

APPENDIX D

Milton at War

Although not perhaps strictly a part of the school's history, the experiences of Miltonians during two world wars make interesting reading and the following is a selection from items that appeared in "The Miltonian", supplemented in the case of Colonel Brady with information from Peter McLaughlin's "Ragtime Soldiers".

The 2nd Rhodesia Regiment sailed for Europe during 1917 — with "Berlin via Cape Town" chalked on the train's sides — having previously been fighting in East Africa; the Miltonian reported:

We have received a poem written by one of the men on board, and we here reproduce it:

"Rhodesians on the High Seas"

September, 1917

FORWARD!

We come not rushing forth with dash,
Nor heralded with clarion blast,
Nor come we 'neath compulsion's lash,
But knowing that the die is cast,
The future calls as calls the past —
 And freedom stands aghast.

The counted cost: the wife, the child, and she
Whose lingering lips still sweetly spoke the call;
The soft-eyed mother praying anxiously;
Let them the laurels wear — to them must fall
 The happiness or gall.

No boast is ours — but kindled by the fire
Of those who high along the walls of fame
Have Rhodesia hung — may we, too, yet aspire
To 'do our bit' — our *all* — and for that name
Stiff-lipped 'to play the game'.

An O.M. present on the Western Front and signing himself "EMMA GEE" (presumably M.H. Green, who had attended Milton until 1916) contributed an account of war-shattered Ypres:

"THE RELIEF"

"WYPERS" — August, 1917

Equipped for the line we leave our warm mess.

"All present, Sergeant?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Righto."

"Section, take up your loads — 'tion."

"Move to Right in Fours" — etc. "Now we're off."

We are to meet our guide at the Menin Gate, but there's much to pass before we get there. On the Vlamertinghe road hundreds of tired and muddy men returning from the so-called trenches (?); endless transport, G.S. wagons, limbers drawn by fast-walking mules and ridden by steel-helmeted drivers with faces drawn, and voices anxiously tense as they encourage their mounts on, great lumbering motor lorries with no headlights, the swift motor tenders of the Flying Corps, while passing them all comes the never-ending stream of ambulance cars with their prominent red cross on a white circular background. Our section, now in single file, struggles on, now opening out and now closing up, each man anxious not to lose touch with his mate in front. And now we come to the region of guns, a voice suddenly on the Right "No. 4 Gun, 3° Left, 3 Rounds, FIRE." "Boo-oo-o-m" !!!!!!! Half our men involuntarily duck their heads, then laugh at their own folly. Past shattered buildings, at length looms up an immense ruin, the Asylum, and not yet being candidates for admission, we pass on; at length we come to that city which has been well called "The City of Dreadful Fear" — ruined Ypres. To

Tommy Atkins, Wypers. And now Military Police break us up into gun teams at one hundred yards interval. Past the dreadful mockery of the once beautiful Cathedral and famous Cloth Hall, picking our way over shell holes and scattered bricks and stones, and occasionally a dead mule or horse, we come to the notorious Menin Gate and Halt; immediately from the shadows of ruins comes a soldier, and we identify him as our guide, and so on over, over the moat to the land where for nearly three long years we faced the enemy foiled in all his attempts to take the city; and now starts the most trying part of our journey, for now there are no landmarks, roads or tracks to guide us, and we must rely solely on our guide and compass, and the never-ending stream of Very lights thrown up by our nervous enemy; circling round shell holes, scrambling in and out of old trenches, and tearing our way through remnants of barbed wire, an endless succession of muttered curses falls on our ears from the tired and heavily laden men. Crash!!! Four hundred yards on our left, but for us that is a safe distance, and so we struggle on, and now a scream of a shell seemingly coming directly for us; everyone instinctively drops, but it has rushed over us and ploughed up the ground seventy yards behind us. We continue on our way, yet still a little faster now, wearied though we are, and so after a couple of hours of similar incident we reach our destination.

Identification established, the people to be relieved rush through explanations and all details, only too anxious to get away. While the officers confer together, going into full details of the position, the sergeants and N.C.O.s are also busy, each handing over or taking on his duties. New sentries are posted. Guns of incomers are mounted; those of the relieved dismounted; final explanations are exchanged, a shouting of names to see that all the relieved party are present, and quickly they move off exchanging, "Goodnight" — "Good Luck". "Good Luck to you." "Mind you don't stop one." "Look out for you in 'Pop' soon", and so our Relief is complete.

Colonel Brady saw much service on the Western Front in the vicinity of Ypres, although his initial posting had been to the King's Royal Rifle Corps' recruiting and training depot at Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey

in Kent where the Rhodesians formed their own platoon. The training programme was tough and a Rhodesian recruit described it in a letter home: reveille and bed-making at 0600, a two-mile run at 0630; breakfast from 0700 to 0900, but it included cleaning and inspections; a route march usually of ten miles from 0900 to 1300 with only one five-minute stop and with full pack weighing sixty-six pounds, steel helmet, rifle and three hundred rounds; dinner 1300–1400; bayonet and rifle drill or P.T. from 1400 to 1600; tea at 1630 followed by night attack practices from 1800 to 2100 at least two or three times a week. Old habits die hard, and the correspondent, complaining of the route marches, sighed, “How we long for our native boys” — to carry the packs!

The first draft of Rhodesians under Brady’s command broke the rifle-range record of seven years’ standing — few English recruits had ever held a rifle and the Rhodesians were regularly put through their paces for their “boasted powers of wild-game shooting”.

When the unit went into action it suffered very heavy casualties and the toll of dead and wounded was so great that at times the Rhodesian platoon virtually ceased to exist. Brady — still a captain at the time — described a trench in which he had to fight, the battalion’s “post of honour” only thirty yards from the Germans’ first line of trenches:

“An open dyke some fifteen paces long; no traverses of any kind; depth from bottom of dyke to top of parapet forming protection from the enemy’s rifle fire about three feet; bottom of dyke, six inches to eighteen inches deep in liquid mud.”

