I were a ghost! Apparently I was illumined and enveloped by a blue cocoon of light, like one of those scientific fiction images that you see on TV. All I felt was a slight tingling in the feet which only lasted a few seconds. Afterwards I said that my companions were thunderstruck while I was only struck by lightening! I had to reassure them all that I was still alive before I could persuade them to continue with the game. And, dammit if I didn't serve three aces in a row .

CHAPTER IX

THE KARAKORAMS

At the time of writing, my last major excursion – I avoid the word expedition, very popular these days, which conjures up in my mind images of Sir Edmond Hillary on Everest or Shackleton in the Antarctic (*he never made it to the South Pole*) with the consequent logistics and vast amount of supplies and expenses – was to the Karakoram Mountains and Pamirs where China and Pakistan and Afghanistan and Russia join hands, though not always in peace and sometimes quite close to hostilities. Ever since my time in India, as the sub-continent was then known, I had dreamed of returning to that most remote part of the world, hoping to find it a haven of peace compared to its troubles of the last century. 'Peace,' as one of the great philosophers once said, or was reputed to say, 'Is simply a lull between hostilities to enable combatants to catch their breaths.' And so I concluded, when standing at that convergence of nations and cultures and found myself looking down the rifle barrels of a frontier patrol.

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The sort of trip that I had in mind involved a minimum of two participants, not necessarily all men but preferably so. Considerations such as route, object, degree of physical difficulty, expense, logistics, baggage, personal preferences,

and many more had to be resolved before putting a foot forward. Both participants should be fit and have adequate experience of handling survival situations. I knew a number of men with whom I would be happy to share in what I considered to be *my* trip which was to fly into Gilgit in the Northern Districts of Pakistan; travel up the Karakoram Highway over the Kunjerab Pass and into the Chinese province of Sing Chiang which latter part of the route is through the Pamirs bordering on the Taklamakhan Desert, and thence to the province capital of Kashgar, now known as Su Fu. I imagine that many of the people who may find something of interest in this narrative will not be without experience of travel in remote corners of the world and if I say that the area I proposed to visit is rich in military and political history overlaid by personal endeavour and human courage together with treachery, espionage, cruelty and murder on a scale through the centuries that surpasses imagination, they would not, I hope, readily suppose that I am prone to exaggeration. Nevertheless, I feel it would not be inappropriate to provide some further detail of the geography and our activities in that corner of the world.

They called it the 'Great Game and its players came from almost any country you can think of from Russia to the Atlantic and Britain to the Mediterranean. It was a giant game of chess in which the prize, on the one hand, was access to the plains of India and the Indian Ocean itself and, on the other, the establishment of a buffer zone to keep foreign aspirations at arms length from what was called once the British Empire. The principal players in this grand strategy were Britain, and France and Germany and Russia, not to mention many others who sought to glean a crumb from the table. The tools of their trade were exploration, espionage and political influence.

Chronologically centered around the nineteenth century, The Game, in concept and strategy, had much in common with the trench warfare of 1914 to 1918. Instead of guns, the weapons were espionage and diplomacy. And instead of the blood soaked fields of Flanders read Afghanistan to Tibet and all the intervening lands. My own particular area of interest within that tangled knot of intrigue was and still is, for that matter, the part delineated by the Hindu Kush, Eastern Turkestan, the Tarim Basin and Western Tibet. That covers a multitude of sins, but let me add very quickly that my own personal experience of the lands is minimal as may be seen by anyone reading these lines.

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The mountain barrier between the Indian Subcontinent and I what I think of as Tartary, comprises The Hindu Kush, The Karakoram and the Pamir. The Kun Lun and Himalayan ranges are just as formidable a barrier. But if you are coming out of the West, like Alexander of Macedon dd in the 4th.Century, BC, with an army Hell- bent for India, the one thing you don't want to face with is a traipse around the Takla Makan desert. The name means 'You go in, you don't come out'.

A long time ago, I don't know how many thousands of years, the Tarim Basin was a green and pleasant land. It was watered by the rivers of silt that poured

out of the Karakoram mountains and it supported many civilisations. Today those civilizations are buried beneath the ever shifting sands and the same water that brought life to the people who lived there, still pour into the basin, the Tarim Basin that is now full of sand to unplumbed depths. Sand, into which that water disappears with barely a trace. If you consider the desert to be ovoid in shape, its minor axis, North/South would be some 350 miles with a perimeter of about three thousand miles. In the latter part of the nineteenth century a Scandinavian explorer, Sven Hedin and thirteen years later, Aurel Stein, a Hungarian, explored the desert extensively and found many traces of that civilization. They were lucky not to die of thirst. Oases were few and far between, and had to be excavated many feet, often only to find them completely dry. The line of oases, hardly visible to the human eye, marked where the Yarkand River flowed into and under the surface of the desert - according to my map: scale 1: 1,000,000 entitled Ho Tien, Sheet NJ 44, undated, and published by the U.S Topographic Command – right across to the north side. The map makes it look rather like a jolly boating trip, but if you are going that way don't bother taking a boat. A hundred foot of piping and a suction pump would be more to the point.

All this excitement about the Great Game business, with the Russkis trying to nip in the back door while Mum was entertaining the postman, never made much sense to me. There are really only three feasible, I won't say practical routes to get through that No-mans-Land into India. One, through Afghanistan and out through the Khyber Pass. Two, by way of the Ferghana Valley and the classic route over the Mintaka Pass to Hunza,. Three, a bit of a traipse along the Takla Makan and over the three 18,000 ft.passes plus a couple of lesser, though by no means less daunting, passes down to Leh. There are other ways in, such as the Baroghil route through the Wakhan Panhandle and over the Darkot Pass to Yasin. And there is the Kunjerab Pass from the Little Pamir which could be reached from Badakhshan, but getting through the Gujerab and Hunza Gorges on the south side would not be my idea of fun. Of course there is the KKH (*Karakoram Highway*) now which cheers up an invading army no end – as long as some bright spark up in the hills didn't set off a rock fall and bury the lot of them!

Assuming the passes to be defended even minimally, anyone who tried to take an invading army into the plains of India through Afganistan, in my opinion would need to have his head examined. That's why, I imagine, while there was a helluva lot of sabre-rattling through the Nineteenth century, but nobody ever put their money where their mouth was!

The route through the Khyber broke a few hearts, and bodies, in the last century. During the retreat from Kabul in 1843, the British and Indian armies lost 60,000 including followers, or should I say 59,999 plus the doctor who made it to Jalalabad, all picked off by a bunch of Pathans armed with not much more than home made rifles, Jezails as they were known.

The Karakoram Highway was built in the eighties and as far as Tashkurgan it is about 800 kilometers; at a cost, so it is said, of one human life, mostly

Chinese, for each kilometer. It connects to the Peshawar/Rawalpindi road at the Attock Bridge, runs from that point along the Indus River to a tad short of Gilgit and thence through the Hindu Kush on the West and the Karakoram on the East over the Kunjerab Pass at 16000 feet down to Tashkurgan in Xinkiang. When I was there in 1989 you took your life in your hands when you got past Tashkurgan, not that it was all that bad. In fact for ponies and camels it was the regular Silk Route to the South. It just wasn't made for cars and trucks and certainly not for suicidal Kirgiz and Uighur drivers. Now, I believe, one can drive in comfort all the way to Kashgar. That's if you don't get steamrollered by one of those ugly gray Chinese trucks that have only two speeds and keep to the middle of the road at all times. Bearing in mind that there are only two lanes, one in each direction.

In the last century – as I write now, in four days time it is going to be year 2000, in which case I would say - in the nineteenth century, caravans would take several weeks for the journey from Kashgar to, say Srinagar and one can easily imagine the chaos that an invading army would face along the way! And not to forget that getting down to Gilgit would only be half the battle. After Gilgit there would have been another 140 miles – across the Indus by the rope bridge, round the back of Nanga Parbat and over the Burzil Pass, 12,000 feet, and then another 7,000 feet down to Srinagar. By which time they, those that were left, would be needing a bit of R & R!

Another route that an invading army might have considered, though had it been in its right mind it would not have wasted too much time pondering its chances, would be over the high passes through the Karakoram to Leh, a distance of not much less than 400 miles. The trail, which is well marked by the bones of men and pack animals that didn't last the course, traverses the three passes, Karakoram, Saser and Khardung each 18,000 feet, plus a couple not much lower and river crossings that would put the Colorado River to shame. Not to be recommended!

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For fifty years after coming back to civilian life, I had dreamed of, and planned, returning to the Karakorams of which I had seen enough to whet the appetite in 1942. My big problem had always been to find a companion – or two – to accompany me on the sort of trip I had in mind. It wasn't until 1978 that I got talking to a fellow of my own age over a pint in a pub in Toronto, who had worked for several years as a forester in the foothills of the Himalaya at Dhaka, Ed Balmforth was his name and we had a few more meetings and a few more pints over the next fortnight and decided to go for it in early September of the next year.

My plan was to fly out to Islamabad and take a Fokker Friendship plane to Gilgit, there to find transport up the Karakoram Highway at least as far as Kashgar in western Xinkiang. I had a number of side trips in mind, one being up the Shimshal Gorge in particular, to see something of the Pamirs and possibly the Takla Makan Desert. From there on it would be catch as catch can. Ed had to go back to Dhaka in the meantime but planned to meet me at

Rawalpindi. I was concerned that many logistics would have to be discussed and agreed on in the intervening time, but Ed promised to get in touch with me before the Monsoon, which would have been around June. A couple of weeks later he departed for India and I did not hear from him until August when he called me from India to say that he was not going to come. That what he really wanted to do was take the bus around the Silk Route – around the Takla Makan desert!

Well! When I got this news it was a blow to all my plans, in fact if I could have got my hands on Ed Balmforth at that moment I would have cheerfully throttled him. At first it seemed that my only option would be to abandon the whole project and that evening I went down to the Duke of Kent at Yonge and Eglinton where I had run into Ed in the first place. Nobby Clarke, who was almost a permanent fixture there and who had introduced me to Ed was in his usual place propping up the bar with an empty glass in his hand. “Good to see you, Nobby. Can I fill your glass?” And with a fresh couple of pints in front of us, Nobby asked the leading question. “How’s the trip coming along?”

“Oh,” says I, casual like, “I’ve got my flight booked, open ended return, the both visas for Pakistan and India cleared and even the Chinese have given up being obstructive about it although they really didn’t want me to enter from Pakistan. Mind you, I had to ask the British Embassy in Bei Xing to intercede on my behalf. But the visa was only for two weeks and no reentry permit. Otherwise pretty well everything is organized. Only one thing – Ed called me today to say he couldn’t make it, ever! I think his mother talked him out of it!”

We tossed this situation around for a while without resolving anything. Naturally, Nobby did not want to push me one way or the other, but we said a few things about Ed that must have set his ears burning, wherever he was. Then we had another pint each and by the time I headed back home I was thinking seriously about going it alone. Bozena had not said very much about Ed’s defection, but I knew that she had been apprehensive about the whole trip, wondering if she was ever going to see me again. So, though she joined me in condemning Ed for backing out at the last moment, she wasn’t shedding too many tears about it! I said nothing when I got back that evening, but overnight I weighed up the pros and cons and next morning I told Bozena that I had decided to go anyway, on my own. She did her best to dissuade me, visualizing all the possible disasters laying in wait for me, from Hunza tummy and dysentery, to falling off precipices or into crevasses, or simply getting lost in that wilderness of mountain and desert. However she was convinced that my mind was made up and didn’t push me too hard.

I had exactly one month to complete all the preparations. David Horsley had kindly introduced me to a Pakistani friend, Khalid, with whom I had been brushing up on my Urdu for the last few weeks. I was very grateful for the time he spent with me; though I spoke the language fluently forty five years ago when I was in the Indian Army, I had forgotten most of it. Khalid also gave me the name of his brother who was a pilot with Pakistan Airlines, in case of emergency and it turned to be an absolute boon, as will be seen.

