

THE DUNTROON SOCIETY

Newsletter 1/1991

April 1991

Chinese Windmill Palm

[In Newsletter 2/1989 there appeared an article by Susan Parsons on the garden of Duntroon House. It was included to give expression to one of the less recognised elements that combine to generate the ethos and attraction of Duntroon. For a similar reason the following is reprinted here by the kind permission of the Editor of *The Canberra Times* and by Robert Boden the writer, inter alia, of that newspaper's weekly 'Tree Portraits' feature. He would welcome any leads to the solution of the puzzle posed here. Ed.]

The commonly held image of palm trees does not readily accommodate fronds covered with ice and snow, yet there is one species, Chinese Windmill Palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, which thrives in these conditions. Its natural environment in mountainous regions of China provides ideal preparation for life in Canberra.

The name *Trachycarpus*, is from the Greek, *trachys*, rough, and *karpos*, a fruit, an allusion to the hairy seeds of some species. The specific epithet honours Robert Fortune, a Scottish horticulturist, who lived and collected in China almost continuously for eighteen years in the mid-19th century. One of his achievements was to collect and export the first tea plants to India for the East India Company.

The common name 'windmill' refers to the appearance of the tree with a tuft of fronds surmounting a single trunk. It is also called a fan palm because of the fan-like nature of the fronds. An alternative common name is Chusan Palm referring to its native Chinese habitat. Although somewhat slow growing, Chinese Windmill Palm is hardy and pest-free reaching a height of 6 metres in sunny, well-drained positions in Canberra.

There are fine specimens in home gardens throughout Canberra, however, one Chinese Windmill Palm, now in Duntroon House gardens, has a fascinating history. It also presents something of a horticultural puzzle.

The Royal Military College was transferred to Sydney in 1931 as a result of the prevailing economic depression. Before leaving, the Commandant, Brigadier F.B. Heritage asked Mr Norman Parbery, dentist to the College, to care for a Chinese Windmill Palm growing near General Bridges' grave. To protect it from vandalism, Norman Parbery transplanted it to his garden at 35 Giles Street, Kingston where it flourished.

Following Norman Parbery's death in 1977, the lease of his house was bought by the retail firm, J.B. Young Ltd with a commitment to retain the tree when the house was demolished. The site became a carpark pending redevelopment and the tree began to deteriorate through soil compaction and lack of adequate water.

In 1988, several people including Kingston resident Mr Ian Hirst, Lady Cain, Norman Parbery's daughter who remembers the tree as a young child, and Major General Blake (1957), Commandant of the RMC, with the help

of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, arranged for the tree to be lifted carefully and returned to Duntroon. It now stands proudly among other trees in the well-tended garden of Duntroon House.

The puzzle is to establish the link between General Bridges and the Chinese Windmill Palm. Various theories have been proposed but, despite extensive search, assisted by the Duntroon Archivist, Mr Bill Harkness (1951), none can be confirmed.

One theory is that the tree was a gift from the Turkish Government to honour a courageous soldier and respected opponent. There were no diplomatic links with Turkey soon after the war and even so, why would a Chinese Windmill Palm be chosen?

Yarralumla Nursery records reveal that seeds of Chinese Windmill Palm were imported from New Zealand in 1913 and successfully germinated in 1917, so plants were available locally when the monument was completed. However, there are few old specimens elsewhere in Canberra and it was clearly not a species generally favoured by Griffin or Charles Weston and certainly not for the difficult planting site on Mt Pleasant.

Another suggestion is that a gardener at Duntroon planted the palm some time between General Bridges' burial in 1915 and the construction of his memorial, maybe as a personal tribute. Is it possible that he had also served at Gallipoli and, with horticultural insight, chose a palm species which would withstand the rigours of Canberra's winters while achieving the symbolism of the date palm so typical of Turkey?

A somewhat fanciful theory links the palm to Tennyson's narrative poem, *Enoch Arden*, with its references to palm trees, lost love and loneliness.

General Bridges' biographer and respected military historian, Mr Chris Coulthard-Clark (1969) is unable to help and it seems that only the palm tree itself can answer the puzzle. We now need Duke Senior and his friendly foresters from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, to find '... tongues in trees, ...'.

Profile of the Corps of Staff Cadets

Current (14 March 1991) strength	442
1st Class	148
2nd Class	153
3rd Class	141
Malaysia	3
New Zealand	5
Papua New Guinea	23
Philippines	1
RAAF	9
Singapore	1
Thailand	1
ADFA Graduates	74
ADFA Transfers	12
Married	42
Female	44
Cadets with previous military experience	130

Branch Reports

New South Wales

The traditional Graduation Day meeting was held at Victoria Barracks, Paddington, preceeding a luncheon attended by 69 members.

New Zealand

Graduation Day dinners were held by the Wellington and Auckland Branches at the Officers' Messes at Fort Dorset and Fort Cautley. Attendance was slightly less than in previous years.

About 30 Members and wives took part in the golf tournament between the Auckland and Wellington Branches at the Wairakei Golf Course on 23-24 March 1991.

During March some 30 Members of the 1961 graduating class and their wives gathered in New Zealand for their 30th anniversary celebrations in Auckland, Hamilton and Rotorua.