Life in these trenches is unimaginable with their deprivation of everything which makes up a normal existence: good, hot food; sleep; dry clothing; warmth; safety. The men were often up to their waists in water and many drowned in the filthy, liquid mud at the bottom of the trenches or shell craters. Brady wrote: “From the sanitation point of view you can visualise the state of things which must exist with the men crowded in a stooping posture for forty-eight hours, unable to move either to the rear or right or left without becoming at once a target for rifle fire at point-blank range.” What he was getting at, of course, was that the men had to relieve themselves where they stood and, since they were often reduced to boiling water for drinking from the trench bottom — which might well contain unburied corpses too —, is it surprising that more did not die from the appalling conditions.

The cold, too, played its part — Flanders in winter is probably as far removed from the Rhodesian climate as it is possible to be in habitable

lands: one Rhodesian in the infamous Ypres Salient wrote: "The cold is frightfully trying. It is snowing and freezing hard tonight and it makes me yearn to be back on my farm in the Hunyani." Brady reported that some of his men went down with frost-bite after forty-eight hours in the trenches.

Most of the action took place at night, it was simply too dangerous to be above ground during the day and Brady described how the Rhodesian platoon buried its dead by night in the cemetery of a ruined village behind the front line. He also wrote of recovering corpses from a nearby trench after dark: "The bodies lay huddled together at the bottom of the trench; death had come so suddenly that the latest posture in life remained unchanged — the arm uplifted, the foot raised, whilst arms, accoutrements and uniform were now covered in mud". The grave for the Rhodesian bodies was dug and then, while the men formed a screen, Brady read the burial service by the light of a pocket torch. The corpse of an officer was not buried there, however, as the men requested permission to take it back to Ypres for proper burial — obviously a popular figure and much mourned.

Brady saw much active service; he wrote of a softening-up barrage on one occasion: "From our position it seemed as if a gigantic watering can, through whose jets liquid fire was pouring, was playing over the German lines". And he described taking five hours one night to creep less than a thousand yards into position under fire to take over a section of trenches some forty yards from the German lines. He was wounded twice — but he was one of the lucky ones. The Miltonian, having listed John James Joss as missing, was subsequently compelled to report him killed: "Signaller Joss (he was in the 51st Highland Division) was at an advanced observation post with another signaller. In his account of what happened the latter states that a number of Germans came upon them and both made for their lines, but a machine-gun was turned upon them, and Signaller Joss fell. His companion managed to reach a gully, where he lay until evening, when the Germans took him prisoner. As he was marched off, he passed the spot where Joss lay, and saw that he had been pierced through the temple by a bullet. The late John Joss was 21 years of age and had seen two years' active service." He was an "original" Miltonian, having joined the school in 1910 and stayed for four years.

When the Germans launched their final great offensive in March 1918, "the School fared very sadly with the ex-Miltonians at the front. Walter Melvill was severely wounded in the right leg but is now

convalescent. William Mirtle was also wounded. "Tommy" Lewis, "Sonny" Ashburner, N.B. Cran, A. Whales, H. Jackson, J.K. Mockford, W. Gray and L. Byers are reported prisoners of war, while J. Ullyett is missing. Alan Reynolds was severely wounded but is now convalescent, as is Hugh Phoenix, also wounded. Tommy Lewis was at first reported killed but then the good news came that he was a prisoner." Ullyett was later discovered to be a prisoner and the Miltonian reported with a gloomy relish: "we have heard that he was struck by a piece of shell which entered his face near the left ear, completely destroyed the left eye, and took away a portion of the bridge of his nose". J.B. — "Sonny" — Ashburner did not easily accept the loss of liberty and "along with another sub. and a colonel, he attempted to escape. They intended to make for Denmark. After having walked about 200 miles in a strange country, they were 50 miles from the border, when the Colonel decided it was no use going any further as they would only die of cold and starvation, so they gave themselves up to the Germans and were returned to the prisoners' camp where they were made to suffer for their indiscretion."

There were other Miltonians fighting in the very different conditions in the largely forgotten "Battle for the Bundu", the war of Latema in East Africa. "N.T.T." contributed an account of

A NIGHT PATROL

An hour before sundown we reached a ridge, well covered with grass, and in the gathering twilight waited for our scouts to come in with information. We knew that the enemy were not far away, but how many of them they were, or what they intended to do, we had no idea. This silent waiting amongst that long, rustling grass, with night drawing in, was not exactly soothing. It is one thing to be up and doing, but quite another to be still and waiting.

Then very quietly we formed square, for we were only a small party. Each man lay ready with his rifle, wishing that whatever was to come would come quickly.

Suddenly through the gloom a native came towards us from the bush. A shot rang out. Had the game begun? We waited, for no one was to fire until the order came along. This waiting was trying for weak nerves. We heard afterwards that one of our own askaris had fired by mistake at a returning native scout as he came to our lines. We felt that we must move now, when a white scout came in, having located the German position.

In single file, quietly and slowly, we made our way towards the enemy's camp. It was quite dark by this time and the path was rough, but we stumbled on over boulders, through thickets, and across vleis. Silently as ghosts we moved nearer our objective as the hours dragged by.

We reached the hill-side at length, where some tall trees grew and near to where the enemy lay. One by one we slipped through the gloomy trees, along the shoulder of the hill, with not a murmur, not a sound. Suddenly we started from the semi-consciousness of weary men, for everyone stopped and quietly lay down. A German sentry had passed. Did he know we were near?

For some minutes we waited, wondering what was to come next. But no sound came save an odd night bird calling in the thicket, or, far out along the hillside, a wild dog howling.

We moved on again and reached a patch of tall, thick grass on the other side of the hill. Here we formed a hollow square and waited. Each man lay in his position, whilst through the silent minutes the dry grass soughed in the night wind.

It was terribly cold for we had neither coat nor blanket, and through the tall grass a few hundred yards away the Germans camped. Then in the early morning the waning moon rose and shed a pale, weird light upon our strange position. It must have seemed like some wild scene on a dimly lighted stage.

After what felt like ages of shivering and waiting, the orders came to "fall in" and "fix bayonets". I can see the patrol as it fell in that early morning before the dawn came — the pale moon, the tall white grass, the gleaming bayonets, and, above all, feel the great stillness.

* * * * *

We began our little scrap as the dawn was breaking, and before the sun was high it was all over. Our job was completed, and we rejoined the column later in the day.