One of the biggest problems I had to resolve was that I was limited to what I could carry on my back. If you lose sight of any piece of duffel for even a minute, you'd be lucky ever to find it again. I ended up with a fully loaded backpack and a rather handy silvery carry bag that Frank Tromblay had given me. In it I kept all my documents, money, camera equipment and film, toilet essentials, iodine tablets and a big roll of toilet paper. One thing I did not take was a tent and I never missed it. The pack weighed 72 pounds which was as much as I ever wanted to carry. On my way to Pakistan I broke my journey at London to visit my two aunts, Connie and Kath, both in their nineties, who lived in Weybridge, Surrey. Connie, who herself weighed less than my pack was impressed with its weight, but did not hesitate to start carrying it up the stairs! I am sure she would have made it to the top if I hadn't caught her half way up! I told her that she should come out to Pakistan with me where she could be my bearer and carry everything. Once I lifted her up and swung her around whereupon she lifted me and carried me several feet. And I weighed close to 85 kilograms at that time. And they talk about the weaker sex!

I seem to remember that the return fare from Toronto to Islamabad with a two day break at London came to about \$525 dollars Cdn. On top of that add \$25 for the return fare to Gilgit, which in the UK, for a similar flight would cost about £100. Well, everybody knows that air flight operators in the UK are like the dentist in the old joke who was badly hurt, falling off his wallet! If I had paid for that flight to Gilgit in London it would have cost ten times as much. I wonder how BA would justify that bit of chicanery? As if they would even bother.

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Arriving at Islamabad, incidentally the second part of the trip, from London, by Swissair, was rather like landing in the middle of a war. Tanks, artillery and very alert looking soldiers dotted the field wherever one looked, and entering the arrivals building, a small single story edifice, armed guards inspected you as you passed, sometimes at gun point. One elderly lady was confronted by an unpleasant looking guard. "I'm not frightened of that gun. So don't point it at me." She said. And then, as an afterthought, she added, though not quite so loud, I thought. "You big gorilla." The rest of the arrival was more or less painless except for two items. I proffered £5 for a few rupees to get me into Rawalpindi – didn't want to pay airport rates - and was given an amount for £1. When I picked the *babu* up on the discrepancy, he said, "Sorry!" and immediately handed me the correct sum. I wondered how much those fellows make, shortchanging gullible tourists. Outside the arrivals hall I needed a taxi, of which there were a super abundance but all parked neatly on the other side of the apron about thirty yards away. I shouted out in my best Urdu, "Kitna paisa Pindi ke liye?" The boss man held up four fingers and a nought. You bloody crook, I thought. The normal fare was 13 Rupees to Rawalpindi. Well, there was a bit of semaphoring back and forth, but in the end I had to fork out the full amount,

I tried to get into Flashman's Hotel but there were no vacancies. I bethought me of Sams – a plate of grilled ham and eggs would have gone down real nice right then, but there were other priorities. I found an hotel, quite nice and clean with room and bath, but I can't remember its name. Somewhere near the Intercontinental. Next I had to go to PIA Airlines and pick up my ticket to Gilgit, also to find American Express to change some money. The latter was a short walk from the hotel – along the main drag, heady with frangipani and open sewers on each side! The office was tucked away round the back and I did not feel too comfortable walking past groups of young Pakistanis lounging on street corners and eyeing me as if they were contemplating slitting my throat. I tried out my rusty Urdu as I walked past and said something like 'Nice weather we are having to day' but they just looked at me and never said a word. The people in the American Express told me that the youths were all Pathans who had come down through the passes to escape the Russian army in Afghanistan. Later I saw quite a few of them in Pindi and in Islamabad, mostly sitting around in small groups, probably checking the edge of their Khyber knives under their ²¹*poshteens*.

After that, I took a local taxi to the PIA and which cost me five rupees which is about forty cents Cdn. Then I walked into the office and got quite a shock. The place, about twenty by thirty feet with a counter at the back, was jam packed with a yelling and gesticulating crowd of Pakistanis, all trying without visible effect to get the attention of the clerk behind the counter I joined the crowd and shouted that I had to pick up my ticket to Gilgit. Of course he didn't pay me the slightest attention and it looked as if I was going to be there all day. Then I remembered the name my Urdu instructor in Toronto had given me. I forget what I said to the clerk but I gave him the name. He did not even look up, but after a minute he waved me in behind the counter, and in no time it was all arranged and the flight paid for, but no ticket! "Come tomorrow morning. *Barah baje²²." He said. But did not give me a receipt!

I came out wondering if I was ever going to get my ticket, but it all worked out OK. Outside who should be waiting but my taxi. The driver leaned out, "Taxi, Sahib?" he called. So he took me to the Pawalpindi Club and I went in and saw the secretary, who looked and sounded like an ex Subadar Major from the old Indian Army. "You are member?" he asked. "No, but I was in 1942, with the Sikh Regiment." Then I looked above his head and on the wall above was a plaque listing all the presidents of the club since its inception in – believe it or not – 1947 which was the date of the partition of India! He asked me a few more questions. Was I an officer? What was my rank? Where was I stationed and who was my Commanding Officer. I was getting annoyed with this cross examination and was about to tell him to jump in the lake. However when he heard the name of my C.O. he melted slightly and handed me a pass for two days. Which was all I needed. I decided to have lunch there and was disappointed to see the general condition of the premises and the service. Not a patch on the way I remembered it back in 1942.

²¹ The loose flowing outer robe worn by most tribesman. Looks a bit like a night shirt!

²² Twelve noon.

In the afternoon I went to see the Sitara Tour Agency which was quite close to my hotel. The agency had been recommended to me by Cumberland Travel in Yorkville, Toronto, who had made all my travel arrangements. It was mainly a courtesy visit but as it turned out I met a Zafar Iqbal there, who very kindly arranged an interesting tour of Islamabad for me. Not only that, but they picked up the ticket for my flight to Gilgit and delivered it to my hotel, for which I was most grateful. That evening I had a splendid dinner at the hotel consisting of curried lamb with choice of some twenty or so side dishes and had the good fortune to fall in with a kindred spirit, Simon Reeves who was out on a business trip from Birmingham. After dinner I took him down to the club where we played billiards on a table that not been recovered since it was installed in the year dot. Even the upholstered seats were threadbare However, not to look a gift horse in the mouth And who was waiting for us when we came out but my favourite taxi driver.!

The following day Zafar Iqbal took me on the trip around Islamabad – the City of Islam – and on the four lane carriage way leading the government buildings I was surprised to see the number of ponies and donkeys grazing on the narrow boulevard that separated the two pairs of lanes, with traffic passing with inches to spare. Before entering the government area, the traffic was all stopped and searched for contraband and explosives. Also all passengers had to get out of their vehicles and submit to a body-search and passport identification. All the guards were fully armed with what looked like Kalashnikov rifles and hand guns. Some of the guards, very businesslike, had Mills hand grenades – British Army issue – hooked to their belts.

The outer walls of the government administration buildings and that of the president Zia Ul Haq²³ were all of gleaming white stone monstrosities that looked as if they had been hand polished. Duly impressed with all this ‘kitsch’ we passed on to the business section that comprised airline offices, travel agencies, hotels, and I believe a ubiquitous MacDonaldis hamburger joint. Hardly any sign of life and not much traffic, Islamabad was a city to glorify the state. Beyond is the imposing Shah Faisal Mosque with its four 200 feet high Minarets. Looking at that imposing edifice, one could easily seem to be standing on the hill behind the well known Blue Mosque of Sultan Mahommed the Conqueror in what is now known as Istamboul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. However, as we approached the mosque, the illusion faded for there was none of the magnificence of the mosque in Istamboul though it was still a most impressive building.

We left our footwear along with a multitude of others and I was somewhat apprehensive about their security. I only brought two items of footwear on the trip. A pair of heavy boots for mountain walking and the type of heavy walking shoes that joggers use, and these were the ones I was wearing at the time. The approach to the mosque was by way of ten foot slabs of marble set on marble blocks at each end so that the view through the steps was unimpeded. The several flights of these steps gave a delightful sense of

²³ Zia al Haq, the then president of Pakistan was deposed in 1989 and assassinated a few months later.

airiness and space, which was however rather spoilt by what looked like human droppings at the ends of the steps. Inside the mosque it was one huge vault, almost one hundred yards square and at least thirty high. The floor being of chased marble and very pleasant to walk on with bare feet. But the walls of the building appeared to be the same unfinished stone as the minarets. It gave the impression of being built with an eye to economy and distant appearance.

On the way out we collected our shoes, to my relief, and returned to Rawalpindi. I had another huge dinner and was early to bed ready for a start at the crack of dawn. My plane was scheduled to leave at 06.30 hrs, and guess who drove me to the airport. My faithful taxi driver.

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It was a small plane, the Fokker Friendship, seating eighty passengers, two on each side of the aisle. I had heard some apocryphal stories about the approach to the landing strip at Gilgit, flying down a box canyon after doing a sharp left hand turn to get into it and was glad it was not a jumbo jet! On the way up the Indus Valley we passed under, several thousand feet below the overhanging ramparts of Nanga Parbat, close to 27,000 feet high, and I bethought me of Hermann Buhl, the noted solo climber who, after his party had been driven back in the face of unbelievable difficulties, climbed alone to the summit after being forced to bivouac a thousand feet below. I had a window seat and a very good view of the mountain, wondering if there was anybody on that wall looking across into the warm comfort of the plane!

Most of the way up from Pindi we had followed the line of the Indus Valley. The Karakoram Highway which was clearly visible from the plane and about which I remembered reading some horror stories written by a budding journalist hoping to impress his readers with some imaginary sensation. Admittedly the Pakistani drivers are no better nor worse than the Italians, of whom the writer has considerable experience, who drive through the mountains with sublime disregard for blind corners and oncoming traffic, thus contributing to the passengers state of unease. However, like being shot at and missed, one gets accustomed to the bullets and gets on with life. After all, if none of the first five bullets has found its mark, then obviously the ones that come after are not going to be any different. If I said that there are quite a few blind corners and steep ups and downs, not to mention the occasional rock or two falling from high, it would still not be any worse than traveling through the mountains in Europe. Arriving at Gilgit, the mountain walls on either side were pressing their acquaintance on our little aeroplane, but the sense of imminent catastrophe turned out to be more a figment of journalistic imagination. No doubt at all about it however, cross winds or any wind whatsoever would add considerable stimulus to the landing. Back at Islamabad scheduled flights to Gilgit were liable to be cancelled without notice or explanation due possibly to poor visibility which might be an aphorism for 'airplane crashed into mountain'. But it didn't crash into the mountain for me, not now nor or at any time, for which I was not ungrateful

Gilgit, pronounced Gilghit, airport is, or was then, not much more than a single landing strip and a small terminal building, in size considerably smaller than the Flying Club at West Malling in Kent, England which used to belong to my grandfather. He had three small planes, a De Souter high wing monoplane, a Puss, or was it a Gipsy, Moth and a De Havilland two seater of unknown vintage. As a teenage boy, I used to get free trips in all of them with my uncle who was a bit of a daredevil pilot, trying to scare the daylights out of me, and most of the time succeeding. I stood on the apron at Gilgit comparing in my mind the two operations and wondering what my grandfather would have thought of my situation, a stranger in a wild piece of country famous for its history of intrigue, murder and betrayal, standing at the confluence of many cultures and languages, with all I possessed on my back trying to figure out my next step!

The problems commensurate with being married to one's baggage were beginning to loom large in my mind. However, needs must when the Devil drives, I hoisted the dead weight of the pack my over my shoulder and stepped out toward the crowds of porters and taxi drivers teeming at the edge of the apron. Most of the taxis were Suzukis but right in the middle of them was a solid looking green Land Rover that seemed more appropriate to my needs. I caught the driver's eye, a friendly, competent looking Hunzakut, Ishaq, by name, who picked up my pack effortlessly and banished the competition with a wave of his hand. "You wish to go to hotel, Sahib?"

What I really wanted to do was to get the Hell out of Gilgit which was more of a tourist trap than I was ready for at that moment. However, in some preliminary correspondence the name of Asif Khan had been recommended to me as a good contact before venturing out cold into that land of extremes. I mentioned my concerns to Ishak and in no time at all I found myself in Asif Khan's office at the Chenar Inn. Basically I needed transportation to get me away from civilization, anywhere up the Karakoram highway towards the Singkiang border. I was in luck's way!