South Australia

Sixteen Members attended the Graduation Luncheon and Annual General Meeting at the Officers' Mess Keswick Barracks. Tribute was paid to the late Major General R.N.L. Hopkins (1915). The Meeting re-appointed Brigadier D. Willett (1942) as Convenor with Dr A.J. de B. Forbes (1941) and Brigadier W.P. Broderick (1949) as committee members. Captain A. Shaw subsequently joined the committee as the representative of the Commander, 4th Military District.

Victoria

Thanks to the good offices of Brigadier L.D. King a total of 18 members and their wives had an enjoyable outing at the VRC Australian Guineas Race Meeting at Flemington on Saturday, 16 February 1991. At least one member had a win on 'Better Loosen Up' in the Blamey Stakes.

On 7 March 1991, despite the debilitating heat of that day, about 40 Members and wives lunched at the Logistics Command Officers' Mess at Victoria Barracks. Guests were the General Officer Commanding, Logistics Command, Major General D.J. McLachlan and the newly appointed PMC of the Officers' Mess, Colonel P.G. Kearsley. The Branch is pleased to be able to report that Colonel J.M. Murphy (1950) again was present and well able to enjoy his lunch.

Duntroon Society Statistics

Society Membership as at 28 March 1991:

Australia	
Ordinary members	1,012
Life members	117
	<hr/>
	1,129
New Zealand	
Ordinary members	132
Life members	11
	<hr/>
	143
Total Society Membership	1,272

Coming Events

A.C.T. Branch

21-22 September 1991. Spring excursion to Cowra. Further information to follow and from Major W.J.W. Sutherland on (06) 265 6955 (W). Members of other branches are most welcome, but contact Lieutenant Colonel J.E. Bullen on (06) 288 7312 (H).

N.S.W. Branch

Monday, 10 June 1991 (the Queen's Birthday weekend). The annual buffet luncheon and raceday at the AJC's Randwick Racecourse. Members from other Branches are welcome. ACT Members who are interested in attending are requested to contact Lieutenant Colonel Ron Hamlyn on (02) 262 5173 (W) or (02) 387 2158 (H).

Queensland Branch

September 1991. The annual cocktail party.

S.A. Branch

Tuesday, 11 June 1991. Cocktail party to mark the June Graduation.

Victorian Branch

Thursday, 23 May 1991. A black tie dinner at the Logistic Command Officers' Mess, Victoria Barracks.

Thursday, 30 October 1991. Luncheon in the Logistic Command Officers' Mess, Victoria Barracks.

RMC Ceremonial Parades

8 June 1991 — The Queen's Birthday Parade.

25 June 1991 — The 1/91 Graduation Parade.

Further information can be obtained from the SO3 (Ceremonial), Captain W.J. Burns on (06) 275 9539.

Old Boys Weekend

The annual Old Boys Weekend was held on 16-17 March 1991 following the ceremonial Beating of Retreat on the previous two evenings. In the past the Weekend has included a day of Rugby Union. Of the three matches played this year, two were 'past members of the RMC' versus the RMC II and RMC I Rugby Union teams. All games were entertaining and played in great spirit together with the traditional 'vigour' normally associated with the day. Both RMC II and RMC I were victorious in their respective matches although that of RMC II was quite close.

An innovation this year was the inaugural RMC versus Old Boys Hockey Match. According to the RMC reporter the Old Boys had lost none of their skills or the fitness which was supposed to have declined with age. A close fought game resulted fittingly in a one-all draw.

A pleasant gathering in the Sportsman's Bar preceeded the Old Boys Dinner that evening in the Corps of Staff Cadets' Mess. It was a most enjoyable finish to a splendid day.



Old Boys versus the RMC Hockey Match on 16 March 1991. Old Boys G.J. (Gary) Stone (1970), J.D. (Jeremy) Logan (1979) and C.W. (Craig) Orme (1978) scramble to get the shot away against the RMC Goal Keeper S.R. (Sean) Faulkner and defender G.D.H. (Glyn) Llanwarne.



At the Victorian Branch Luncheon on 7 March 1991 — I.G.C. Gilmore (1944), D.M. Butler (1946), P.P. Jackson (1934) and R.T. Eldridge (1937).

Initiation 1925

M.H. Walters

We had been at Duntroon for about a fortnight when, at dinner, it was announced that Fourth Class would parade for fire drill at 1830 hours. So far as I was concerned, at the age of 16, everything was so new and exciting that I looked forward to this new experience. Alas, little did I know what was in store.

We paraded in front of the front row of huts and were called to attention. Thereupon there emerged a hoard of cadets dressed in grotesque costumes who descended on us with loud cries. We were seized, stripped and pushed into the various bathrooms. The doors were locked. The fanlights had been removed and through the openings fire hoses were directed at us. From time to time the door opened and a victim was dragged out. My turn came. I was blindfolded and put onto a hand cart which was pulled about until I had no idea where I was. It came to a stop and I was put on to my feet in front of a glowing brazier which I could just see under the bottom of the blindfold. A voice said "Can you bear pain because you will now be branded with the insignia of the Corps of Staff Cadets?" My reaction was that they were quite capable of doing this, that it would be very painful but I would have to 'take it'. A red hot iron was pulled out of the brazier and moved towards my stomach. Having spent my childhood in the country I was well acquainted with the branding of cattle and the smell of burning flesh. Suddenly there was a feeling of pain and that very smell. I thought they had really done it. I discovered afterwards what actually transpired. The red hot iron was put very close to the skin and then a hidden lump of ice was jabbed against the stomach at that point while a piece of raw meat was pushed on to the red hot iron. Very effective!!