Such was the life up there. It was not all sunshine, it was not all shadow — but something like the country itself, and something like the memories it leaves behind.

The coming of the Second World War was greeted by a poem in the Miltonian which must have spoken for many:

WAR

'Tis come again, what once we strove to end.
Those heroes lying deep 'neath Flanders' fields
Lie dead in vain. The lesson that they left
Was little use. For once more but one man,
In search of power to dominate the world,
Has brought to prosperous, happy men and lands,
This turmoil, blood, and smoke, and vile gas,
This endless, loathsome train of bloody war.
Once more the youth, the very cream of men,
Must rally to this foul and bitter strife.
No thought of glorious battle rises now.
Such things are long since past. Today we go
Knowing full well no hope of glory lies
In this dread thing. But there's a task to do:
Please God we do it well.

It was attributed to "N.W.N., Form V" — presumably N.W. Nevile, who won a Beit University Bursary in 1939's examinations. The following year, amidst the more predictable "Air Raid", "Daily Heroes" and the rest, appeared another eloquent cry against the horrors of war:

MAN'S FEET ARE GONE ASTRAY

Among these lonely shaded hills,
Soft slumb'ring 'neath the quiet sky
Where blossom golden daffodils,
And gentle breezes sigh,
I rest upon cool mosses deep,
While cloudlets o'er the heavens sweep.

Whilst lying thus, there comes to me
Where mellow peace the country shrouds,
A distant murmuring melody,
A bomber plane drones through the clouds.

What signifies that silver cross
So tiny on the cloud's white breast
But death, destruction, ruin, loss
Of all the world holds best.
Alas! Man's feet are gone astray
From off that Christian lowly way.

Oh, God! if men could only see
The wanton waste and misery,
The cruel, heartless strife and pain
For just a passing, fruitless gain.
Oh, God! give grace for them to see,
And lift their hearts and minds to Thee.

G.R., Form IVa

Whilst schoolboys lamented the coming of war, those Old Miltonians already under arms were chafing for action as the months of the "Phoney War" dragged by. The first element of the armed forces to see considerable action was the Royal Navy and P. Coxwell² was a gunner on board one of the ships patrolling the Atlantic in the summer of 1940. His letter, which, the Miltonian noted, was "passed by Censor", told of some successes:

We are on patrol out here, for how long I do not know. We have captured two German ships in fourteen days. The first one was sighted at sunrise and before we could get near the crew had scuttled her and set it on fire and taken to the boats. Our boarding party tried hard to save it, but did not succeed; we had to let it go and after 8½ hours it sank after we had put a few shots into it.

The second one we got at midnight. I had just come off watch and turned in when I was pulled out again and lashed up my hammock. They had also set it on fire, but the boarding party was quick and stopped all the crew from getting away and turned them back to help put out the fires. We ran alongside the German ship and handed over our hoses to help put out the fires. I was made to jump overboard on to the German ship. I was down below helping to put out the fires and when I came up for fresh air our ship had gone! But she had gone on patrol so that other ships would not come and claim our prize.

We fought the fires for the rest of the night. At dawn another

man-o'-war of a small type came alongside to tow the prize, because its engines were out of working order. They towed us for about five hours; then our ship took over the tow and towed the prize to harbour.

I was one of the prize crew . . . I and some of the others took the prisoners over to our own ship and then returned to the prize; it was a hard fight to get back because the sea was a bit rough. When we got going we had to work hard to keep the fires down and stop the prisoners from trying to sink it. We all worked during the day time and then took our four hours' watch at night.

It took us nearly a week to get her into harbour, but when we did the prize crew were given 48 hours' leave. I had my birthday on board that German ship! . . .

Many Rhodesians joined the R.A.F. — one such was Eric Sturgess who left school towards the end of the second term of 1940 and shortly afterwards wrote to the headmaster, Mr. Livingston:

How I wish I were back in my study, with no worries worth speaking of and with the assurance of a good night's sleep at the end of the day. No blackouts, no sirens, no shattering bangs pulling you out of bed, no fire alarm, and, above all, no warrant officers. Still, I'm glad I came for several reasons; firstly, in just sixteen weeks' time I will actually be helping our pilots to bring Jerry down, also there is the experience of life under war conditions, and the greater knowledge I am gaining of my fellow men.

I never thought I should be using the little French I learnt . . . to act as interpreter for Poles in an English camp. There are Polish airmen here, who have fought their way through many countries, and have formed up here for training. In the course of their travels they've picked up a little French and that is the only means of conversing with them; thus, in the canteen, I often act as a rather stumbling medium, when our lads swap experiences with them. They are a happy lot, and when they are amused they clap their hands and laugh like children.

. . . For nearly three weeks now, I have had no word from Hubert³, who remained behind at Bridgworth waiting to be posted for training as a pilot. His is a twenty-two week course, so I will be in it before he has finished his training, and thus will have beaten him to it. I don't know why his letters have not arrived, but

I do know that he is well, if a bit impatient to have done with waiting and get stuck into Jerry.

There are many O.M.s among us, and it is quite interesting to hear the stories about things which happened in "their" time, when "the rigger team *was* a rigger team", and the prefects were tyrants, etc. There are also chaps from other schools who talk of times when they played against Milton at rigger and cricket. Now, there is no jealousy, only memories of games hard fought, lost and won . . .

The first O.M. to obtain a decoration for bravery in the field seems to have been A.M. Ruda, who was awarded the M.M. whilst serving with the delightfully named Transvaal Scottish in East Africa. He had been captain of the school rugby and boxing teams in 1935 and, coincidentally, the second old boy to gain a medal, W. Treger, had also been a member of both teams. His citation for the D.F.C. recorded that:

Flying-Officer Treger, since July 1940, completed 53 operational missions, involving some 320 hours of flying. During the period June 25 to July 21, 1941, Flying Officer Treger carried out sixteen missions with coolness and success. In an attack on Tripoli Harbour, despite intense anti-aircraft fire, he succeeded in obtaining a direct hit on an 8000-ton tanker, which was destroyed. Throughout Flying Officer Treger has shown the utmost keenness and determination and set a fine example to all.