"If you want to go up North", he said, or something to that effect, "Why don't you take Ishaq? He is a good driver, reliable and his vehicle will get you anywhere where there is a track. I think he is free at the moment, so why don't you talk to him and make your own arrangements?" Which I did, and I couldn't have found a better man."

I called Gilgit a *Tourist Trap*, which in some ways it is, though not in the ostentatious, money grabbing way to which tourists in the western world have become accustomed. Straddling the Gilgit River it could qualify as a small town and through the centuries it has been the confluence and meeting place of adventurers and traders from all parts of Asia, linking the Indus Valley with that of the Hunza which drains the Northern Districts as far as the Chinese and Afghan borders, and the Gilgit flowing out of from Chitral., itself a hotbed of intrigue and internecine wars.* Later I had some opportunity to see more of the town on my way out. For the moment however, my feet were itching for the

road.that winds its way into the state of Hunza and an endless vista of high mountains. Hunza is a protectorate of the Agha Khan and comes under the aegis of the Agha Khan Rural Support Plan – the AKRSP - which acronym appears on every milestone along the Karakoram Highway – KKH. The Hunzakuts are Moslem Shiites though I never felt that they were very strong in that belief. Certainly Hunza Water which is a popular drink, the mention of which is generally accompanied by a nod and a wink and a conspiratorial grin. No doubt there was some water in it, and though I stand to be corrected, I think it is made from fermented apricots.

The word Apricot, which is the staple product in Hunza, gives me pause at this juncture. In the Burushaski language, which is native to the Hunzakuts, there is no word for apricot. There are many words for the condition or state of an apricot, such as:

<i>Unripe</i>	-----	<i>juro'li</i>
<i>Dried, whole</i>	-----	<i>gu'li</i>
<i>Dried, split</i>	-----	<i>bate'r</i>
<i>Fresh, split</i>	-----	<i>phaqi's</i>
<i>Top quality</i>	-----	<i>tupu'ri</i>
<i>Apricot tree</i>	-----	<i>dudu'r</i>
<i>Apricot vinegar</i>	-----	<i>su't</i>
<i>Apricot juice</i>	-----	<i>chamu's</i>

In the same way, in the land of the Esquimos, Northern Canada, there is no word for snow but there are very many words such as, dry, wet, crystalline, falling, on the ground, packed and powder snow and many others.

Burushaski is not a written language and its provenance, though obscure, is thought to have roots in the Altaic. Some words approximate those used in Urdu, presumably, by a process of osmosis, through the Persian. Though I have no claim to knowledge of linguistics, I have often felt that the vicinity of Hunza to Nuristan, both of which have languages of obscure origin, points to a degree of commonality which cannot be ignored. Though the Hunza language is Burushaski, a large proportion of the people speak Urdu as well and not a few have a fair grasp of English. Ishaq himself spoke all three languages and although his English was much better than my Urdu he was quite content to use either in our conversations.

Before leaving Gilgit we gassed up Ishaq's green a bit like a Jeep, at a cost of about 400 Rupees – say, about \$25 – and set sail for the North. The weather was fair and dry, about 43 C. In Toronto, worse in London, that would have been unbearable but up there among the mountains it was entirely comfortable. They never heard of 'humidex' there and I imagine the relative humidity would have been much more than 20%, if that much. The whole of the time I was in Pakistan I never saw a drop of rain. In fact the only time I ever saw rain on that sub-continent was years ago in Kashmir when the stuff came down like a Tsunami wave. Of course that was monsoon weather and if you drew a line from Peshawar to Gilgit it would be a line that the Monsoon rarely crosses. It used to be quite common, in Nowshera during the Monsoon season, to see

threatening black clouds advancing from the Southeast with everybody waiting in their swim suits for the deluge which never came.

*

The road to the North, the KKH, missed Gilgit by not very much, barely a mile, heading over the Hunza River and disappearing into a small black hole on the East side. There seemed to be only one lane through that tunnel and I wondered if we were going to meet one those of ugly gray Chinese trucks driven by mad Kirghiz drivers coming in the opposite direction! I asked Ishaq for clarification on this point but all he vouchsafed was something about us being in the hands of Allah. I held on to my seat, hoping that Allah knew what he was about and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw light at the end of the tunnel, literally. However, when we out the first thing in view was a tourist van with scenic windows hanging over the edge of the road above the roaring gray torrent, 100 feet below. I looked at Ishaq questioningly and he grinned at me in his friendly way, "Allah must have been looking the other way that time, Sahib!" I gathered afterwards that the highway is visible – mostly – from either side of the tunnel far enough to be sure of not meeting oncoming traffic thinking it had the right of way! But there is always an imbecile who thinks he is the only one on the road. Just like back home!

We headed up the Hunza Valley towards Chalt some thirty miles away, following the left bank of the river with Rakaposhi 25,550 feet high and the Hindu Kush making an encircling movement around Chalt as if to cut us off from our target. The valley was wide and open without any sign of life, flora or fauna, but ever the gray of water and²⁴ *misplaced macro here?* rock and terrain. And every mile AKRSP flashing past and far away sitting on the jagged horizon of Hindu Kush, dark clouds threatening rain. Ishaq shook his head, "No rain. Only clouds." Well, it looked like rain to me, and lots of it. But Ishaq was right. No rain. Koi nahin!

In the days of Marco Polo who travelled from Venice to China and for how many centuries before I have no idea and for several centuries after I do know for sure, caravans, principally carrying silk to the West, took the route around the Takla Makan desert to Kashgar and on through Turkistan. The caravans skirted the desert on both the north and the south side, meeting in Kashgar. The route along the south of the desert through Khotan and Yarkand branched off to the South through the Pamirs passing over the Mintaka Pass to Gilgit and Srinigar. Below Mintaka it eventually found the Hunza Valley which it followed to the confluence of three rivers, the Indus, the Gilgit and the Hunza. The whole of that system became known as the Silk Route and the southern branch followed the right bank, or the Yasin side of the Hunza river, along the

²⁴ Yakub Beg, today in Khiva, tomorrow in Yarkand, was a bit of a Will o the Wisp. Believed to be responsible for the imprisonment of Lieutenants Stoddart and Connolly in a pit in Bokhara in 1870. Leader of the Tartary countries between Afghanistan, Russia, China and what was then India. A shadowy figure of treachery and intrigue.

left bank of which we were now driving. Looking across the river to the steep banks on the other side I could quite plainly see that section of the Silk Route winding its way perilously across and around rock falls and precipitous areas that looked more suitable to flies than camels and human beings.

Not very far ahead and before Chalt, a foot bridge was marked on the map, accessing the Silk Route on the West. It was here that we had our first stop and I got out to have a look at the bridge. Had any department of transportation in the civilized world inspected this bridge, they would have condemned it out of hand. Actually, as bridges go in this part of the world, this one was a de luxe model. I decided to try my luck and taking a few supplies in a small pack I set off across the bridge. Any qualms I might have felt about this edifice disappeared when I saw an old monk who looked about eighty and carrying two loaded milk containers probably weighing close to twenty pounds each, slowly making his way across the rickety bridge. It wasn't so much the loose slats that could easily be kicked into the torrent below, as the ends of broken steel strands that would slice through the fingers when gripping the handrail, that held my attention! I noticed that the monk, who inclined his head gravely as we passed, was keeping his distance from the sharp wire ends, some of which were at eye level.

On the far side of the river I inspected what was left, which wasn't much, of that section of the Silk Route. The undamaged sections were wide enough to accommodate a train of camels but not enough for two camels side by side.. Over the broken sections, with due care and attention, a man on foot could get through if he kept his fingers crossed. I had looked forward to walking along a trail that was so rich in history and to savouring its redolence. I managed a mile or so, scrambling over many open cuts terminating in sheer drops to the gray rushing water below, before chickening out and beating an undignified retreat. I wondered, at the time how the milk carrying monk had fared with his load along this suicidal track, but when I got back to the bridge I noticed, about a hundred yards up stream, a more civilized pathway leading up the hill. Tempted to follow that track, I started to climb up thinking I might unearth the ghost of George Hayward, an English adventurer and explorer who was done to death at Darkot eighty miles to the West of where I was standing. He had waited there for his assassin(s) all one long night in July of 1870. They came just after dawn and dragged him from his tent where he was beheaded – on the orders, it is variously surmised - of Ranjit Singh the Maharajah of Punjab and Kashmir, Yakub Beg notably the Khan of Kashgar but whose sway extended from Yarkand in Eastern Turkestan to the Aral Sea, and Aman-ul-Mulk sometime Khan of Yasin and Chitral. Their complicity was suspected but never proved, for all had something to gain by Hayward's death or much to lose by his continued existence.

I spoke of the very low relative humidity in that country, and it showed in my continuous need for water. When I was in Gilgit I purchased a one liter thermos flask and this together with a good supply of iodine tablets kept the bugs at bay most of the time. I found that spring water was the best, melt water from the glaciers which had a high percentage of silica grit, not very good and

river water was to be avoided like the plague. Ishaq taught me to recognize spring water which, though not always discernable from glacier melt, together with an iodine tablet, kept me on the up-and-up. Another life saver was the little self pressurizing stove I always carried with me. There's nothing to beat a mug of hot, sweet tea with condensed milk, a *brew-up* which, I always say, won the war for the Eighth Army in the Western Desert. When I returned from my very short walk down the Silk Route, I made a brew-up on the roadside and Ishaq told me it was almost as good as Pakistan tea – which is usually drunk out of a glass.

We were still a few miles out of Chalt when we caught up with an Islamic traffic jam. It was a religious procession and a couple of hundred of the faithful were blocking the road completely. flagellating their backs with whips. A small van with a public address system was exhorting them to greater excesses, though with my unbeliever's eye I detected a certain lack of enthusiasm. For sure there was no blood showing on anybody's back, nor even any welts. And who could blame them! Eventually the waters parted and we proceeded on our way

Time was getting on and for the first night we put up in a caravanserai and were served dinner in the open on a communal table with a tablecloth, yet! I had my favourite dish, dahl and chapattis, followed by a savoury omelette and several side dishes which were excellent, only don't ask me what they were. There were several Pakistani couples who kept to themselves, Mohammed Suleman Khan, an engineer from Lahore and Steffan Forssel, a Swedish information officer working in Peshawar with the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.²⁵ I enjoyed the dinner and the company very much. One thing about that meal that stuck in my mind was the huge insect, about four inches long that sat in the middle of the table as if it were part of the decor. Nobody took the slightest notice of it, though I was relieved when it flew off, seeking greener pastures. Afterwards I retired to a big tent which I had all to myself with a lovely view of Rakaposhi in the distance bathed in the fading coral shades that illumined the jagged ridges of the Hindu Kush.

Next morning everybody was up at the crack of dawn moving around in the first gray streaks of light before the sun poked its nose over the battlements of the Karakoram. And within the hour Ishaq and I were embarked upon our travels. About ten miles up the road from Chalt the highway crosses the Hunza River at Minapin by a robust looking low level suspension bridge. At the south side of the river a high pressure jet of water was issuing forth from the supporting tower. There must have been a pipeline with a ruptured gland that was feeding a big head of water from some high lake up in the Bagrot Range. I guessed that there must have been several hundred pounds per square inch – psi – pushing that jet of water fifty yards or so down into the river. The noise of the jet as we crossed the bridge was painfully loud making conversation

²⁵ In 1987 the Russian army was still trying to eradicate the Mujahedin in Afghanistan without, be it noted, very much success. The Swedish Committee was one of the many organizations at that time bringing in supplies and medical services to the thousands of refugees streaming, mostly, into Peshawar where the administrative offices of the committee were set up.

impossible.