The blindfold was removed and I was pushed to the next stand. There I had to lie on a table while someone wielding the sharp end of mechanical horse clippers proceeded to remove all the hair one possessed. Highly dangerous I thought and made sure I did not move.

Having survived this indignity intact I was conducted to the third stand. There I was presented with a tumbler containing a brown concoction with which to drink a toast to the Corps. Luckily the cadet in charge of this stand was a friend of my sister and he whispered "Don't swallow it, spit it out later". The taste defied description. The receipt was a mixture of rifle oil, cascara, worcester sauce and, I think, castor oil. It was known as 'Creme de Cora'.

Next, I had to climb a ladder on to a roof while a stinging stream of water from a fire hose played against one's person. Not pleasant, but I managed to get some water into my mouth to alleviate the terrible taste. Then down the ladder to the next torture. This was being anointed with what I believe was a mixture of soft soap and black paint. It was difficult to remove and for some days various members of Fourth Class had black streaks on their faces and elsewhere.

Then came the climax. At the end of the terrace there was a brick wall with flat ground behind and, on it, under half a tent, sat the king and queen of the ceremony. The king held a sword and at his feet was a large block of ice. I was pushed up the wall, seated on the block of ice and had a 'jerry' put on my head. I was then told to repeat after the king an oath of loyalty to the Corps of Staff Cadets. I can remember only the first two lines

which were, "I swear by the nuts of the Hotchkiss and Lewis and the soup in the Mess which old Edwards pours through us"

The king then said, "I dub you a member of the Corps" and touched my shoulder with the sword. I received a monumental electric shock! The sword and block of ice were wired to a magneto from an aeroplane engine which was operated behind the tent with great effect. I jumped up and at that moment was pushed down a slide into a canvas tank full of water in which I was ducked. I was then pushed into another canvas tank full of sawdust which was rubbed into the soap/paint mixture.

At last it was all over, I was helped to my feet, given a towel and a mug of tea and congratulated.

Brigadier M.H. Walters entered the RMC on 18 February 1925 and graduated on 11 December 1928. He transferred to the Royal Indian Army Service Corps on 12 November 1931. (See also 'Exodus' in Newsletter 2/1989). As Director Supply & Transport, Far East Land Forces he made one of his official visits to Australia in September 1958 when your Editor had the privilege of being his pilot for part of that visit. Brigadier Walters retired from the British Army and now lives in Devizes, Wiltshire.

Council Column

Duntroon Society Award

At its meeting on 14 March 1991 Council was given the details of the first presentation of this Award which was to Sergeant D.R. Groves on 10 December 1990. Following the meeting, Council viewed the Honour Board in the Trophy Room of the Corps of Staff Cadets.

Australian Soldiers' Chapel Appeal

On the basis of the majority recommendation given by Branches, Council agreed that a donation of \$1,000 would be made to the Australian Soldiers' Chapel Appeal.

Duntroon Society Membership Overseas

During a recent visit to military colleges in the South Pacific and South East Asian regions the Society President discussed the subject of Society membership with the Australian Military Advisers in Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines and with members of the armies of those countries, all of whom have cadets attending the RMC Duntroon. There was a mainly positive reaction to the establishment of overseas branches particularly in the Philippines which has a large number of graduates of the Officer Cadet School, Portsea. Strong support was indicated for their association to amalgamate with the Duntroon Society. It is intended to discuss this subject at the next meeting of their association and inform the Society Secretary of the outcome. In the meantime copies of the Society Newsletter will continue to be distributed through the Australian Military Advisers to encourage interest and membership.



*Duntroon Society Council before its meeting on 14 March 1991.
 Left to right: Major R.G. Curtis Honorary Secretary, R.R. Harding (1946), R.W.O. Pugh (1946),
 W.J. Slocombe (1945), F.J. Hartridge (1940), J.G. Hughes (1953), Brigadier R.G. Curtis (1960) President,
 A.J.de B. Forbes (1941), P.J.A. Evans (1955), F.R. Edwards (1969) & M.J. Dudman (1956).*



*Presentation of the Duntroon Society Award by the President of the Society, Brigadier R.G. Curtis
 to Sergeant D.R. Groves on 10 December 1990.*

Annual Postal Golf March

[The Chairman of the 1990 Match Committee, Colonel J.A. Clark (1945) has kindly provided the 1990 results together with an expression of his pleasure in working with the Match Committee members and his commiseration with the NSW team for their most unfortunate weather. Ed.]

As is usual, six teams competed. The Competition attracted 77 golfers, including five ladies who competed unofficially. The winning streak of the ACT team was firmly brought to a halt with that Team not gaining the lead in any of the three events.