Another member of the 1st XV now with the R.A.F. was Archie Wilson, subsequently to become the first Rhodesian-born commander of the Rhodesian Royal Air Force. He had an adventurous war and in a letter from the summer of 1941 described a narrow escape:

I was engaged in chasing a Junkers 88 over the sea when an unfortunate event occurred. I was unconscious and when coming to found that I was diving out of the clouds at 600 m.p.h. towards the sea. Unfortunately, I was quite dazed and blind at the time, something having exploded in my face. Well, suddenly something happened (fortunately for me) while I was trying to regain control, and I was torn out of the machine and then I realised that I was hurling through the air head over heels, still half unconscious as in coming out of the aircraft I had hit the tail plane of the machine. Now, luckily, though dazed and blinded I remembered to pull the ripcord of the parachute and again luckily it opened and I landed safely in the sea. I was picked up two hours later by a flying boat.

During the period I was in the sea I regained consciousness and my sight returned. I was kept afloat by my life jacket. Although the above was uncomfortable at the time it is good to look back on and was exciting since I've made my first parachute descent. My only regret is that the Hun got away.

Wilson goes on to complain of stiffness and the bloodshot nature of his eyes as a result of which he wasn't able to fly for some time: "But still I shouldn't grouse as it's by an act of God that I'm still alive."⁴

By 1942 more than 700 Old Miltonians were under arms in every theatre of the war. In the Middle East Sergeant A. Moseley won the Military Medal under circumstances described by another O.M. who had fallen in with Moseley's C.O.:

We have palled up to several officers from the Middle East, including a Capt. Stevens, who commanded a platoon of Rhodesians with Sgt. Moseley, and who has recommended him for the M.M. for an act he did just before leaving the desert a month ago. The reputation of the Rhodesians in the desert is terrific; in fact, we are rather living in their reflected glory here, for these are all regular soldiers who are not prone to throwing bouquets at colonials. It is really fine to hear first-hand accounts of their work in the desert, and of course there is hardly a name that they mention which I don't know, but young Moseley is apparently the bravest of the brave. His act for which he has been recommended was for taking four "jeep" cars on which were mounted machine guns and going out on night patrol and shooting up Germans; he led his section so well that they started sixteen fires in the enemy lines in the face of intense fire. Naturally Capt. Stevens, who is cricket captain of Kent and brother of the famous English Test bowler, was very interested to learn more about his men from us.

Charles Perry, of a well-known Bulawayo family⁵, had a horrifying ordeal on his way to England to join the Royal Marines; having sailed from Cape Town with his wife Joan, his ship was torpedoed at about 11.30 in bad weather and heavy seas:

Everyone was marvellous — no panic and the women and children grand. They were just put in boats, Joan had a little girl of five, belonging to a woman who also had a boy of seven and a baby eighteen months old. Luckily just before they were lowered away I was called in too. I was thankful.

Just as we were being lowered, being the first boat away, a

third torpedo struck just alongside of us. An awful moment, for the boat all but capsized. We got away with nine children between seven months and nine years, twenty women, four stewards and one seaman. Luckily two of the civilians were ships' masters and Capt. Davidson took command while we got to the oars.

The seas were mountainous. We drifted away in company with twelve other boats and then sea anchors were fixed up. The conditions in our boat were dreadful, with all the women and children on the bottom of the boat, for there were forty-eight altogether. However, there wasn't a murmur.

At 2 o'clock a ship came in sight and the gallant captain, a Pole with a Polish crew, stood by . . . We were the last of twelve boats to be picked up, after ten hours⁶ aboard in a sea in which I never thought a lifeboat could survive. A hair-raising business being got aboard; the women were dragged up in a collar, while we had to climb up ropes slung over the side. . .

That night together with all day Sunday were a real picnic — imagine 1,000 odd men on a small boat equipped to feed and carry 55. . . The most welcome sight was the arrival of two destroyers to escort us at twelve midday Sunday, but even their presence did not stop another attack on us, for at 6.30 on Monday morning we were brought to our senses with depth charges being dropped, a dreadful hour until it was light enough to see our escorts going round in circles and our ship doing likewise . . .

Nothing daunted, Charles Perry managed to get to England to join the Marines; he was commissioned, passing out first in his group of 95.

Another Old Miltonian who had some grim experiences at sea was Ronald Shinn, who was on H.M.S. Dunedin when it was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic; he was one of the 63 survivors of a ship's company of 481 and he told a truly terrible tale in a letter to his parents:

We went out in search of a German raider operating in the middle of the Atlantic and after four days' steaming from our base we were about 1000 miles from the African and American coasts. The look-out spotted a mast ahead, and half an hour afterwards there was a lovely bang, followed by another a couple of seconds later. Smoke, water and debris went sky-high and the ship took a nasty list.

Then things started. We started getting the rafts off, with everybody slipping and sliding on the fuel oil, which had been

spread all over the decks by the explosion. Once the rafts were over everybody swarmed over the side and made a dash for them; but, as you may imagine, there wasn't enough room on the rafts for everyone, so some had to go down and they did.

The fuel oil took a few, because, although it calmed the sea, it was nasty swimming through, especially when you swallowed a mouthful.

I couldn't get a show in anywhere, as all the rafts were crowded, so I had to find some other means of support, and after a little swimming about came across a wooden gangway which was just big enough to take my weight. That's where I stopped and watched the ship gradually go down. Before she went to the bottom the U-boat came to the surface to have a look round, then went down again. When the ship disappeared we got down to business. All the rafts got together and it wasn't long before we had connected them with lengths of rope.

Our first discovery was that there wasn't any water in the bottles and we had only half a box of biscuits among us. Well, it wasn't long before it was dark. Being the first night everybody saw rockets, lights and all kinds of things that weren't there. The first thing that greeted me in the early hours as I sprawled on my gangway was the fin of a shark which cut the water very nicely all round me. I just about fell off my gangway with fright and I am sure my hair stood on end in spite of all the fuel oil in it.