Talking of the problems of finding suitable water to drink and of how to guard against onslaughts of Delhi Belly or Funny Tummy, whatever it is called, the discomfort and embarrassment is the same. My own prophylactic precautions paid off and for the most part were effective. However that morning, no doctor was needed to tell me what was happening in my innards. Unfortunately, rest rooms along that stretch of highway were at a discount, which fact the urgings of my plumbing system failed totally to recognize. I should have instructed Ishaq to stop immediately or even sooner. Instead I mumbled something about having to get a photograph of the magnificent scenery! I leaped out with my carry bag but without the slightest bit of cover or dead ground, realizing that wherever I went I would be in full view of any passing traffic. At that moment I heard Ishaq's voice calling me, "You have toilet paper, Sahib?" So much for taking photographs! However, that episode was little more than a flash in the pan, sorry, but I had no more trouble until I was on my way back to Gilgit. The only time in my life that I have been in a more exposed situation was during the war half way up the North Buttress of Tryfan in Snowdonia. Freddy Gardiner was about fifty feet directly below me and absolutely no cover at all. I called out to him something like 'Heads below' and all I got was a most unsympathetic instruction that in the event, proved unnecessary. Being chronologically challenged I had to grin and bear the dictates of fate. Which would have been more bearable had Freddy not, pointedly, kept upwind of me for the remainder of the day.

After that contretemps, I had no further problems of that ilk until the tail end of my trip. Not having any immediate plans beyond getting up the gorge that led up the Shimshal river into the back country beyond, I was on the lookout for anything that seemed interesting. My map showed a bridge leading to a small village called Atabad on the north side of the Hunza river, and indeed, as we were driving along I could clearly see the backward progression of the Silk Route that had defeated me a few miles back, but with all kinds of interesting variants. What was more the route appeared to be in much better condition than the previous section. Getting to it was another matter. Ishaq was adamant that he could reach the village in the Land Rover though I would have been (much) happier to walk. The bridge was a sort of a suspension arrangement that I was not able to come to terms with. It spanned a gap of about a hundred feet over the river and had a space at each end that seemed wide enough to trap the wheels of the vehicle if they turned through much more than thirty degrees. After the bridge, the road angled up at an impossible slaty degree and at about the worst possible place did a sharp U turn such that we had to back up twice in order to negotiate it. Meanwhile I was trying not to look at the possible alternate should we not make it to the top. We did however and I jumped out thankfully, thinking that nothing the Silk Route could offer would come anywhere competing with our little bit of hill climbing.

There was no sign of life in the village and I assumed that everybody was out working on the green terraced slopes. I commented earlier that in Hunza and indeed through most of the Karakoram, the predominant colour is gray,

battleship gray. The rivers, the mountains and scree slopes, the mud banks, wherever you looked some celestial painter had daubed the whole landscape in varying shades of gray. Well, not quite the whole landscape, for here and there he had splashed the odd drop of green paint. The terraced and irrigated slopes surrounding each village relieved the eye of the monotony of monochrome. And so it was at this little village of Atabad where tall slim poplars gave shade to the dwarf corn and lentil that grew in profusion as if to negate the harsh lifeless country pressing around it. But who tended this greenery and adjusted the sluice gates upon which life in the village so much depended? Where were the animals, yaks, goats and poultry that provided meat and dairy products? No sign of them either. Later I was to get a clear answer to my questions, but for the moment I had food and drink and other necessities for at least a few days so I headed south leaving Ishaq to fend for himself until I returned. This in itself was an act of faith for I took only the bare necessities, leaving my backpack in Ishaq's care.

I would like to be able to say that I had come to grips with the Karakoram, sorry, on this side of the river it's mostly the Hindu Kush, the Yasin district to be precise, but the Kush did not present itself to be gripped. All it did was to make a damned nuisance of itself. After coping, not too happily, with a seemingly endless succession of broken sections along the Silk Route, each offering a headlong tumble, down to the rushing waters of the Hunza, I spotted a well used trail heading up a feasible gully. This is for me, I thought. Feasible gulleys are infinitely preferable to suicidal scrambles across friable landslips. After about half an hour there was an easy climb over a sort of parapet which led over some relatively flat cultivated land with contoured and irrigated terraces rising in the distance to what I took to be a lesser peak in the Atabad Group. The summit, which at first sight looked quite close, had plenty of snow on it, rising probably to around 20,000 feet, which I had no intention of tackling. However to the right there was another peak, probably close to 14,000 feet, no snow on it and accessed by an easy ridge leading NNE about two miles from where I was standing.

Looking at my map I saw that I was below the Mustagh Group somewhere within which must be the fearsome Mustagh Tower which was climbed by Joe Brown, the famous plumber and climber from Capel Curig in North Wales. But I couldn't spot it unfortunately for even a good photograph would have been a worthwhile trophy.

Below the Mustagh the green terraces extended across to the ridge to the East and this was their highest point so I figured there would have to be clean water there. It took me the better part of half an hour to get there and that was where I met my first villager. I assumed he came from Atabad, only he seemed quite shy of my attempts to use my execrable Urdu. I pointed towards what looked like spring water issuing out of the hillside. "Pane achha hai? Safed pane?" To which there was no response. I began to wonder if he was dumb. I tried another approach, "Is the water good to drink?" I went through the motions of drinking and just for good measure I added "Wasser gut zu Trinken?" and then the dam broke! "Ya, Ya !Wasser good drinken!" And he buried his face

in the water and drank copiously. It turned out that he spoke no Urdu but had, apparently, acted as a guide for some German tourists. Afterwards he did a lot of talking of which I understood hardly a word. I presumed he was talking Burushaski so when he showed signs of leaving I gave him the local expression, “Shurabana!” which means ‘Very many thanks, everything is OK and I’ll do the same for you one day’. At which his little face broke into a wide grin, “Ya, Ya, Shurabana, Shurabana.”! And off he went, running like a deer in the direction of Atabad.

I had been stuffing myself with chocolate and raisins and biscuits and I still had an hour before sundown, so I took myself off in the direction of what turned out to be an elusive peak. The ridge, which I called ²⁶Kizyl Gali, was to be my pointer to the minor summit, and I had intended to gain the crest and then take a leisurely stroll to the top. In the meantime my hour was long past and I knew I was not going to make the crest before dark. Anyway it was supper time and I was looking forward to dahl and chapatti, a couple of apricots and a mug of Pakistan tea. Lord, how I blessed that little ‘puffer’ of mine. But I knew it was an extravagance I could not enjoy for long, fuel being in short supply in those latitudes. I found myself a cozy sort of niche, well sheltered from wind and totally undeservedly comfortable. But in the middle of the night was I ever glad of my ‘Polar’ sack.

The morrow dawned bright and clear and I was out of my bag by first light enjoying the crystal clear view of Rakaposhi silhouetted against the rising sun with Dobani hiding coyly behind and a circle of jagged peaks arising out of the evanescent blue mists of the morning. Kizyl Gali did not give me much trouble though the minor summit looked different and much closer than it had appeared the day before. Of course it was not the summit I was looking for, which I found out when I reached it. And there were two more like it before scrambling up the top of the real summit. And what a view I was afforded right down the nullah to Gulmit where I could see the sunlight glistening on the Hunza River with its back drop of one hundred foot mud cliffs, winding its way down the valley. It was two in the afternoon. Time to get moving. I figured it was about eight miles back to Atabad which, with my Limmer²⁷ boots from New Hampshire I could do in about ninety minutes. In the event it took a lot longer what with going down a dead ended gully and having to climb back up quite a few feet or more. It was five pm when I reached Atabad, and there was Ishaq waiting for me with a glass of hot sweet milky tea which I couldn’t get to fast enough!

And who else was waiting for me but a score or so of children half the size of Ishaq all looking as pleased as punch. I took a photograph of them, with the women folk standing discretely in the background. My little friend from up on

²⁶ Kizyl Ghali. ‘Kizyl’ from the Persian meaning ‘yellow’ and ‘ghali’ from Urdu meaning ‘ridge’. That is Yellow Ridge’. My own construction!

²⁷ Peter Limmer use to make the best made to measure mountain hiking boots I have ever come across. All the hut boys who carry anything up to 100 lbs of supplies to the huts every day. Limmers of Jackson, New Hampshire. I put a thousand miles and 350,000 feet vertical on my boots and they are good as ever! . Only thing is , you have to look after them

the hill was there also, standing next to Ushaq. I shouted out “Shurabana!” to them and was rewarded with a chorus of Shurabanas! I wondered how far I would get on my one word of Burushaski! After, as I passed the women, whose faces were not covered and were quite comely, they looked pleased when I said “Thikhana” which is about the same thing in Urdu as Shurabana, and then I thought I would push my luck with my total Burushaski vocabulary and they all laughed and said the same word. One of them actually reached out and patted my arm, and she was not the least comely of all the women!

We got back across that weird bridge that seemed to float in the air a hundred feet above the Hunza River and were just pulling out onto the highway when without any warning the engine quit. But Ishaq was equal to the situation. He took the carburettor off – it was side mounted just like on a Jeep – stripped it down to its component parts, blew through all the nozzles and assembled it again. And off we went, but not for long. It turned out to be the gas pump which was over heating and he got over that problem by wrapping wet mud around the barrel, keeping it in place with a damp cloth. When the cloth dried out you just poured some cold water over the Rube Goldberg assembly, and off we went, only this time the Jeep kept going, certainly until Ishaq was back in Gilgit!

I had it in my mind that I should find myself a sort of base camp from where I could sally out to nearby points of interest. When I was in Pindi visiting all the sights, courtesy Sitara Tour Agency, Zafar Iqbal who was my guide and mentor mentioned the Village Inn in Gulmit as being suitable as a pied-a-terre. Gulmit, if you remember was the village I could see from the peak at the top of Gali. I should mention at this point that when we were assessing the carburetor problem, a friend of Ishaq turned up in a Volkswagen ‘Bug’. The long and short of it was that he took me down to another of those Caravanserai places in his ‘Bug’, but it was too small to get my big packsack in. So I had to leave it with Ishaq whom I trusted as none other up in that country, but nothing is ever for sure so I was much relieved when he turned up only half an hour later complete with all my duffel.

The morrow found us at the Village Inn just in time for breakfast consisting of fried eggs, potatoes, tomato, and something that thought it was bacon but turned out to be a piece of frizzled goat! All of that with plenty of tea and one big paratha which is chapatti fried in ghee and folded over twice. Couldn’t have wished for better! The rooms were not bad; mud floors, charpoi and a couple of blankets, but it was the electric surface wiring was what got my attention. No electrician that I know of could have achieved such perfection. Issuing forth from a central fuse box the wires were either horizontal or vertical and perfectly so and turning through geometrical right angles wherever appropriate. There were modern lighting fittings on the ceilings and switches mounted conveniently close to the charpoi. The owner, from the cut of his rig, looked like a retired Subadar Major from the Pakistan army and I suspect he was also the electrician. But I didn’t see any electric supply lines coming in. I asked him about this and he said, “There is no electric supply here, yet. But we are ready for it when it comes”. Whenever that might be!

I decided to make the most of Ishaq and his jeep, even though its continued operation was dependent upon a mud poultice, so we headed up towards the Shingshal Gorges past the snout of the Batura Glacier which was close to claiming the road for itself. On the east side of the Hunza, which, if you remember, was our constant companion almost as far as the Chinese border at Kunjerab Pass, were the 'fearful gorges of Shingshal' looming over us a couple of miles away. The Shingshal river runs into the Hunza River close to Pasu. It is accessed by a solid looking bridge over the Hunza but the road gets progressively worse as it runs along the east side of the Hunza until comes to a fierce little stream in a hurry to join the main river. The ford at this point is about two feet deep and angled down to the West at about twenty degrees. Ishaq obviously had been this way before, charged into the ford fearlessly and then stopped, with water lapping over our feet. I thought to myself, 'The good news is that the fuel pump is not going to overheat here!' However, after a bit of tooting and froing we were home and dry. Well, home anyway.

We were on a rough stony track heading south into an open coombe about half a mile in diameter with the Shingshal flowing round the far side, though not much could be seen of it at this distance. On the east side, like a military pincer movement, black vertical cliffs six hundred feet high with a dark shadow in the middle, presaging the opening into the gorge, loomed above us. We could have driven on but I wanted to walk in. That is to say, I did not want my first introduction to that primeval amphitheatre that had been cut through by the waters of the Shingshal for many thousands of years, to be on a motor vehicle. Ishaq wanted to drive in but I wouldn't have it, and set off on foot leaving him, albeit, a bit pissed off, with the Jeep!