• Teams Event

1st: Victoria (221)	S.J. Dunn	43
At Barwon Heads Golf Course	P.G. Kearsley	41
24 players	B. Flynn	35
Fine with strong ocean winds	J.J. Mack	35
Played 21 Sep 90	C.C. Tognan (1974)	34
	P.J. Lawrence (1968)	33

2nd: S.A. (213)	J.A. Clark (1945)	37
At Royal Adelaide Golf Club	J.E. Duff (1948)	37
11 players	J.A. McGreevy (1948)	37
Very strong wind with showers	C.B. McAuley	35
Played 11 Oct 90	D.L. Barzacott	34
	P.J. Devine	33

3rd: A.C.T. (205)	T.A. Gee (1958)	38
At Royal Canberra Golf Club	D.K. Baker (1951)	37
12 players	R.A. Hay (1937)	34
Cool, cloudy and windy	D.F.W. Engel (1944)	34
Played 12 Oct 90	L.G. O'Donnell (1951)	30
	N.P. Farquhar	32

4th: Queensland (184)	I.M. Hunter (1939)	34
At Royal Queensland Golf Club	L.R. Greville (1944)	34
7 players	A.J. Fittock (1958)	31
Strong wind	J.H. Humphrey (1948)	29
Played 28 Sep 90	B.G. Bond (1957)	28
	G. Barnard (1952)	28

5th: New Zealand (180)	C.M. Dixon (1951)	38
At Auckland Golf Club	R.G. Williams (1949)	32
13 players including 5 ladies	H.B. Honnor (1946)	31
Ideal weather but new greens	J.R. Clarke (1946)	29
Played 2 Oct 90	A.C. Hamilton (1950)	27
	R.K.G. Porter (1943)	23

6th: N.S.W. (162)	R.S. Fotheringham (1942)	31
At Australian Golf Club	B.A. Andrews (1941)	28
9 players	R.J. Doran (1974)	28
Rained all day, course water logged	A.L. Casey (1971)	28
Played 13 Sep 90	D.A. Spencer (1959)	26
	G.W. Grimsdale (1956)	21

• Individual scores were:

First: S.J. Dunn (Victoria)	43
Second: P.J. Kearsley (Victoria)	41

• Four Ball Best Ball scores were:

1st: S.A. (47)	J.A. Clark
	J.A. McGreevy
2nd: A.C.T. (45)	T.A. Gee
	R.A. Hay
3rd: Victoria (44)	P.J. Lawrence
	A.M. Stove (1960)
4th: Queensland (42)	L.R. Greville
	I.M. Hunter
5th: New Zealand (40)	C.M. Dixon
	J.R. Clarke
6th: N.S.W. (36)	R.S. Fotheringham
	B.A. Andrews

Council adopted a number of amendments to the rules of the Postal Golf Match Competition. This Match was conducted in accordance with the amended Rules and no further changes have been requested. The W.A. Branch is responsible for the organisation of the 1991 Competition. The Chairman of the Match Committee will be in contact with the Branches in mid-1991.

Letters to the Editor

From Lieutenant Colonel F.L. Skinner (1939)

I was interested to read the contribution by J.W. Black (1948) in Newsletter 2A/1990. He gave the names of his Classmates who were in Korea in 1952-53 and I was particularly pleased to see among them J.W. (John) Burns A.E.J. (Gus) Breen and J.W. (John) Sullivan. They were my platoon commanders and what a wonderful bunch they were.

On a lighter note, it is worth recording a couple of amusing anecdotes which occurred in the last few days before the armistice.

We were on the "Hook" and there was quite a ding on our left flank. The Kiwi 16th Field Regiment and the British 14th Field Regiment were at their best. One could count each battery salvo whooshing overhead and see the resulting flashes a few hundred yards away. The Brits controlled the command net in their usual calm manner and distinct accents. A Test Cricket match was in progress and every 15 or so minutes the command net would go dead and a British voice would give the score, "Australia six for 225", then the war would continue. It was a wonderful contrast.

Some time earlier the Brits had gone one better. The Yanks on our left had an oversized standing patrol out to give warning of an expected attack. When they spotted 'Charlie' coming, the air suddenly became full of "the enemy are massing for an attack. We must have immediate artillery support". The command net went dead again, "I say old Boy, how many to a mass?"

From Air Commodore P.G. Heffernan (1925)

Since the first issue of the Duntroon Society Newsletter I have noticed that, apart from semi-official articles, there seems to have been few stories from the older graduates of the pre-1939 era.

That select band is, I agree, being reduced with the passage of time but, surely, some of them must have got up to pranks that would remind the younger generation of what their grandfathers did.

I do not know what material you have in the pipeline but I suggest that some of the geriatric bestir themselves to put pen to paper and let us know something of what went on in the very early days.

Swan, remembered with gratitude

[For obvious reasons it is general policy that obituaries not be published in the Newsletter but Council has agreed that, following their death, writings about persons who have made significant contributions to the RMC should be accepted. With the permission of the Editor of *The Canberra Times* and of Brigadier G.D. Solomon (1938) this article is reprinted. Ed.]

The death of David Swan has broken yet another link with the old Duntroon.

When he left the Royal Military College in 1982 after an association of 36 years, *The Canberra Times* reported that he planned a busy retirement. That news and the general shape that activity would take came as no surprise to those who knew this active, friendly, caring man.

He maintained his connection with Freemasonry, created one with the newly formed Disabled Adults Residential Establishments and increased his already active involvement in Legacy. He joined Lifeline and for some years was its statistician. As well, he worked as a telephone counsellor and a mobile team member.