By the afternoon one man had died from burns, so that gave me the chance to get on to a raft. I took it quick and lively. When the next night fell things took a turn for the worse and a couple of fellows got light-headed and we had to be cruel to be kind and give them a good thumping. During the night there was a short shower and we all put out our tongues to get a little moisture. Next day another man died on our raft, and another in the afternoon from drinking salt water. That afternoon we managed to pick up a mast and sail from one of our broken boats. We cut the sail into pieces to shield ourselves from the sun, and tied the mast to the raft, with a pair of pants fluttering from the top.

Things got on the move again the following night. Fellows were diving off, saying they were going to make some tea or going for a couple of beers. Not all the hammering in the world would hold them. Next morning there were a few more short, including

two officers whom we didn't expect to return because they went completely mad and were trying to bite everyone.

But in spite of our troubles we did have fate on our side because that night it rained again. It rained cats and dogs and we caught enough water to fill our bottles and then we had a drink as the water ran off the canvas, which made a big difference to the outlook.

During the day the men kept seeing aircraft, convoys, bottles of beer all round. Well, when it came to 4 p.m. and someone said he saw smoke on the horizon, we just gave him a pathetic look, but after a little investigation we could see masts and superstructure, so we started to paddle — and did we paddle! Was she German, Vichy French, British or American? We wondered, but it didn't stop us paddling.

She kept stopping every now and again, and we couldn't make out why. When we got close we were relieved to see the Stars and Stripes. On board everything was waiting for us in the dining-room, and, ye gods, did that coffee taste good!...

The reason for the queer behaviour of the ship was that there were two more rafts ahead of us that we didn't know of and she was picking them up. The following morning we were very sorry to hear that five more of our survivors had died during the night.

Ronald Michell, who at that time held the record for the highest individual score in the Milton-Plumtree cricket matches with 142, was with the R.A.F., but he too had a watery experience. Whilst on convoy protection, his engines failed and the machine had to come down in the sea. The aircraft broke in half, and one half went away with the second dinghy so there were nine to crowd into the survivor; from that position the crew saw their plane sink. "I knew that the Atlantic is pretty big", said Michell, "but it looked a darn sight bigger when we were in the dinghy at least 400 miles from the nearest land". Michell and his crew were lucky — they were picked up after four-and-a-half hours by a naval vessel which, they discovered, was on the way to Africa. "Two of us were from Rhodesia so we tried to work a point and get back home for a short while, but we were unsuccessful in our efforts."

Michell was also on bombing raids over Germany and mine-laying expeditions in the Baltic; he gave his parents a vivid description of flak in a letter: "It really is an amazing sight to see the continuous stream of flak, as all the light flak is tracer and consists of every colour under the sun.

These coloured tracks follow us in a continuous stream up to about 1000 feet and then begin to curve away, giving a fountain effect. It all looks very beautiful and harmless.”

One who learnt to his cost that, for all its beauty, the flak was far from harmless was Wing-Commander Ashley Jackson, remembered “by many Old Boys as one of the finest head prefects the School has had”; he was killed over Stettin in January 1944 and buried in the military cemetery there. Not long before his death he too had been on convoy duty and had written eloquently of the Merchant Navy:

The merchant seaman characterises the highest virtue in the British race — dauntless courage, devotion, singleness of purpose, humbleness. For them there is no glory, no military uniform, no proud beribboned chest to display — just old simple civilian clothes with democracy written broadly over their make-up. The British Empire owes its greatness to those simple sailormen who have learnt to master that relentless, pitiless enemy, the sea.

I realised then (i.e. whilst on convoy duty) why we would never be beaten by a Continental Power, however mighty. Last year I met many who had had their ships sunk under them for the fourth time. They had no medals to prove their manliness and courage to the outside world, and were waiting for their terrible burns to heal so as to get back to sea again.

Perhaps the determined heroism of the Merchant Navy may be matched by the story of Corporal Trevor Booth, who was mentioned in dispatches as a result of an encounter in Italy which was reported by the Chronicle:

Booth's troop, in which he was a crew commander (i.e. of a tank), were detailed to do a difficult job when, with the infantry of a Brigade of Guards, the Rhodesian squadron were driving against the town of Torita. The main road being heavily mined, troops were sent off to do a flanking attack on the town to take the enemy by surprise. Booth, in the leading tank, found the route extremely rough and through difficult country, and was within 200 yards of the objective when he was forced to make a detour at a demolition.

Booth descended from his tank to guide it, but while he was doing this, the tank was damaged by an explosion right beneath it. He surmised that a charge had been set off by means of a wire by a party of enemy nearby. The blast of the explosion broke one of Booth's legs and badly dazed him. The clothes of one of his crew

were alight as he baled out of the tank, and Booth, with amazing fortitude, stumbled to his assistance and tore off his clothes.

A supporting tank sent a first-aid party to their assistance, but by this time the enemy, who had been covering the demolition, had rushed to the scene, and from point-blank range opened fire on both wounded and would-be rescuers, who had just got the first-aid box opened.

Once again Booth, equal to the occasion, pulled out his pistol and went into action till he lapsed into semi-consciousness. From the moment when his tank was damaged and he himself injured it was forty minutes before the supporting tanks cleared out the enemy and could rescue the wounded.

Another O.M. in Italy was K.B. Hanssen — “none of us thought of him as a poet when he was at School” remarked the Miltonian, but he had been inspired by the Italian Campaign to write a set of verses entitled

INFANTRY 1944

When the weather's too inclement for the aeroplane to fly,
When the ground's a bit too soggy for the tank to have a try,
When everything's too filthy for everyone but me,
They write a little paragraph about the infantry.

If only I were jet-propelled or radio-controlled
In blazing banner headlines my story would be told,
But, as it's only brains and guts that take me where I go,
My glamour co-efficient is exceptionally low.

Now disgracefully in Norway I let the foe advance.
In Burma, too, and Africa and Crete, and Greece and France,
While others were preparing I — incompetently — dared
To venture into battle, alone and unprepared.

Before the flower of victory sprouts out of a machine
And fills the public's nostrils with the scent of gasoline,
I hope some backroom boy will find a substitute for me,
“Pre-fabricated, bipod-type, mark something, infantry.”