As I walked, the huge jaws of rock began to close in around me and it very quickly came home to me that I was on a track that had been cut and quite recently too, for nothing bigger than a Jeep. The river, now no more than twenty feet wide, was constricted by the rock walls which, on the right bank had been cut back about eight feet so that the track was proceeding along an open sided tunnel and a bare two feet above the water level. Onwards, the gorge wound its way between vertical cliffs to another, smaller coombe and ahead of me I could hear the sound of a jack hammer and an air compressor. I didn't need to be an engineer to know what was going on. They were cutting the new road so that people could drive their automobiles into the heart of the Karakoram.

And so it was. Another ten minutes walking I ran into a work gang with a jeep and a big compressor on a trailer flat with high pressure air hoses snaking between their feet. Their overseer, who turned out to be a medical doctor, approached me, rather belligerently, I thought. "Who are you, and what are you doing up here?" he asked in quite good English. "And why did you leave your vehicle back there?" Apparently one of his men from a small village on the north side of the river had spotted me leaving the Jeep. Dr Farmandolah – I'm not sure about the spelling – told me that although he had qualified as a doctor but had been unable to find an outlet for his professional skills and taken this

job in default. He had also met a Dr Michael Pfluge from Toronto, who had been up the Shingshal river on some kind of 'help' plan. I spoke to this doctor when I returned to Toronto but he was not too forthcoming on the subject.

Anyway, I had been hoping to find the route up to the village of Shingshal which is some twenty-five miles east of the Hunza river, but from the lie of the land it didn't come this way, not before the Jeep track was finished and that, for sure, was not going to be this year! Farmandolah told me that the trekking route was to the North of the river, avoiding the lower gorges. When I got back to Ishaq we followed the track back to the highway and I was able to scout the approaches on the North side and found a feasible looking track close to Mor Khun leading apparently up to Karun Pir²⁸ pass. Some distance below that was a dotted line on the map, leading down to the river but from a look at the closely spaced contours shown and altitudes claimed I knew I was not going to be able to handle on my own with a heavy pack, so I put it on the back burner! I'll think about that later!

Meanwhile there was Sost, ten miles up the road, to be considered. This was the Pakistan Frontier Post complete with Passport Control and various other checks to go through. Fifty miles, give or take a bit, ahead on the KKH was the Kunjerab Pass but there were no further controls for another forty miles or so, a bit short of Tashkurgan. In between you could run back and forth across the border at Kunjerab pass as many times as you liked and no one would bother you. But long before getting to Kunjerab there was plenty of interesting country to hold your interest

Back down the valley a few miles short of Pasu, where the Shingshal from the East and the Batura from the West run into the Hunza river there is a panorama well worth seeing, if only for the huge amount of space that surrounds you.. The Batura, which flows out of the Kampire Dior Group thirty miles away is not more than a hundred yards wide at its snout at the KKH, but higher up it widens out to several miles. Only the narrow snout is visible from the highway before it curves away to the South and disappears into the distance. I would have liked to tramp a stretch of that giant glacier but other priorities and the possibility of falling down a crevice and pressure from Ishaq who didn't want to lose a client, dissuaded me

So at Sost I had to surrender my Passport as I had only one reentry permit into Pakistan and I didn't want to use it up on the short trip into China. Also I the Chinese visa that I obtained with so much trouble in Toronto was not valid for reentry, and once I had been in and out, that was my lot! So off we went to Kunjerab through some gorges that had to be seen to be believed. It was after leaving Sost that the hills began to close in on the road, very reminiscent of the Shingshal gorges and for a long section the cliffs came down to within a few feet of the verges. Rock falls, to judge from the frequent piles of detritus littering the roadway, some of which had to be removed before we could proceed, made it inadvisable to loiter along there. If any one of the bigger

²⁸ I believe that Karun Koh is the local group of mountains, Karun the highest peak at 23,000 feet and Karun Pir, a bit over 16,000 feet, the pass that accesses the higher Shingshal valley

rocks had fallen on us it would have been a major disaster and in fact at one point we had a narrow escape when a fall missed us by about the length of the jeep .

A few miles out of Sost there was a turn to the left with a large official notice prohibiting entry to unauthorised persons and threatening all manner of retribution to intruders. But this was the road to the Mintaka Pass which looked directly into China and was only a few miles from the Killick Pass which not only looked into China but was a step from the Wakhan Valley²⁹ in Afghanistan. Moreover the famed Oxus River, the ³⁰Amu Daria and its source the Lake Sarikol were all down there somewhere and I resolved to see something of that country before I returned . But for the moment Ishaq was importuning. “Sahib, it is forbidden to enter,” he said, “And dangerous too. Please, come. We go to Kunjerab Pass.” Yes, I thought . For now. But I was beginning to realize that I wasn’t going to get anywhere as long as I was tied to this Jeep. I could not have wished for a better or more honest and capable driver, I should say, companion, than Ishaq. But I could not expect him to do anything that might lose him his licence. And of course he would be held responsible if I got into any sort of trouble. So it was Heigh Ho for the Kunjerab

Other than a few boulders rolling around, our trip up to the pass was uneventful though quite interesting. At one point we stopped at a little glade sheltered by a clump of trees under which three ponies were contentedly munching the grass. They were quite tame and came over to inspect me. I imagined that any little girl with pony tails would have given her all to have one of them!

Shortly after we left the turning to Mintaka, say about four miles, we came to a small village called Shachtr. At that point we were at an altitude of about 9,000 feet and from there on until we reached Kunjerab Pass we were climbing steadily. The land began to fall away from us until we had open pastures on either side practically covered with grazing yaks though I couldn’t see much fodder on the stony hillsides. Up ahead the road curved to the left towards snow covered peaks extending to the West. We had arrived at the Pass, 16,000 feet an official looking notice claimed. Closer to the road was something that looked like the headstone on a grave, but on closer inspection it was revealed to be a notice written in English and in Chinese characters commemorating the opening of the pass and the completion of the Karakoram Highway to that point. Reference to the eight hundred workers who it was claimed, had lost their lives in the project was conspicuous by its absence:

²⁹ Often referred to as the Afghan Panhandle, a long open valley up to four miles wide in places bordered by 20,000 foot peaks of the Hindu Kush to the North and running some forty miles southwestish into northern Afghanistan . See ‘Caravans to Tartary’ by Roland and Sabrina Michaud, published 1978 by the Viking Press, New York and simultaneously by Penguin Books of Canada Ltd.

³⁰ The two rivers, the Amu Daria and the Syr Daria drain out of Tartary from the East and flow into the vast salt lake, The Aral Sea as it is known, to the North of Bokhara. Famous from the days of the Great Game in the nineteenth century, the history of these rivers and the lands and peoples around them would fill a hundred books.

The opening ceremony
of the Kunjerab Pass
to traffic was performed by
Major General (retd) Jamal Dar
Minister for Kashmir Affairs
and Northern Areas
Government of the Islamic
Republic of Pakistan and
Mr Ishmael Ehmed
Chairman of the Peoples
Government of the Xinjiang
Uighur Autonomous Region
Of the Peoples Republic of China
On Aug. 27 1982

I jumped out of the Jeep and my legs almost collapsed under me! Normally, walking slowly up to heights of 16,000 or more should not need much acclimatization, but coming up fast in a vehicle is a different matter. However, the weakness soon passed and I was able to walk around and inspect the location. Not that there was much to see. I had expected to be able to view the Kush and the Karakoram and the Pamir – the Bam I Dunya or what is often called The Roof of the World. – but other than the Kunjerab valley we had just come up and the road disappearing down into China there was nothing of much interest. The peak to the West of us had some attraction inasmuch as the position might have afforded a worthwhile view of Chinese Turkestan

I was more interested in getting down to Tashkurgan and having a look at the Takla Makan desert but Ishaq seemed to be having some reservations about setting foot in China. Although he didn't say so, I rather thought that, being a citizen of Pakistan and resident of Hunza he might be considered to have crossed the border illegally. So we headed back towards Gilgit where we would part company

However, that was not going to be until the next day for I still had in mind another trip I wanted to make on the way back. On the east side of the KKH about ten miles downstream from Atabad where I had a jaunt up to Kizyl Gali, there was a bridge to the east side of the Hunza river and a village called Skalyar, and about ten miles further down the river another bridge close to Gulmat, not to be confused with Gulmit. The section between the two bridges looked like a good opportunity to get off on my own and sample some inhabited country. I told Ishaq to wait for me at the second bridge and set off hoping that there wasn't another bridge that I had missed!

I enjoyed being able to stretch my legs and soak up the vast panorama surrounding me. The track I was following climbed steadily for a couple of miles and then flattened out as I reached Pisan, a small village nestling comfortably in the shade of the ubiquitous poplar. A few single story buildings of primitive construction with a rutted lane in the middle. The altitude was around 7,000 feet but nowhere more than 8,000. Rakaposhi to the Southeast rising to over 25,000 feet was framed by a trio of poplars, and made a fascinating backdrop to the scene from the village. A thousand feet below, sheltered within the curve of the landscape, the village of Gulmat. A *chiaro*

scuro picture of black and white relieved by a startling matrix of cultivated terraces clothed in meadow green. 'A green and pleasant land' encompassed by a scene of devastation. Across the gulf a mile away to the West, the KKH, a thin dark line winding its way through the tortured contours of gray rock that is the Karakoram and hundreds of feet below, as if to mirror the contours, the Hunza River, the razor sharp tool that had cut this tremendous gorge.

A mile up the Hunza was something that disturbed the total dissymmetry of the land; a hardly to be seen straight line surmounted by a twenty degree arc of a circle, neatly bisecting the the river. A bridge. At first I thought it was the one I had crossed earlier on. But no, that one was ten miles back. So it had to be the one where Ishaq was waiting. Or was supposed to be waiting. Trouble was – how the Hell to get down there? I scrambled down to an orchard, apricots, I presumed and looked over a low wall on its far side, and wished I hadn't! Either wings or a parachute were what I needed at that juncture, but since neither were part of my equipment, I was going to have to rearrange my logistics. While I was taking uffish thought on this question, my eye chanced upon some people sitting on the grass under – wouldn't you know it? - a poplar tree in the mid distance.

They turned out to be two scholarly looking old men and a small boy who all considered my approach with interest.. "Shurabana, Ji," I ventured, "Shurabana, Sahib." they replied gravely, bowing their heads. I managed to explain my predicament in Urdu. One of them spoke to the small boy who leaped to his feet.. "Come, Sahib. Come meri sath." He said, "I show you way." I thanked the old men and one of them said something. like 'Sahib kih jao', which, loosely translated, means 'Go, Man, Go.' I went, gratefully.

The small boy, whose name appeared to be Huun, took off like a goat with a firecracker tied to his tail. I managed to keep up with him until he headed down a forty five degree slope covered with loose stones and slate. I noticed there was a trace of a track corkscrewing down the slope but Huun went straight down like he was on the flat. I decided that there must have been a goat in his lineage somewhere and as I slid and slipped after him, he waited patiently for me at the bottom. The rest of the trip was, well, more of the same and half an hour later we reached the bridge. But no Jeep.

But not to worry. I was early and we had time to spare. Huun asked me if I would like some Char but I saw no means of producing any. He winked at me and said "Come, I show you." He took me down under the foundations of the bridge and in the semi gloom, produced a big chunk of brown ice, presumably frozen tea. It was his personal refrigerator, down there where the temperature is never above freezing point! I considered the lump of ice and weighed the likelihood of it sheltering some horrible bugs against giving offence to the boy. We were out on the open by that time and there was Ishaq waiting for me, having arrived only a few minutes ago. I handed him my chunk of tea, "Here! Hold on to this a moment." And I fished in my pack for a visiting card size calculator and gave it to Huun who needed no instructions to operate it.