To all this he brought the ingrained capacity for hard work, determination, and care for others which had marked his time at Duntroon and the years preceding it — a BSc (Hons) degree at Sydney University before service in the RAAF which resulted in the award of the OBE for his contribution, both on the ground and in the air, to the development of radar.

Not yet 26 when he came to the RMC in 1946 as a lecturer in physics and chemistry he was appointed head

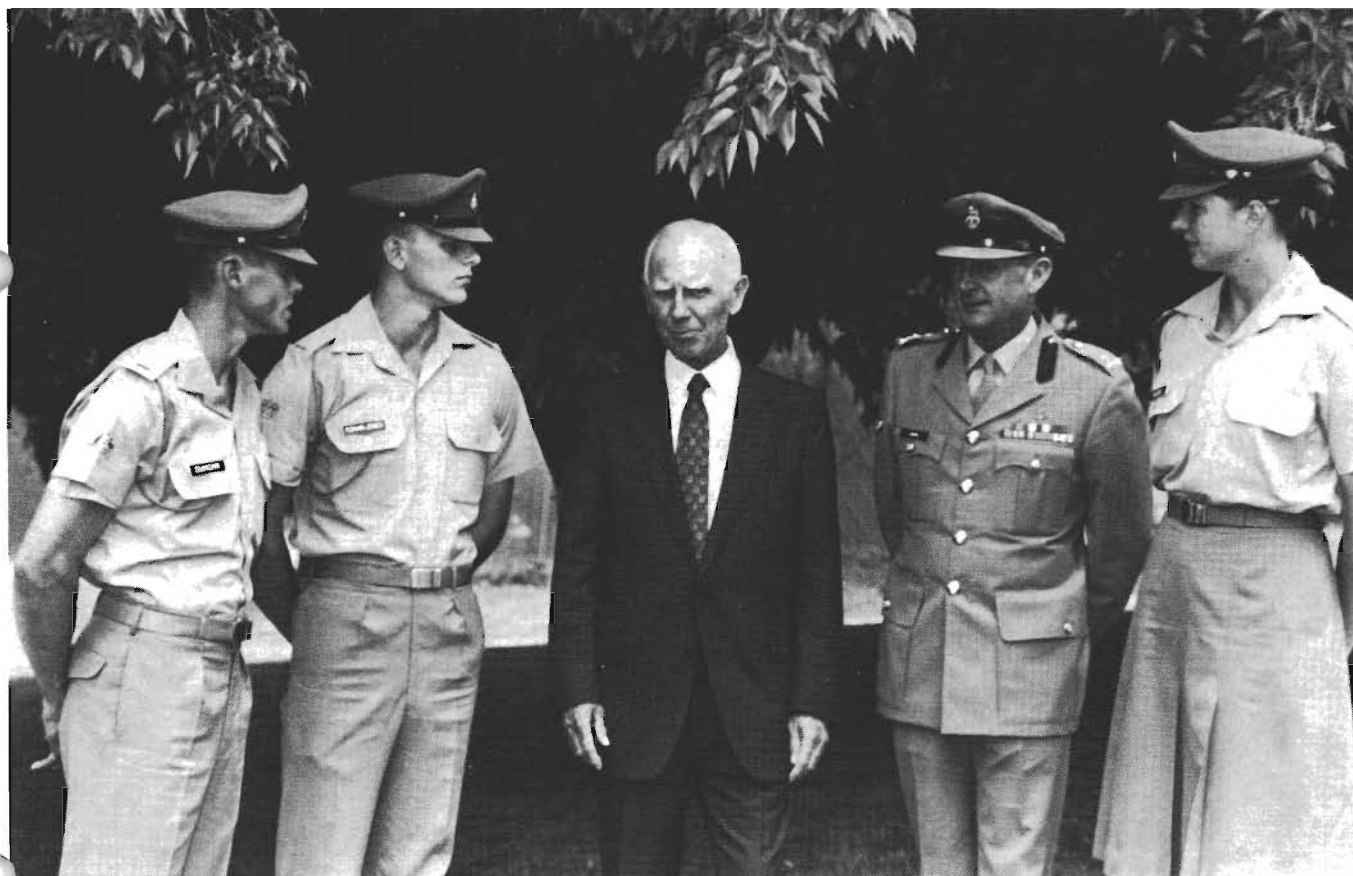
of the department when Dr C.E. McKenzie retired two years later.

When Physics and Chemistry became separate departments in 1962 he remained Professor of Physics, one of that small number who held the title of Professor at the RMC in the period 1911-1967.

He played a significant role in the negotiations which led to the affiliation of RMC with the University of NSW in 1967, when Professor Sir Leslie Martin became Dean of the Faculty of Military Studies and head of the Department of Physics. Mr Swan was appointed as Associate Professor, a position he held until retirement.

His contribution to the remarkable development of the academic curriculum, not least in the decade before affiliation, was enormous as colleagues, military as well as academic, can testify. A wise mentor and a born teacher (his parents were teachers before him, and even in retirement he found time for coaching young people) he will be remembered with gratitude and affection by generations of Duntroon cadets for what he did and the man he was.