By the end of the war, over 900 O.M.'s were serving with the Forces and 113 more had lost their lives, but it is a safe guess that none of them had a more extraordinary series of adventures than J.B. Harrod, whose story was first published in a South African magazine — “The South African Sapper” — which opined that “the story of his many escapes will rank as

one of the most thrilling of the many dramatic episodes of World War II. It might be very suitably entitled 'Hairbreadth Harry Rides Again' but we are giving it the simple title of 'The Amazing Adventures of a South African Sapper!' . . . it will be found to contain as many thrills as are found in any Edgar Wallace or Sir Philip Oppenheimer novels."

It was scarcely an exaggeration — Harrod's adventures do indeed make exciting reading, though in the later stages particularly his sheer callousness also becomes somewhat chilling. John Harrod was in the 1st Anti-Tank Regiment in Egypt in 1941 where, a common experience, he found the standard issue two-pound anti-tank guns quite useless against heavy German tanks, and soon got himself transferred to a unit specially trained to undertake sabotage work behind the German lines. He was in Tobruk when it surrendered and there followed a series of escapes from Italian P.O.W. camps which always ended in recapture brought about by a combination of his weakness from the diet and conditions of imprisonment and the nature of the territory through which he had to escape — swamp or desert.

Eventually the prisoners were transferred to Italy — again the conditions were appalling: they were given "two biscuits and a tin of Italian bully beef" for the four-day trip and the holds were then battened down;

there was barely sufficient room to lie down and just about everyone was suffering from stomach trouble, and quite a few actually had dysentery badly; add to this the fact that the boats had been used to bring across crude oil and no attempt had been made to clean them out. Some of the boats had to put back to Tripoli as so many fellows died from dysentery during the first day out. More than one of these boats were torpedoed coming across and in every case the Italians made no attempt to release the men from the holds but took to the boats and left them trapped . . ."

Once in Italy, Harrod was sent to Brindisi and then further north to Lucca to a camp situated on a piece of reclaimed marshland where the conditions were "practically unbearable". He quickly determined to escape, was betrayed — "the plan was given away by one of the fellows in the working party; he probably got some extra food, etc." — and, in company with two others, quickly evolved a new plan which saw them successfully out of the camp and into the mountains. They headed for the sea and on the fourth day

we had a good view of the coast, but were extremely disappointed to find that the fishing boats were not moored off the beach as we had expected, but all in the harbour of a small town (Manfridonia). There was nothing else to do but adopt a bold move, so the following evening we strode into the town and posed as German soldiers on leave. No Germans had been in this town, and the people were of a very simple class; in fact they insisted on taking us to the only hotel in the town, so we had no option but to hire a room. That night we slept in a bed for the first time in years. The rest of the hotel was occupied by Italian officers. I had found out that the fishing fleet put out at dawn, so at dawn next morning we were down at the harbour, selected a boat, and put out to sea with the rest of the fleet. Once clear of the harbour we changed course, and if the wind had held we would have got away, but after a few hours' sailing we were becalmed, and a patrol boat came out to investigate, and we were once more in the Bag. I was sentenced to 31 days' solitary confinement but only served 21 days, as our troops had invaded Sicily and orders came out that we had to be moved north.

Harrod now determined to escape from the train carrying him north by "opening the leather concertina between the coaches" whilst the guards were asleep. At 4.00 in the morning, as the train was pulling into Bologna Station, he and two others put the plan into action but

before the third man had jumped the guards woke up. The game was on. I dived under a stationary truck, and the other two shot off in different directions. The guards opened fire and gave chase. The R.A.F. fellow leaped into a mail truck and began sorting mail, and the third fellow was caught as he tried to scale over a fence. As soon as the chase had passed me, I left my hiding place and made for the main entrance of the station. I was wearing a great coat which I buttoned up to the neck. The guard at the entrance was just about to ask for my pass, etc. when I gave him a glare and said in Italian that I was a German. The Italians were scared of the Germans, so he stood back and let me pass. I now found myself in the middle of Bologna, a town about the size of Johannesburg. I intended making for the mountains and heading south, living on what I could steal. It started getting light long before I was clear of the town, and it became essential that I find somewhere to hide out in for the day. I selected a house that looked empty, scaled the

wall and broke in. My luck was in; it was unoccupied. I found some tinned food which I ate, and then turned in to get some sleep. As soon as it was dark I was on my way, but here my luck failed and just as I was getting clear of the town I ran into a bunch of Italian police. Once more the game was up.

Eventually Harrod finished up in a P.O.W. camp at Laterina and there met again Cliff Thomson, the R.A.F. pilot with whom he'd escaped at Bologna. The two of them and another twenty or so others were kept in a special wired-off section of the camp where they had to report at two hour intervals to prove they hadn't escaped and at night had their ankles chained together although "we soon overcame this little difficulty by putting on a couple of pairs of thick socks, so that as soon as the Italians left us we would take off the socks and slip the chains off, being careful to replace them before . . . the morning". Escape, of course, was still intended and a tunnel had been far advanced (with ventilation from a fan "made from Red Cross food tins and turned by hand through gearing etc.") when news came that Italy had signed the Armistice⁷. There was much debate as to whether to proceed with the escape or wait for liberation but eventually the Italian guards deserted and Harrod, Thomson and an English private named Butler wasted no time in getting away; "the rest of the fellows remained in the camp waiting for our troops to arrive, but the Germans arrived instead and they were all taken to Germany".

The first plan was to seize a plane at Siena aerodrome and fly across to Allied lines "but where we slipped up was that we did not know that the Germans had already arrived to occupy the drome; they opened up on us with machine guns, we dived out of the plane and raced for the bush. The plane was destroyed but we got away". Eventually they got in touch with the Italian underground and Thomson and Butler decided to attempt to get through to British lines whilst Harrod stayed on to form a sabotage unit behind German lines. He rapidly got control of a band, promoting himself to Captain to give greater authority, and, with 200 Italians, 50 Russian deserters from the German army and about 50 mixed troops — Poles, some Sikh Indians, and a few American commando troops — rapidly became a thorn in the flesh of the enemy.

We carried out extensive sabotage work, blowing up power lines, bridges, etc. and shooting up troops moving on the road, raided towns, shot up Fascist troops, looted their stores, etc. On one occasion I carried out a successful raid on a warehouse, securing

about 2½ tons of grain. I picked about a dozen men and we crept forward and knifed the Italian guards, and the rest of my band came in with mules and horses, and we got away with the lot.