We got back to Gilgit by late afternoon after saying goodbye to Ishaq, a bit sorrowfully for apart from the fact that he had been a good and cheerful companion, I had learned a lot from him. I checked into the Chinar Inn for one night and then went out with an open mind. I knew what I wanted but I didn't want to hang around in Gilgit making myself conspicuous. There were quite a few European travelers around and I got the feeling from talking to some of them that they had come out to Hunza expecting that the mountainous country would unfold around them, exposing them vicariously to its history of intrigue and adventure. I directed some of them to Ishaq and knew they would be well looked after, but it was not until I went in for dinner that I struck gold. I got talking to a couple who were traveling with a group of Germans on their way to Kashgar. Their vehicle had a spare seat as far as Sost. It was exactly what I was looking for. Now all I needed was to pick up a lift from Sost to the turn off that led to Mishgar. From there, if necessary I could walk as far as the Killick pass, a distance of about thirty miles, but not with that seventy pound back pack.

On the way up to Sost I had decided that I should opt for Xinkiang and keep my passport. I didn't know what sort of problems I might run into, going up to the Killik³¹ Pass area and if I got turned back, I would still have the option of crossing into China. My German friends, it turned out, had an empty seat as far as Kashgar but I stuck with my plans and they very kindly dropped me at the turn off to Mishgar. I didn't tell them any of my plans and I thought they really did not want to know

They disappeared up the Kunjerab canyon, me with my back pack and carry bag on the ground beside me and a damn great notice warning of the unpleasant consequences of ignoring it, which was what I was about to do! But my first priority was to get out of sight of any passing traffic, so I grabbed my stuff and hauled it a hundred yards round the first corner where I could not be seen. I had to rearrange my duffle, have some nourishment and hot sweet tea, and put on my Limmers and my best foot forward! While I was attending to my needs I got to wondering what had happened to the Hunza river. Beyond the turn off there was only the Kunjerab river and the Killik river, the former going up towards the pass and the latter guiding my footsteps towards the Afghan Panhandle and the Wakhan Valley.

The road surface was not bad at all at first and after about an hour and a half I saw signs of human occupation up there in front of me, but no sign of life. If there was a border post there I didn't want to run into it and get sent back to Sost. However, there was some high ground off to my left rising to a couple of peaks that must have been pushing through the 15,000 foot mark. There was no way I was going to carry myself and accoutrements up 5,000 foot of rubble better suited to a mountain goat but a restful 250 feet seemed to lead to a fold that, hopefully, I could contour along unseen from the village. What was more there was a well defined path going up the middle of the nullah that invited my

³¹ Killik Pass. Somewhere around the middle of the Nineteenth century there was, so I understand, a skirmish between conflicting interests in which fifty lives were lost. The word for 'fifty' was 'kilik', hence the name of the pass

footsteps.

The fold did not disappoint me, in fact it led me about three miles along a contour and out of sight of Mishgar and I was able to join the track again near a small village consisting of a few mud huts called Kalam Darchi straddling the Killik River. I was on my way again. Back down the track that I had just been avoiding there was a dark mountain wall pointing away from Mishgar to the Northwest rising out of sight to beyond three thousand almost vertical feet. It looked like the north face of the Eiger, only not so friendly! The next main point of interest was Murkushi, seven or so miles ahead and the junction for the Mintaka and the Killik passes, both of them over 15,000 feet. I seemed to have lost the Killik River but there was a well used track that a Jeep might have managed and at the time I wouldn't have refused a lift if one had happened along that way. I had hoped to reach the Killik pass the same day, but with my heavy pack and the altitude going for over 15,000 feet I figured that, by the following morning if I had not found a spring, I would have a water shortage problem.

I don't think I got much more than a couple of miles beyond Kalam Darchi when I came to a murderous looking cliff on my left, past which the land opened up quite noticeably, rising a thousand feet or so to what I hoped was Murkushi. - five miles to Gundighi, I thought! I had had thoughts of hiding my pack somewhere and 'going for the top' so to speak. Unfortunately there didn't seem to be anywhere where the pack would not stick out like a sore thumb. The Killik River had shrunk to a reasonable size and I was tempted to drink its water. Tempted only for no doubt it was loaded with yak dung.

It was at this point that I heard the sound of an engine, coming up towards me. There was nowhere I could hide so I just waited to see what turned up. From the sound, it was obviously climbing and quite fast. It couldn't have been more than five minutes before it hove into view. It seemed to have handlebars and was driven by a man sitting in the middle, or standing, rather. As it got closer I saw that it had tracks at the back but looked like a motor cycle at the front. Suddenly I knew what it was! A motor cycle tank, as that was what I used to call them. The Germans used them for reconnaissance in the Western Desert, and in Sicily where I picked up one in a vehicle dump. With two gear boxes, like the Jeep, it could do fifty on the flat and climb up the side of a house. There was a driver's seat provided in the front housing which you learned very quickly not to use, unless your knees were made of tempered steel.

The driver, until he spoke, I took for a *Pathan*, for he was dressed in a short *Chapan*³², Yusufzai headgear and a pair of sandals that Marco Polo could have left behind. Also, strapped to the cubicle behind was an old Martini rifle that had seen better days. I opened my mouth to say 'Salaams Aleicomb' when he spoke in excellent English but with an undefinable accent with faint undertones that could have been Russian. "Who are you and what the Devil are you doing up here?" he said. Then without waiting for a reply, "Don't you

³² The Chapan is a long embroidered coat without buttons which are worn by the well dressed Pathan

know that this is a severely prohibited area” I knew then that he was not English. The ‘severely’ was a dead give away for a European, probably Italian or French.

Well, I told him who I was and what *I* was doing up here. “And who the Hell are *you* and what are you doing up here? And where the Hell did you get that German recce wagon?” His name was Luigi which told me a thing or two and he stole the wagon from the Russkis somewhere in Afghanistan. He had, so he told me, crossed the border not too far from Chitral. He was now on his way up to the Killik Pass, hoping to cross over into China and hit the KKH before Tashkurgan. The wagon was loaded up with jerrycans. I tapped a few of them. Luigi smiled. “Not to worry, they all full. Just filled up at Sost.” Then he looked at me quizzically. “Did you come through Mishgar?” Well, I didn’t actually come through it. Rather around it. Not wanting to find myself running into a border guard. Apparently Luigi had made a detour around Mishgar for the same reason as I, so neither of us knew if there was a border post there or not

We stood there for a moment eyeing each other speculatively surrounded by this vast mountain scenery with its endless vistas of snow covered peaks and glaciers between valleys and nullahs filled with the deep blue haze of mysticism A panorama to make an artist weep. Suddenly Luigi burst into laughter “Well, I don’t know what you are doing up here. I suppose it’s none of my business.” He pulled a long face. “But we both seem to be heading in the same direction. So get yourself and your baggage up on the back and hold on for your life.” I was happy to comply, but if there was one thing I knew for sure, it was that Luigi’s plans were a Hell of a lot more convoluted than mine, and what was more, I had the idea that all I was ever going to find out about them was what I already knew, which was Damn little. But I wasn’t going to let that do me out of a free ride!

Luigi was studying a scrap of crumpled paper with some pencilled lines on it. It thought it was a map but I figured if that was all that Luigi had to guide him through this disaster area, he wasn’t going to get very far. And he could kiss Tashkurgan goodbye, for sure! I pulled out my map which was a 250,000 with 500 foot contours, black and white copy of 43-14 and -15 printed by the US Army Map Service, Corps of Engineers and showed it to Luigi. You’d have thought he was looking at the Dead Sea Scrolls, the way he handled it. “Dio buono,” he exclaimed, “Where did you get this from?” But I wasn’t about to tell him all my secrets. “Oh,” I said nonchalantly, “I foraged it somewhere.” He looked at it excitedly, but couldn’t make out the incredible maze of contours, “Where are we now?” he said, “Show me on the map.” Well we were right up at the top of the map and not more than a few miles before running off it. I pointed out Murkushi to him, where the track split right to Mintaka, and left to Kilik which was about five miles off the map. I also had a 1,000,000 scale map printed by the US Army which showed Mintaka and Kilik, but with poor detail so was not much use to us at that moment.

Well, it had been a long day, but we still had a few hours before sundown, so

on we went. Before starting off we had discussed what we should do at Murkushi, *caso mai* ³³as Luigi said, we ran into the opposition. All being well we would go straight through pretending not to see anybody. I couldn't imagine anyone trying to stop us; they would be so flabbergasted at the sight of this weird machine that, by the time they had gathered their senses, we would have been long gone! Hopefully. Well, Murkushi didn't amount to much and nobody tried to stop us – if there was anybody. We didn't stop to look!

We had another eight miles to go to the pass. It was mostly open country with yaks all over the place and not much else if you didn't count the odd sort of low shack here and there. We followed the nullah as near as makes no difference, but the ground was rising quite steeply, so much so that I had to hang on for dear life. Luigi certainly knew how to handle that buggy but what with the 'track steering' and the slope of the ground' I very nearly got flung off half a dozen times when he swerved abruptly to avoid a hazard.

Suddenly I heard a different noise. It was a ricocheting bullet not more than a few feet from my ear. Luigi heard it as well and shouted something pointing up to the horizon and then I heard the sound of more shots. There were several figures up there and they were shooting at us in a very unfriendly manner, I thought. Evidently Luigi had the same thought too, for he swung the vehicle around and headed for cover, followed by a fusillade of shots, none of which found a target. Rotten shots, I thought. They weren't Afghans, for sure or we would have been dead by now. Those sods can hit a bullseye at 500 yards with their home made *jezails*. So our assailants had to be Pakistani border guards or maybe Russians doing a little poaching. Whoever they were, we didn't want to tangle with them so we kept on making tracks until we were out of sight and range. Actually we didn't stop until we had Murkushi well behind us and then Luigi pulled into a sort of hide where we were well hidden from the track. Then we walked back, obliterated our tracks and camouflaged the Recce Wagon as well as we could

We were in for a long wait and didn't want to risk even a twig fire to make tea, so it was water and hard tack We were OK for water, having found a spring earlier on, so we just settled down for the night and waited. Nothing happened all the night but just after sun up we heard a whirly bird up there going past, but not in any hurry. The sound faded away to the West. "This is where we part company," said Luigi, "Its not far back to the KKH and you know your way from here." I realized then that we had stopped almost at the same place where he had picked me up, and I was glad to be going on my own way. "Which way will you go?" I asked Luigi, but he just smiled and shook his head. "You go your way and I go mine. And we never met! Don't forget that. I'll give you an hour before I start up this little monster. That'll give you plenty of time to get clear of Mishgar." I never saw or heard of him again. Nor did I hear his engine which made enough noise to wake the dead

It was about noon hour when I reached the KKH. I had taken the same route as

the one I came in by and when I was not far from Mishgar I heard the helicopter coming back and seemed to be landing at the village. Discretion being the better part of valour, I lay low for a while until it took off and headed towards Chitral in the South. It was a long trudge back to the highway and with my heart in my mouth most of the time! But I didn't see a sign of life, for which I was most grateful!

A couple of miles up the KKH towards the Kunjerab Pass there is a village marked on the map called Shachkatr at the confluence of the Kunjerab River and another flowing down from the North West from Gordur I Giaraf. I did not know if that was the name of a village or the area or the river. Anyway, I had marked it as a possibility for an interesting trek when I came down that way with Ishaq. I decided to walk to Shachkatr and have lunch there before pushing up through the nullah. The altitude there was about 10,000 feet and with, as always, the sun shining in a cloudless sky it was pleasantly soporific. I had my lunch in a pleasant little lay by under some trees and was kept company by two goats who didn't see why I should I should not share my meal with them. After lunch I was just setting out up the road when a Greek man in a VW Bug stopped to give me a lift. He spoke no English but had as much Urdu as I. He seemed to know where I wanted to go but when he stopped to let me off I realized that we had gone past the village, though I didn't remember seeing it. It was only after he had gone that I realized that I was at the place where I saw the ponies at the side of the road, only a few days ago.

It seemed to me that the country that was opening up to the North West was a much better choice than the one I had had in mind back at Shachkatr. The Kunjerab river, at this point not more than fifteen feet wide, was between me and my objective, and I was just considering how to get across when I spied a neat little bridge crossing the river just up the road. So off I went.