A country boy from northern NSW he never forgot his beginnings. They enabled him to build a life on secure foundations. The structure was held together by a powerful commitment to family and friendship, buttressed by a strong Christian faith and decorated with, among other things, a quirky sense of humour, a ready capacity to laugh at the world about him and himself as part of it and an acute sensitivity to the feeling of others. He was a staunch friend and delightful companion who will not be forgotten by those privileged to have known him.



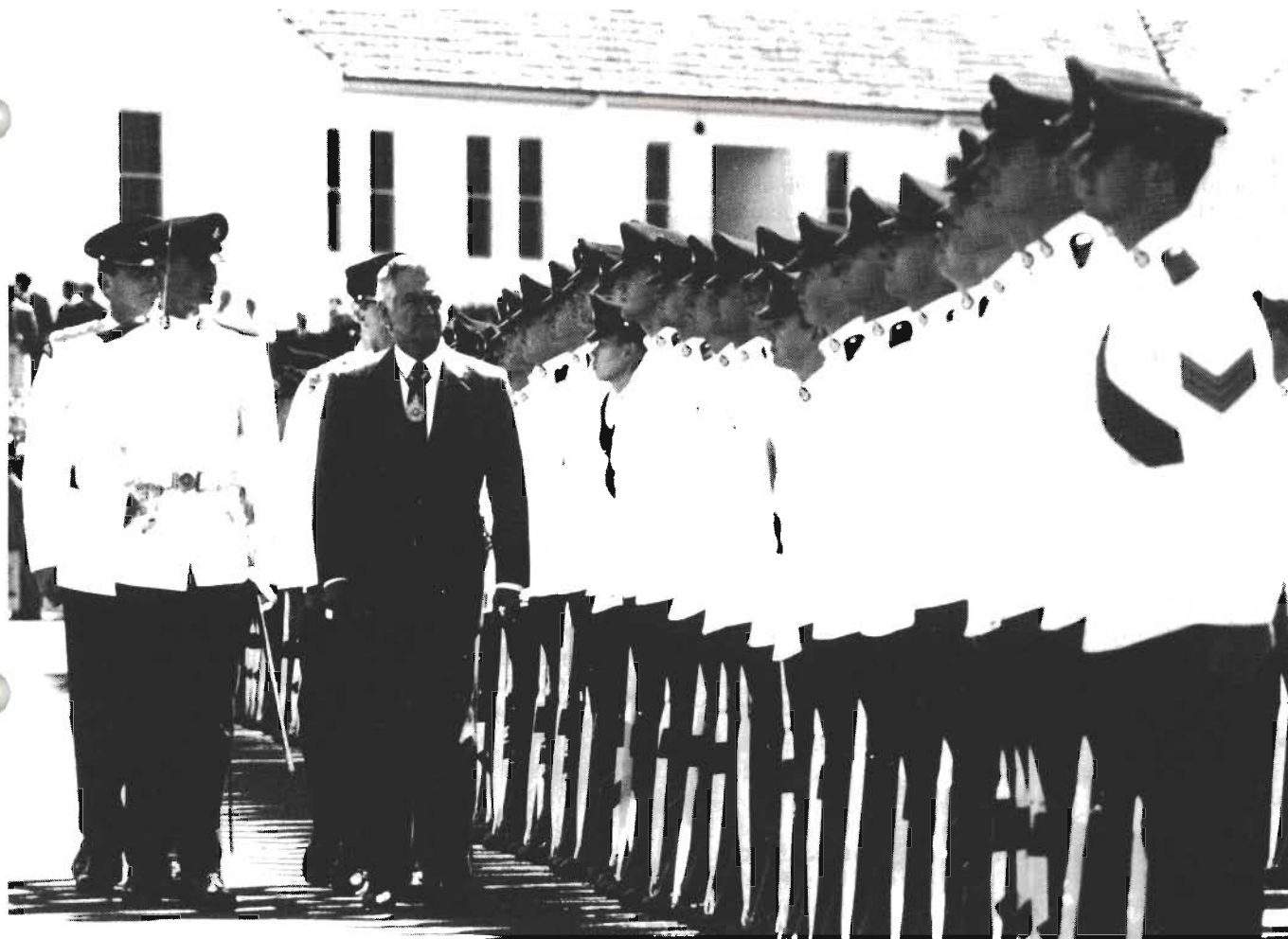
On 29 November 1990 the Major General Sir James Harrison Memorial Lecture was delivered by Mr L.M. Jarman (1941), seen here with, from left to right, Senior Under officer G.H. Duncan, Under Officer S.G. Rohan-Jones, Brigadier R.G. Curtis (1960) and Under Officer K.L. Ross.



With a bit of a shove I could just get that one into my cellar!

Memories of the Rutherglen excursion of 26-27 May 1990 linger on.





For but the second time in the history of the RMC a Prime Minister was the Reviewing Officer of a Graduation Parade. This occurred on 11 December 1990. The Prime Minister, Mr R.J.L. Hawke is shown here during the inspection accompanied by the BSM, Senior Under Officer G.H. Duncan, the CO Corps of Staff Cadets, Lieutenant Colonel F.R. Edwards (1969) and the Commandant, Brigadier R.G. Curtis (obscured). The first Prime Minister to do so was Mr R.G. Menzies in 1956 and, coincidentally, also on 11 December.