Eventually a group of “high Fascist officers” were sent to wipe out the guerilla bands in the area, and Harrod got the details in typical fashion: a beautiful, expensively-dressed young woman was brought to his headquarters and she gave vital information about “the coming Fascist clean-up”:

Knowing Italians fairly well by this time I knew that there was obviously some favour required of me. I scanned the list of names she had given me, expecting to find her family name amongst this crowd of Fascists who I intended to wipe out. True enough there it was. Luigi Comporte, so I asked her if it was one of her relations; she said it was her husband. This did not surprise me as it was not unusual to find a family split through political feelings. Naturally I thought I had hit upon the price of her information, and told her I would make a point of seeing that he was not shot. This really beautiful young girl shook me rather badly by explaining very carefully that she was a Catholic and therefore could not obtain a divorce from her husband who was considerably older than her and her one ambition in life was to get rid of him and marry her more attractive lover. So I had to promise her to make particularly certain that he was amongst the killed. This promise I fulfilled. This girl afterwards proved to be one of my most valuable agents, but she carried out one mission too many and was shot by the Germans.

Harrod wasted no time in making use of the information she had brought and decided to attack the Fascist HQ, which was well guarded, and shoot the leaders:

It was now that I had a stroke of amazing luck. The Germans had sent a Russian Division to fight in Italy and practically the whole division deserted, mainly across to our lines, but fifty fully armed men and an officer came back into the hills and joined me. I now found myself with fifty men in German uniform, so I decided on a gamble. Next morning, myself dressed in civilian clothes, and the Russians still in their German uniforms, we marched straight into the small town where the Fascist HQ. were. The Russian officer produced his papers and we were in. (I was acting as the Italian interpreter for the party.) The Fascist’s HQ Staff turned out to

welcome us, and at a given order from me we opened up with Tommy guns and grenades: the surprise was complete and we wiped out the whole bunch. The whole town was in a panic, the remaining Fascists took to their heels and we got clean away, the only casualty on our side being one man slightly wounded by a splinter from one of our own grenades. This I consider was one of my most successful stunts.

On another occasion two Americans from Harrod's band were captured and he determined to rescue them; he took about sixty men and attacked the town where the prisoners were held:

After a short scrap the town was ours until reinforcements arrived; we had no time to waste. I had to blow the prison door down while they were still dazed. I dashed in, shot a couple of Fascist officers who had their quarters in the prison, and got the remaining three guards to get the keys and open up the cells, but our fellows weren't there and the Italian prisoners were too scared to come out and escape because of the shooting etc. On the way out two of the guards I had left alive tried to draw concealed pistols and shoot me in the back, but my Sikh Sgt. got them both with a burst from his sten gun. This raid had serious consequences as one of the Fascist officers I had shot had very good connections in the Fascist party, and within a couple of days a very strong force of Fascists attacked us. They were fully armed with mortars, artillery, heavy machine guns and flame throwers. The fighting wasn't going too well with us, as we had no heavy weapons, and I had quite a few of my men killed and wounded in this little scrap, though it was far from being one-sided. At about this time the Americans had broken through at Cassino⁸, and were advancing rapidly. This was too much for the Italians, and they deserted to a man, leaving their commander (a little Fascist Captain who had boasted that when he captured me, he would give me a pretty tough time before finally shooting me) right in my area. It was now my turn and I threw a net around the area, and captured him trying to get away in civilian clothes. I tried him and shot him.

The Germans were retreating rapidly, so I moved in and occupied the town of Roccastrada, knowing that the Germans must retreat through this town. Sure enough the following day about 150 Germans (mainly office staff) all lightly armed, moved into the town. We allowed them to get right into the town, and

then opened up. We massacred the lot, but within an hour a strong force of Germans arrived and we were driven out of the town. They took immediate reprisals on the townspeople, shot about fifty, burnt down a whole block of houses, and cut a couple of youngster's hands off (this I saw for myself). It had the desired effect, as all the Italian members of my band deserted and I was left with under a hundred men. By now the Americans were fighting on the Marema Plain, within a couple of miles of my headquarters. I now got busy spotting German artillery and anti-tank gun positions, and sending the information through at night. These were an exciting few days and I had a grandstand view of the whole battle. I had my Russians placed on a few paths running back into the mountains, as I realised that when the Germans broke and retreated, quite a few would endeavour to get back to the main road through the forests. This is exactly what happened, and not a Jerry got through my area (i.e. in the mountains). We accounted for about 200 Germans.

Eventually, on 23 June 1944, exactly two years after his capture at Tobruk, Harrod joined up with the Americans. He returned to Rhodesia for some leave and was awarded the Military Medal for his exploits; some of his leave was spent in Bulawayo — and no doubt the pupils of Milton thrilled to the story of his adventures!

Notes

¹ What the Miltonian didn't report — and, indeed, could scarcely have known at the time — was that Lewis was the last of the victims of the famous Baron von Richthofen who commanded a group of fighter pilots whose exploits earned them the name of "Richthofen's Circus". Richthofen accounted for more than eighty Allied planes and shot down Lewis over German lines near Amiens on 20 April 1918; the next day his red Fokker triplane was brought down by Captain A. Roy Brown of the Royal Flying Corps and Richthofen was killed, eleven days short of his twenty-sixth birthday. Subsequently Tommy got to know the Baron's family — they used always to exchange Christmas cards and became good friends.

² He was later killed in action in 1942 during the Battle of the Atlantic.

³ His brother, H.J.S. Sturgess, who was killed in action in 1942.

⁴ He was subsequently promoted to Squadron Leader and on one occasion led the escort to Winston Churchill when he arrived on a visit to the Middle East.

⁵The brother of Alfred Perry, commemorated in the stained glass window in St. John's — see footnote ⁸, Ch. 1.

⁶Sic! — Perry's times don't seem to add up — his account would suggest something over fourteen hours adrift in the lifeboat.

⁷It made little practical difference initially as the Germans simply took over with the assistance of Fascist sympathisers.

⁸His brother, Barry, was killed in action near Cassino in June 1944; the third brother, Cedric, spent the latter part of the war in command of an important seaplane base in the Far East and received the D.F.C.