It was past 1400 hours by this time. I had plenty of food and an abundance of water, but not much time before sun down. I was determined that I was going to find a comfortable bivouac for the night in some pastoral glen beside the rippling brook I was following.. Aha, I thought;

A jug of Wine, A Loaf of Bread-and Thou
Beside me, singing in the Wilderness

And I had everything, except Thou, and resolved to make myself comfortable where opportunity offered.

Well, opportunity, as sure as Hell, knocked and I grasped it with two hands, but it was not until I had climbed the better part of 1000 feet over some of the roughest terrain I'll ever want to tangle with carrying seventy pounds on my back. It was climb, scramble, scratch and claw my way, crossing and re-crossing the nullah in the middle of which poured a blessed crystal clear stream of icy cold water coming from the 21,000 foot snow covered peaks at the head of the valley. Up ahead it looked like a nice Sunday afternoon ramble for the ladies, not more than two miles to the head of this restful, sunlit valley, at the outside. But mountains are like women; they lure you on with smiles and

promises but blind you with hair in your eyes. I thought of things like that as I cleared the parapet of that first thousand feet and looked ahead to this peaceful valley that I could hardly believe my eyes. It was a miniature Shangri La that beckoned me to succumb to its blandishments and indeed I was a willing victim..

Of course it was a lot more than two miles, closer to five before the valley started to close in on either side and up beyond was a jagged ridge that was pushing 20,000 feet at least. Somewhere up there was Mintaka Pass, or so I thought at the time for the upper reaches of my valley, Tuckermans I called it after the well known trail in New Hampshire with which it had much in common - turned away to the South, towards Mintaka and Kilik! But I felt no urge to make its closer acquaintance, particularly after my experience yesterday with Luigi who didn't need telling twice that we were being shot at.

I settled down for the night and cooked freeze dried beef bourguignon, four helpings, and potatoes with half a bottle of wine followed by dried apricots, chocolate biscuits and a cup of hot sweet tea. Across the valley to the East was a beautiful view fifteen miles away over the Kunjerab Range and Karun Pir glistening under their mantle of snow, their peaks illuminated by the last golden rays of the sun. Somewhere in the valley below a bell tolled. What more could a man want?

*

I was woken up in the night by some footsteps passing by, but I was out of sight and preferred to emulate 'Brer Rabbit'. Next time I woke up it was with the sun shining in my eyes as it cleared the eastern ramparts of the Kunjerab Range. After a hurried *chota hazri*³⁴ I set off down the 'Tuckermans' at a jog trot that took me back to that well known trail. A couple of times I stumbled and almost measured my length on the rock strewn ground, but got down to the rock fall in good time. Nevertheless it was noon hour when I made it to the KKH. I had hoped to spend that night in Tashkurgan, but after waiting for half an hour and only seeing one vehicle that didn't stop, I resolved to take the first one to stop regardless of which way it was traveling. In the event I got back to Sost where I got lucky and picked up what I called the 'shuttle bus' seating about ten people who were going to Taskurgan.!

Of course we had to stop at the Kunjerab Pass where everybody was being photographed in front of the large poster saying '16,000 feet'.

Everybody rushed out and found that their legs weren't responding very well! Two of them actually had to sit down for a while! I tried standing up and didn't seem to have any trouble this time. Evidently my first trip of a few days ago had stood me on good stead so I got out and walked around nonchalantly. As I said before there wasn't a helluva lot to see anyway and after my companions had all gotten themselves photographed in front of the poster - being careful not to obscure the 16,000 Ft bit - we all climbed aboard and took

off into Sinkiang³⁵

I was hoping to be able to see something of the Pamirs. Mustag Ata and Kangur Shan, both over 25,000 feet and ninety five and one hundred and thirty miles away, respectively. There as a haze in the middle distance which, according to the driver, was dust and sand blown off the Takla Makan desert, close to the fringes of which we were traveling. Of the two giants there was no sign, but faintly in the distance a white cloud with a yellowish fringe could be seen soaring above the haze. Not a cloud though. It was the summit of Mustagh Ata blanketed by the eternal snows. Farther to the West are the Peaks of the Pamir, most of them snow covered and conveying a picture of space and grandeur, rising above the petty squalidness of man and his works. But with my seventy-two years behind me it was unlikely that my feet would ever tramp their high passes. The lake of Sarikol, over 13,000 feet above sea level, twelve miles or so long. I have always believed it to be the source of the Amu Daria³⁶ and my ambition on this trip was to stand on its shores, the heart of Central Asia. Badakshan to the North. Warring Afghanistan to the South with armed Pakistani frontier guards that closed to route to Sari Kol, the one that that ³⁷William Henry Johnson had followed one hundred and fifty years ago. But there is a feasible route down the middle of Badakshan by road from Kashgar to Ribat Abdullah Kahn and then by horse or camel, fifty miles to the Bash Gumbaz Post on the North side of Sari Kol where it feeds the Amu Daria flowing 1,600 miles to the Aral Sea close to the Caspian Sea. I could have attempted that route with a companion, though at this stage of my journey, I was running out of time

So I bowed to fate and went only as far as Tashkurgan. where I spent two nights in a serai outside which was a sign proclaiming – believe it or not – ‘Bed & Brekhast! Which wasn’t bad at all, considering. Tea of course and bread with something that I thought of as a sheep’s tail – the upper part, I hoped – omelette. There was enough to feed three hungry Mongols just back from a quick trip across the Takla Makan and gallons of tea to wash it down.. I didn’t dare leave any but I figured that lunch was going to be conspicuous by its absence!

While I had been eating, a big ugly s.o.b. with a grizzled beard and a long night shirt, across the room, was making faces at me and my pack. Just as I was about to leave he came across and pointed to the pack and, to my astonishment spoke in Pasto of which lingo I know nothing, but had no difficulty in following the gist. “Salaam aleicum. Meri nam Ishmael. I carry pack. Come.” With which he swung it onto his back, turning to the front as he

³⁵ Sinkiang or Xin Jiang also known as Eastern Turkestan is the westernmost province of China and although the official language is Chinese, Turki and Uighur, are the predominant languages of the Islamic peoples there

³⁶ Amu Daria or the Oxus River is the demarcation line between Northern Afghanistan and Badakshan and flows over a thousand miles by Western Turkestan and Northern Iran, through the desert of Kizyl Kum to drain into the salt flats of the Aral Sea.

³⁷ William Henry Johnson, explorer and surveyor. The first man to trace the source of the Oxus River to Sarikol Lake. Late in the nineteenth century he travelled in mid Winter and had to dig through the ice to find the depth of the lake. Reportedly, 8 feet!.

did so and then stopped. Only the pack kept on going and Ishmael found himself on the floor with the pack on top of him and furniture flying in all directions. Three of his compatriots got to their feet rather quickly, wondering, I thought to myself, if they were going to have the pleasure of sticking their knives into this Infidel Feringhi³⁸. Fortunately Ishmael was equal to the situation and said something to the trio who all sat down again with disappointed looks on their faces. This time he was prepared and shouldered the pack without too much difficulty.

My problem now was to harness this fellah before he took off into the desert somewhere. But he was only heading for another Char Kharna – Tea house – around the corner. He explained that there were two Badmarshes – scoundrels – at my ‘Bed and Brekhast’ place, and anyway the tea was better where we were heading. It was worse than being in Englistan! Tea around every corner. However, the Char Kharna was the ideal place to have a bit of *bat chit* - a chat - with Ishmael who turned out to be a very companionable fellow furnished with several dog eared *chittes* from various clients of European origin and one who seemed to know his way around the country

I had hoped for a short day trip by camel into the Takla Makan to a handy oasis but it was pointed out that if I wanted to see the real desert I would have to go to Kizil Bazar, a distance of one hundred miles through some pretty rough country, where I could engage a Kirgiz camel herder to take me out. A better alternative would be to take the minibus to Yangi Hissar, a hundred and twenty miles on the road to Kashgar, but chance is a poor companion out there and I had visions of getting stuck there without any hope of transport for the return journey. In those days the KKH had not made much impression on that desolate landscape, none of which is below 10,000 feet and some big lumps of rock topping the 18,000 foot mark. In between it looked rather as if a giant bulldozer had run amok, tearing the country to pieces.

However, if I wanted to sample the terrain in comfort, he, Ishmael, could arrange a local camel trip in the direction of Cushman, a few miles to the North. He pointed out that I couldn’t get lost as I would have the Mustagh Ata to guide me. In the event we rented two ponies, one for me and the other for Ishmael and my pack and we took off for the day for what turned out to be a most interesting trip My pony was sure footed, which was just as well considering the assymetrical condition of the terrain. In fact I should say that we – my pony and I – were sure footed since, by reason of. inadequate stature of the former, my feet were more on the ground than off. I rather felt that the pony should have been paying me, rather than the converse.

We were in the Sarikol District of Eastern Turkestan, a bit under a hundred miles from the elusive lake of the same name. I knew I was not going to make it there, not this time, but there’s always hope! At least I had reached the Pamir even though the incredible mountain scenery was mostly hidden behind a haze that, I was told, was blown up from dust storms from the Takla Makan. I

noticed that we were traveling more west than north, more or less contouring but gaining height all the time and Ishmael informed me that there were some Kirghiz yurts a couple of hours away which I certainly would have liked to see. Unfortunately, though we found the campground, the birds had flown, presumably to higher pasture for their yaks. At this point I figured we had to be at about 12,000 feet and in the near distance I could see a number of snow capped peaks rising above what I thought of as the 'Altipiano' *Altiplano??*. To the West our view was blocked by steep slopes rising another 4,000 feet from which point, Ishmael assured me, we would be able to get a clear view over hundreds of miles to the West

I had been thinking in terms of a day trip but with Ishmael and the ponies, food for at least two days and plenty of water – we were practically standing on top of a spring, at that point - we could reach the ridge easily in five hours and make camp at 1900 hrs in full view of the vast spread of the Pamir. Looking at my map I realized that along the top of the ridge we were heading for lay the border between China and Russia. I had never set foot in Russia before and I was not wild about doing it for the first time without a visa. Ishmael did not attach much importance to the situation and considered it most unlikely that we would meet up with anyone, let alone a border patrol. And in any case we were not going to stay more than a few hours in Badakhshan which is a part of Eastern Turkestan, not Russia says Ishmael!

Well, we made it to the top in good time and if anything was *altipiano* this was it. We were on a patch of terrain as much as ten miles in width and stretching away to the North as far as the eye could see and from where we were standing away to the Southwest towards Lake Sarikol, the better part of fifty miles away. And not much of this high country was less than 16,000 feet with fifty percent of it under snow cover. All very nice, but my immediate concern was food and warmth for the night, neither of which seemed to be forthcoming . I looked hopefully at Ishmael “Where is this campsite you were telling me about?” I asked him. “Come, Effendi!” he said, “Good campsite, ten minutes away.” And so there was. A nice roomy, smoky and no doubt flea ridden yurt, in quite good condition and no draughts! All it lacked was one of those huge Tashkent carpets that you pay few thousand pounds for in the western world.

We got ourselves settled in with tea on the brew, me stretched out on my bedding roll. It was at this point that I had my first, and last, disagreement with Ishmael. I had realised that the ponies were still outside and said that we should bring them in before they froze. Overnight it was going to be as close to zero as makes no difference, but Ishmael just laughed. “You do not take horses into house in Englistan. Sach to hai?” Is it not true? “Yes it is true,” I observed, “But we have horse houses in Englistan .” Well, I got the horse (sorry) laugh at that with flashing teeth and the beaked nose going up and down you could have sliced the bread with! He had never heard of such a thing! Any, I insisted and we got them in. I wont say that I didn't regret it, but I can say that I was glad we didn't leave them outside all night.

Next day we found some fodder and melted some snow for them, which was a

bit of a chore since firewood was not overabundant. I had hoped to get some revealing photographs but the distant haze obliterated all but blue depths and the immediate foreground which could have been the North African desert for all there was to see. The horse manure which makes good fuel when dry, we left for the next occupant!