This, That and the Other

[Newsletter 2A/1990 included a letter written by Major H.B. McKenzie (1933) about his pre-Staff Cadet days at Duntroon. Since then he has kindly provided some additional notes of that and later times. Ed.]

My younger days at Duntroon were very similar to those of most small boys — in and out of mischief except that I was in a very special place that was an oasis in the growing city of Canberra. I well remember the aeroplane of Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith flying over Duntroon while the Staff Cadets on the ground and wearing that awful white canvas uniform, formed up to spell out the word 'Welcome'. The victory anniversary bonfire which was lit somewhere near the Maze was another memorable occasion as I was burnt on the nose by a spark.

I was last at Duntroon to attend the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the RMC with my Classmates John Bleechmore and Merton Morgan. With the vast increase in size and numbers, I feel that the College has lost something of its individuality, and this is understandable. However, I did notice that there was a much better rapport between Staff Cadets and staff. In my day at the College,

and also before my time as far as I could tell, there was rarely any contact once off the parade ground. To some extent we tended to regard the military staff as the enemy to be kept at arm's length. It may well have been the small numbers at the College together with the fact that we were just coming out of an economic depression with the government of the day anxious to close the College and with Staff Cadets being dismissed for trivial reasons that helped create this impression.

Our daily allowance of 7/6 from which was deducted costs of uniforms, messing and other charges meant that we had to be very careful. However, by borrowing soap and toothpaste etc, from other Staff Cadets we could save enough to put a deposit on our Mess Kit and other required uniforms.

I also recall that when I wished to get married in 1938 I had to obtain the base commandant's permission which was given on the understanding that we would live within half a mile of the Victoria Barracks in Sydney. It was clearly pointed out that I was letting the side down by putting myself outside the Barracks and thus, to some extent, not doing some of the tasks normally allotted to junior single subalterns.

Shorts

- Last October, the Commandant welcomed Mrs Ilona Main at morning tea in the RMC Officers' Mess when she was at Duntroon revisiting the Allen Main Memorial Preschool Centre, which was named after her late husband. Many graduates of the early 1960s will remember Major Allen Main, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, when he was the British exchange officer on the RMC staff. In 1962 he was also the officer in charge of swimming and water polo — when the present Commandant was a member of First Class and captain of the swimming and water polo teams.

- Major Mike Dyer, the Welsh Regiment, followed Allen Main as the British exchange officer. He and his wife, Jayne, paid a flying visit to the RMC early last year when touring Australia with a group of Welsh farmers. The Dyers live in Llangynidr in Wales where Mike, long retired from the Army, keeps bees. Their two sons, one of whom was a baby in their Duntroon days, graduated from Sandhurst to the Welsh Guards. Mark, the younger one, commanded the Escort to the Colour at the 1990 Trooping of the Colour in London for the Queen's Birthday.

- With the graduation on 11 December 1990, the number of graduates of the RMC is now 4,087 and includes 79 females.

- In a move with a coincidence that could create confusion, Major R.G. Curtis became the Honorary Secretary of the Duntroon Society vice Major J.M. Low (1977) in January this year.

- Colonel Bill Clements and his wife Liz, called at the RMC this month. They were on their way home to England via New Zealand after three years at the British

Embassy in Rangoon where Bill was the Military Attaché. Previously he had been the British Military Attaché in Beijing. The Clements lived at Duntroon from 1973 to 1976 when Bill, as a major in the Royal Irish Regiment, was the British exchange officer. Shortly before that they were at Queenscliff while Bill attended the Australian Staff College.

- In Newsletter 2A/1990 there appeared a photograph taken on 20 April 1990 inside Duntroon house. To those who may be confused by the seemingly inordinate longevity of Harry Hutton, it has to be admitted that more than a little licence was taken in applying the appellation of 'favourite nephew' to him.

Obituary

Since the publication of the last Newsletter we have been notified of the deaths of the following:

26 Sep 85 Mr R.W. Meadows (1949)
3 Jun 90 Mr E.G. McDonald
23 Nov 90 Professor D.E. Swan
24 Nov 90 Major General R.N.L. Hopkins (1915)
19 Dec 90 Staff Cadet M.M. Kidd (1990)
2 Feb 91 Mr B.N. Dobson (1940)
24 Feb 91 Staff Cadet R.E. Trewin (1990)
24 Feb 91 Staff Cadet A.J. Bindley (1990)
24 Feb 91 Staff Cadet R.M. Muller (1990)
24 Feb 91 Staff Cadet G.B. Clymer (1990)
15 Apr 91 Major General D.C.J. Deighton (1949)

[Brian Dobson will be remembered not only as a member of 'The Slack 60' but also as the first appearing 'Prodigal Son' (Newsletter 2/1989). Ed]



What was it???

P.G. Heffernan

When I came to Melbourne in 1929 the land which ran along Dynon Road was a waste known as Dudley Flats and used by the Melbourne City Council as a dump. It became a popular past-time to visit this dump to see if anything useful might be found. It was also the home of many old derelicts who used to scavenge for food scraps and live in humpies made of rusty sheets of iron or anything less that would keep the weather out. As Dynon Road was then the route to RAAF, Point Cook, we often stopped to have a look around but the only item of interest that I located was an ivory paper knife. This, I found out later, was made from the sting of a giant stingray. These opening remarks will show that I had an interest in garbage, thereby giving a lead to this short story.