ROLL OF HONOUR

1914-1918

T.A. Carnegie
N.V. de Beer
T. Ely
R.H. Johnston
J.J. Joss

H.D. Keigwin
J.A. Myburgh
H.E. Ricketts
C.T. Stuart

F. Taylor
F.W. Thomas
J. Van Zyl
E.F. Wilkinson

1939-1945

J.C. Atkinson
W.H. Austin
D.L. Baker
S.D. Baldachin
S.A. Bamberger
S. Barbour
D.D. Bentley
D.F. Bernstein
G.G. Blyth
A.F. Booth
D.M. Boon
H. Boyer
H.H. Brown
A.D. Campbell
A.H. Classen
A.W. Coley
P. Coxwell
D.S. Crossley
Brough Davies
W.H. Day
A. Dixon
T.W. Dunk
A.S. Edington
P. Ellenbogen
D.W. Erikson
E. Evans
A.A. Feigenbaum
I.S. Francis
A. Fulton
M. Gallinos
A. Garos
S.L. Geach
L. Gibson
F. Goldstein
G.O. Gordon
D. Graaf
S. Graaf
C.E. Greenwall

A.M. Griffiths
M. Gruber
R.I. Gruber
B. Harrod
F.S. Haslett
S.G. Haslett
G.W. Hendrie
M.J. Heydenrych
R.J. Heydenrych
D.K. Hodge
C. Hore
E.V. Hore
A.W. Horobin
R.B. Houston
S.B. Ingram
A.D. Jackson
C.J.A. Jacobs
W. Jaques
J. Jeffrey
D.H. Johnson
L.J. Loewenson
G.R. Lacombe
S.P. Lacombe
D.C. Leggo
R.H. Lewen
G.W. Liddell
R.I. Liptz
G.E.R. Lock
J. MacMurray
W.A.B. Maxwell
D. McLean
S. McPhee
A.R. Meldrum
D. Milne
H.B. Mitchell
L.R. Mitchell
S. Mitchell
E.F.C. Montgomery

D.E. Murray
B.L. Nesbitt
M.P. Noble
E. Owen
A.C. Petty
E.M. Price
R.M. Quarendon
C.J. Ralstein
S.C. Rhynas
P. Rix
F.H. Robertson
D.J.R. Robinson
R.T. Rounthwaite
C.R. Rundle
H.L.O. Rundle
J.J.F. Russell
W.A. Russell
L.V. Schaffer
A.A. Scrooby
W.E.G. Sheffield
F. de Smidt
R.R. Smith
D. Stewart
G.C.D. Stowe
H.J.S. Sturgess
B.J. Thal
P.H. Theodosiou
H.A. Todman
T.B. Treble
G.R. Turkington
E.A. Turner
J.J. Veldsman
N. Walker
J.B. Wallenn
A.A. Watt
E.H.E. Welby
R.A. Wright

1974-1979

L. Androliakos	H.H. McKenzie	A. Stainthorpe
C.J. Coom	D.L. McLaren	K.W. Standers
C.J. Davy	H. Myerson	G.D. Summers
B.T. Furber	S. Nugent	J.G. Terblanche
D. Hawkes	W.M. Partridge	C. van Blomenstein
A.D. Herbst	C.W. Posthumus	J.C. van Hese
G.V. Hunt	I.M. Procter	A.E. van Wijk
F.M. Kaschula	S.W. Randall	A.E. Vaughan
J.M. Kelly	I.A. Robertson	A.M. Wilson
W.L. Loxton	R.L. Sanderson-Smith	J.B. Yates

C.A.T. Hales killed by guerillas whilst on R and R.

WINNERS OF MILITARY DECORATIONS IN THE TWO WORLD WARS

WORLD WAR I

R. Allan M.C.	F.W. Thomas M.C.,	Col. J.B. Brady D.S.O.,
N. Cranswick M.C.	Croix de Guerre	Croix de Guerre
D.E. Randall M.C.		

Mentioned in Dispatches

A.J. Peiser	Col. J.B. Brady (four times)
-------------	------------------------------

WORLD WAR II

W.W. Acutt M.B.E.	J.M. Loewenthal M.M.
H.G. Addecott M.C.	W.A.R. MacDonald D.F.C.
H.C. Ballance D.F.C.	J.R.B. MacDonald M.C.
J.W. Baggot M.B.E.	W.C. MacNeilage D.S.M.
J. Baron M.C.	M. Mansell D.S.C.
D. Barlow D.F.C.	A. Moseley M.M.
R.J. Bawden M.C.	A.D. Munn M.C.
R.G. Boswell D.F.C.	F.O. Nichol D.F.M.
J.B. Brady O.B.E.	J.C. Pare D.F.C.
A.H. Calder B.E.M.	F.H. Robertson D.F.C.
R.A. Cooper M.B.E.	S.R. Peacock-Edwards D.F.C.
C.H.V. Cooke M.C.	A.M. Ruda M.M.
L.L. Dando D.F.M.	O.J. Schulman D.F.M.
G.B. Davis D.S.C.	A.G. Smythe D.F.C.
H.C. Fisher M.C.	H.H. Taylor D.F.C., D.F.M.
J.B. Harrod M.M.	W. Treger D.F.C.
C.R. Harrod D.F.C.	E.C.W. Trollip, D.F.C., A.F.C.
K.G. Harvey D.S.O.	C.J. van Jaarsveld M.C.
T.E. Hendrie D.S.O.	E.L. Williams D.F.C. & Bar
C.E. Kalshoven M.C.	A. Wilson D.F.C. (U.S.A.)

Mentioned in Dispatches

H.B. Ashburner
P. Baron
B.E.E. Bawden
T.F. Booth
A.D. Campbell
J.H. Charsley

J.S. Gray
G.B. Hendrie
L.C. Ross
A.A. Rubenstein
R.R. Stirling
H. Streak

J. de L. Thompson
E.C.W. Trollip
D.C. Trow
L.A. Visagie
R.D. Widdows

The original — First World War — panel of the School War Memorial carries the inscription:

“Brave in peril, constant in tribulation, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving, one to another”.