Before retracing our steps back to Tashkurgan, which incidentally takes its name from the tall stone tower which dominates the area, I wanted to see something of the plateau where we spent the night and left the ponies to guard my belongings and took off in the direction of Lake Sarikol or Zor Kol as it is known to the Kirgiz.. Not that we had any remote possibility of seeing it, fifty miles away, but I wanted to get the feeling of the land and the space around us and the unbelievable jumble of huge snow covered peaks and vast endless valleys between them. But the haze still robbed the scene of its clarity.

We had put about a mile behind us when Mustagh Ata to the South pushed its rounded dome out of the haze and I was just about to point it out to Ishmael when he grabbed my arm. "Look! Effendi, quickly!" There, not a hundred feet ahead and balancing effortlessly on a spire of rock above us was a huge ram with the biggest curved horns I had ever seen. He was looking straight at us. A magnificent animal, he must have been at least five feet to the shoulder. My camera was in my hand and I started to lift it cautiously, but the moment I moved, in the blink of an eye it was gone. Later somebody told me it was a Markhor which are very rare and seldom to be seen.³⁹ *Lost end of macro.*

³⁹ George Shaller, a North American writer and climber whom U had the pleasure of meeting in Canada, wrote an epic story about his research among the Big Horned sheep and

The plateau we were on sloped slightly to the South and in the distance we could see movement of figures that appeared to be scores of yaks dotted over the scarp. Ishmael told me that the Kirgiz *shepherds* had a domed yurt encampment somewhere out of sight and that they would be there for the summer grazing until the snows came. Earlier on I heard the sound of wolves calling, probably miles away but the yaks were fresh meat and I guessed that their herders had their work cut out to keep the predators away.

I could have spent weeks up there exploring the Pamirs but time was of the essence and it was going to be noon hour before we could pick up our ponies and head back down to Tashkurgan. On the way we came to a stream of clear blue water tumbling over the rocks, and the ponies made a beeline for it sucking up the water in great gulps. It was six in the evening before we got back to our starting point with many poignant memories of that incredible land. They called it the Roof of the World, and though not much of it is over 20,000 feet, it was the focus of terrestrial ambitions, both political and exploratory on the part of Russia and of the British throughout the nineteenth century. Compounded by the internecine wars, treachery, murder and intrigue, the activities came to be known as the Great Game, out of which, it must be admitted, that though few gains were made, the status quo at the break of the twentieth century remained essentially intact. A few frontiers were rearranged, blanks on maps were filled in, a few more mountains were discovered and Afghanistan gained some land to the East including the Wakhan valley which gave them common frontier with Russia.

The following morning I picked up a yard of bread, fruit and other provisions and was just in time to catch a mini bus which dropped me off at Mor Khun, a few miles below Sost. As we passed the turnoff to Mishgar I was interested to see a Pakistan army jeep and what looked like a section of infantry parked round the corner and looking like they were there to stay! I wondered if they were waiting for Luigi to come out – they could hardly have missed him with that mechanical monster of his. Or were they looking for his erstwhile partner, that *feringhi infidel!* I quickly removed my white golfing hat that somebody might have remembered seeing. It would have been a dead give away!

Mor Khun is the a little village from which the track leading up to the Karun Pir (pass) starts. Followed to its end would bring the traveler in a wide loop round to the Shingshal River, avoiding the gorges below. I had noted this alternate when I came past with Ishaq and at this juncture it was now or never. I had no difficulty in finding a place to stay the night, in fact Hassan, who seemed to be the owner of the building, hailed me like a long lost friend. Apparently he knew Ishaq quite well and had seen us when we stopped to look for the trail the previous week. When I told him that I was planning to go up to the Karun Pir (pass) next morning he told me it was an easy march. “How far to the pass?” I asked him. “One march,” he said, “But with that pack,” he looked at my gray hairs and the spaces between them, “Two marches up and one down, maybe two!” After thinking it over I figured I could take all I would need in my small pack, enough for three days at the most, but Hassan, although

he agreed to look after my big pack, was against my attempting the trip on my own. “You must take a Shikar⁴⁰,” he said, “There are some passages that are not easy and the track difficult to find. And it helps to have someone in case of need.”

Next morning the condemned man ate a hearty breakfast and the last mouthful had hardly gone down before this ruffianly looking individual appeared, “Salaams, Effendi, Me Rashid. We go to Karun Pir. Ji han?” So off we went and I have to confess that I never could have done it with my big pack, in fact I was most grateful when Rashid took my small one over some of the less easy pitches – suicidal I would have called them! We started at a little under 10,000 feet, about the same height as Tashkurgan but I was feeling the altitude much more. Rashid was restraining himself from running up the cliff faces which I thought was rather decent of him. On the climb from Tashkurgan there were quite a few steep sections and I had not refrained from holding on to my pony’s tail on several occasions! Here there weren’t no pony so I had to keep a stiff upper lip!

The route followed a relatively easy and open nullah with beetling cliffs on either side which restricted the view. However, shortly after midday we came to some primitive stone huts called, I think, Pariar, and from there we were afforded a magnificent view over the Batura glacier and the maze of jumbled peaks beyond which they seemed to go on for ever. There were a couple of tethered goats here, but no other sign of life. But we did find a bubbling spring. At least Rashid said it was a spring, but I thought it was melt water which often has fine suspended particles of grit and silica which play merry Hell with one’s personal plumbing system. I decided to drink all the contents of my thermos, and refill it with the ‘spring’ water in case of need!

By four in the pm we reached traces of packed snow which was easy to walk on. Rashid, for whose expertise I was most grateful, said that we should reach the pass within the hour which would give us plenty of time to get to a shelter that he knew of, a short distance back and off the trail. At the pass we had a fine view of the 25,000 foot summit of Disteghil Sar to the South. It lay some twenty miles away across the Shingshal valley below us. We were somewhat over the 16,000 foot level and there was a bitter wind that blew the frost right through the bones. I had hoped to be able to see the summit of Karun Pir but from where we were standing there seemed to be a lot of peaks. Perhaps after a breakfast of bacon and eggs, porridge, toast and marmalade and ‘keep the coffee coming, Charlie’ - dreams are OK but the reality is not always the same – we could reach the summit.

We found the shelter, the better part of 1000 feet lower down but not too far from the track, just as the sun dipped below the horizon. The night was cold and dismal and we awoke to an even more dismal dawn. I won’t tell you what we had for breakfast, it might spoil your bacon and eggs! Suffice to say it was first class fare for Rashid!

I decided against Karun Pir summit. It was close to 7,000 feet vertical to the top from where we overnighted and that would have meant at least another day up and down and a hard grind at that., so we retreated back to Mor Khun. When we got to the half way point at Pariar we stopped off to take a breather and brew some tea. Behind the huts to the North was a steep cliff rising almost vertically with an inviting sort of chimney. It made a comfortable place in the sun for our break so we sat with our backs to the rock and luxuriated in the warmth. I was just thinking about getting moving when I heard some stones rattling down the cliff and the next thing I recalled was Rashid looking down at me, not worried but sort of interested. I had apparently been hit by one of the falling rocks just above my right eye. Blood all over the place! I managed to find a handkerchief to staunch the blood. After a few minutes I felt better and tied the handkerchief around my temple with a bit of Kleenex over the wound.

Rashid was getting a tad concerned, no doubt worried that he might have to carry me down to Mor Khun, the better part of two hours away! I didn't think it was serious and after the blood stopped flowing we set off, rather gingerly on my part, but with Rashid carrying my pack. Fortunately I was none the worse for the accident and got down to the highway in good time.

Hassan was a great help and from somewhere produced a Suzuki which took me down to one of those AKRSP places where somebody sewed me up with string and something that looked like a carpet needle, and of course no anesthetic. But it did the job until I got back to England where I visited a health center who took out the stitches. They were most interested in the suturing, which was of a backwoods nature and made me look like one of those horror stories where people had their lips sewn up! For a time I was able to dine out on the strength of my embroidery, but now it has faded away together with all the rest of my cranial cartography.

*

I managed to get on a shuttle bus to Gilgit which deposited me at outside the Chenar Inn by mid afternoon and after booking in I decided to go for a walk in the town and do a bit of shopping. My first port of call was a tea house – what else? – and I feasted myself on tea and all kinds of tea cakes. While there I fell in with an ex Havildar (Sergeant) from the Pakistan army, one Quarban Ali who was very helpful in choosing some local *bric a brac* to take back to Canada. At the time I was consumed with a raging thirst but had not brought my thermos and iodine pills with me. On Quarban Ali's advice I bought a big glass of lemonade which, he assured me, was safe to drink.

The following morning I boarded the 07.50 flight to Islamabad with every intention of flying up to Srinigar in Kashmir as soon as I could get a seat. But the lemonade forestalled my plans dramatically. I was sitting in a hotel restaurant enjoying a second breakfast when the starter's gun went off and I just made it.. Returning to my table I was violently sick. I really thought I was

going to die and maybe I would have expired, not too gracefully, if it had not been for the friendly services of the manager of a pharmaceutical company in Rawalpindi, Tariq Wajid by name who had been sitting at an adjacent table And for whose help and advice in obtaining medication I owed him my heartfelt thanks.

The next day I managed to get a flight back out of Islamabad to London but as we were taking off it seemed that we were going to be forced to land again. Fighter planes of the Pakistan Air Force were zooming around us – is buzzing the right word? – but the pilot seemed to be saying that our *authorized* flight path was north west, over Afghanistan and ‘hope the Russians won’t shoot us down’ – my interpretation of the pilot’s announcement! Happily, we did not get shot down and made our connection at Dofar without further irritation. My abiding memory of that flight, as I sat there with a bloodstained bandage around my head, was of my dehydrated state and constant need of drinking water, coupled with my total inability to attract the attention of the flight attendant, a tall, slim, attractive looking Indo-European girl who was interested only in the advances of a male admirer. Fortunately, the flight staff was replaced at Dofar by a British crew who brought me a never ending supply of ‘real clean water’.

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Much has been written about the ⁴¹Great Game or, as it was sometimes referred to, the Gilgit Game. The footnote below is intended as a reference for those whose interest extend beyond what I have found space for in this chapter.

⁴¹ The Great Game. The players were adventurers, explorers, surveyors, politicians and military men. The stage, Central Asia and the period the Nineteenth Century. Much has been written about that area and about the men and women whose exploits focused the attention of the world upon it. For more detailed accounts of the history of this country try ‘When Men and Mountains Meet’ by John Keay or the library of the Royal Geographic Society in London.

CHAPTER X

EPILOGUE

Many people have asked me why I returned to Britain, having obviously fallen in love with Canada. While I cannot say that I went willingly and I must admit that for the first few months I kept hoping it was all a bad dream and that I would suddenly awake to find myself back in Canada where a couple of hours drive would get me up into God's Country, Summer or Winter. All my friends were in Toronto or scattered across the country from Newfoundland to Vancouver. In London the roads were grid-locked most of the time, God's Country was at least four hours drive away and every thing cost three times as much as in Canada. To top it all, the house we were moving in to was dilapidated and barely livable in and we were facing the better part of four years of renovation before we would be able to get settled down.

On the other side of the coin our house in Toronto, though all we could possibly want in a house, had been overtaken by road construction which brought the traffic almost to the front door, and a move was inevitable. The house in Kew, London, which we had inherited from our favourite aunt, we did not really want to sell. My daughter, living in London was another draw and Bozena, with many relations in Italy and Croatia, including her sister in Trieste, was keen on the move.

I haven't lost touch with Canada, in fact, since we came to London, I have returned to Toronto seven times to ski and canoe with my friends with whom communications through Email keep me in close touch and Bozena and I keep open house for any who may be visiting the country.. Here I have no friends, partly because I have so little in common with the Brits, whose parochial and self-centered life is so different from what I am used to in Canada.

Another thing that has soured my relations with the Brits is that it is impossible to place any reliance upon arrangements made with trades-people. They would make a date for such and such a day and not turn up, if ever, until a week or two later.

POST SCRIPT

Michael Naughton died in London on June 3rd 2015.