In 1925, having been accepted as a Staff Cadet at Duntroon, two of my mates and I found out that, on Friday afternoons, there was a voluntary subject titled mechanical training which, provided that the Cadet did not wreck the RMC workshop, could credit one with up to 100 marks. In my case, being the brainless wonder of my Class, (I was told this by the Commandant at a 'toc') I seized with some rapidity this opportunity to add a few marks to my annual total.

By the time I had managed to reach Second Class, W.G. Bruce, the Foreman of the workshop, was kind enough to give the three of us almost free rein about the place, so we sought fresh fields to display our talents. By three I mean Tony Carr, Don Veron and me but, alas, today only I survive. Somehow or other we located in the gun park a section which contained several derelict cars, the remains of a wrecked aeroplane and a miscellany of mechanical bits and pieces. The result was the creation of the mechanical monster, Bitza. (Newsletter 1/1987)

When we returned after Christmas leave in 1927 we found that the front wheels had been removed from Bitza to make a trolley for oxy-acetylene bottles, so our creation was temporarily grounded. However, remembering my interest in rubbish tips, we visited the one used by the College and located somewhere behind the 'House of Lords' on the slopes of Russell. The 'House of Lords' was, by the way, the lavatory block used by the senior Classes while the 'House of Commons' was some 50 yards further away and used only by Fourth Class.

The College tip had been the dumping ground for about 18 years and it was amazing to see what had been discarded. Apart from household debris we found scraps of old uniforms, a bayonet or two, lots of Mark VI ammunition (the old round-nosed type) and finally what we were looking for, a set of two wheels. These came from a very ancient Nordenfeldt gun carriage and further scavenging located a gun limber, very decrepit and in a state of collapse. At the back of the limber there were about 50 holes for shells of the 15 or 18-pounder size but, perhaps fortunately for us, these were found to be empty.

Nevertheless, on the other side where two of the gun team put their feet, we found many small lockers. All were very rusty but, with careful use of a bayonet, we managed to open them. All were empty except for one and right at the back of it we found a tin, sealed with solder, about eight by six inches in size, with an opener, ardine tin type, soldered on to the top.

So a bit like Jabberwocky, we sat in uffish thought as to whether we should or should not open the tin. The label still left on the tin was indecipherable so we had no clues as to the contents. Finally we decided, 'What

the hell?' and removed the opener to rather gingerly roll back the first bit of the lid. Apart from a slight hiss as some air either escaped or went in, nothing happened. Emboldened by this, the tin was fully opened and we found that it contained six small packages wrapped in waterproof paper. One was removed, the paper taken off and the item investigated. It is rather hard to describe but I will do my best.

It was a tapered block of wood, approximately four inches long, roughly an inch at the base but tapering to about half an inch at the top and covered with a very thick paper that had printed on it a spiral that began near the base and, winding round the block, ended near the top. On this spiral were the figures one to ten. There may have been more but my memory fails me. Alongside these figures were painted black spots. The base was covered with thinner paper and as we delicately perforated it, black powder ran out. Further investigation revealed that, under the paper covered spiral, was a groove also filled with black powder. After some serious thought, we determined that it was some type of fuse but what it was used for had us beaten. To find out if our theory was correct we took one, tied it securely to a post, having punched out one of the blackspots, then tied a match to a long stick, lit it and held it to the base. There was a bit of fizzing noise and a flame came out of the hole that we had punched in the spiral. Eureka!!

Later we approached Captain A.G. (Wang) Thomson (1915)¹, our artillery instructor and put the problem to him. He was as much at a loss as we were but confirmed our ideas that it was an elementary type of fuse. As guardians of the College, there were two 15-pounder guns at the Yass gate and 'Wang' suggested that the fuse could have been used with that type of shell. He also suggested that the drill was to take a shell, either HE or shrapnel, and work out the range and time of flight, etc... Then the appropriate hole in the spiral would be punched out and the fuse inserted in the base of the round, securing it with a good thump by means of one's boot or similar implement. Next the round would be rammed into the breech, followed by the charge. With the firing nipple capped, the breech would be shut and, having stuck one's fingers in to the ears, the trigger would be pulled. The flash of the charge would ignite the powder in the base of the fuse which would then fizzle along the spiral to come out of the hole that had been punched. This would ignite the charge in the round, thereby causing the necessary explosion and so sprinkle the enemy with the contents of the round.

How this tin of fuses had managed to remain in this limber for so many years was beyond our comprehension, nor did we ever find out if our theory was correct or, better still, on what type of gun the fuse was used. In later years I have asked many old soldiers if they could explain but none, even Boer War veterans, could offer any ideas. So I am putting this problem to the modern artillery experts to see if an answer might have been found by some researcher.

1. *The presenter to the RMC in 1930 of the Thompson Boxing Cup, since awarded to the heavyweight boxing champion of the CSC. Ed.*

Since 1982 Air Commodore Heffernan has, in his own inimitable way, carried many of us back to the years of 1925-28 as seen by a Staff Cadet of the time. He, and your Editor, feel that there are other periods of the RMC that deserve descriptions of this kind. Elsewhere in this Newsletter he again puts that view.

