

TOM'S DIARY

*THE FIRST
23 YEARS*

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SCRUBBY CREEK

As some people advance in age, they have a tendency to reminisce about their early childhood and the years that have passed. Normally they have a desire to bore all and sundry with their written word, and if they can get an audience, they will elaborate for hours on end about their history. In this regard, I suppose I am no exception. So it is with much trepidation that I pen this short history.

I was born on the 9th of February 1931 in the Bayview Hospital Townsville, to Elizabeth and Bill Conner, two people I grew to love sincerely. There is scarcely a day passes that I do not cherish their memory even after all these years.

My first recollections are about our life and home at Scrubby Creek, mid-way between the Alice River and Hervey's Range. This was a cattle property owned at that time by a Mr Ferguson. It was here that my parents and grandparents arrived from Cardwell to try to eke out a living cutting timber for the Railway Department in the harsh depression years.

As a six-year-old I can still remember our camp constructed of round bush timber with corrugated iron roof, and hessian around the outside to act as walls. The floor consisted of packed earth, that after a period of time with constant wetting and much sweeping, became hard and smooth like concrete. The only furniture my mother possessed was an old dutchess with mirror, a Singer sewing machine, our spring beds, and a Crown wood stove.

One of the most versatile commodities available was the kerosene tin and the kerosene case. Most benzine and kerosene were purchased in square four-gallon tins and two of these were sold in a pine box to stop damage to the very thin tins and to facilitate handling. These small boxes were used, one on top of the other for our kitchen cupboards and storage shelves and by folding old newspapers a certain way and cutting in the folds my mother made decorative curtains for the pine box shelving. The kerosene or benzine tins had a multiplicity of uses. If cut along the square edge and down the middle of the end, and then folded back; and with the addition of a piece of pine nailed to the ends, you had a very versatile V shaped wash-up and draining dish. Also with one end cut out, and a piece of wire for a handle they passed as a useful and cheap bucket. In this form they were used for boiling clothes and cooking large pieces of corned meat on the open fire.



Left to Right: Thomas Robert Conner, Thomas William Conner and William Thomas Conner

Our kitchen table consisted of two round pieces of timber set into the dirt floor with some boards nailed on to form the top. The stools were again of round timber set in the floor with the square ends taken from the kerosene cases nailed on for the seat.

Ants were always an annoying problem at our camp. Any crumbs or foodstuff left on the table were ferociously attacked and carried away; thus necessitating a continual battle of wits to try and combat the little devils. My mother was forced to tie kerosene oil soaked rags around all the table and cupboard legs to try and thwart the menace. Not visually pleasant I will agree, but in these times we were not concerned with the finer things in life but only with existing.

It has always been a great wonder to me how perishable food was kept in these early bush days. There was no electricity or refrigeration, no ice or a corner store down the street. All that was available then was an assortment of hanging safes with a variety of ideas for keeping the contents cool. The one we favoured consisted of a square tin box with a small water trough around the top. From this was suspended some cheesecloth that remained continually damp, so if it was hung in the coolest part of the camp, it at least kept the butter from turning to oil in the 100° heat we experienced in the long, hot summers.

In the extreme dry season at Scrubby Creek our water needs would become very precarious. All the surface water would dry up, so this necessitated the men-folk digging holes in the riverbed sand and lining them with old drums to obtain water. These were called sinkholes. I can still remember helping or hindering my mother and grandmother to carry water up the steep banks of the creek. We used two kerosene tins suspended on wire fastened onto a bent piece of bush timber called a yoke. This was a mighty effort for my mother who never weighed more than eight stone in her life. This work virtually had to be carried out on wash-days by the women as it was always too late in the afternoon when the men returned home absolutely exhausted after a hard, hot day at work.



Left to Right: Johannah Jane Conner Thomas
Robert Conner, Thomas William Conner and
William Thomas Conner

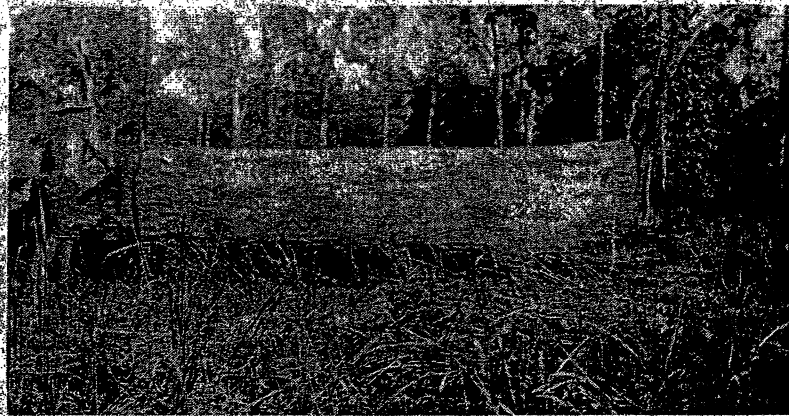


Left to Right: Elizabeth Maryann Conner
and William Thomas Conner

I vividly recall one of our excursions to the sink hole and being confronted by a very large bull that had got down on all fours for a drink, and being in an exceedingly weak state was not able to get up again. He had been there for about three days and as you can imagine he was a frightful sight to behold, with eyes rolling and in the final death throes. He denied us our water carrying that day. Quite often we had to skim some frogs and cow dung floating on top of the water but it never seemed to affect anyone. Possibly people were much tougher in those times. Normally in a good season we obtained our water from a well on the property, but this was an exception to the rule, as when we lived there, the country was as dry as a wooden god and in the grip of a terrible drought with cattle dying and no green grass anywhere.

Whether it was the extremely dry weather or just a cycle of nature I will never know, but in all my years in the bush I have never encountered the plague of snakes that inhabited the bush around the Scrubby Creek area. How members of my family were never bitten is amazing as snakes were seen and killed everywhere. The iron roof of our camp had a number of bullet holes near the ridge pole, where my father was forced to shoot at snakes that had taken refuge there at sometime in the day or night even though we were never away for any length of time.

One night I was woken by a noise and I thought I could see something hanging on a nail that was protruding from the hessian wall. At first I thought it was a pair of braces that I used to wear at this time, but as it turned out, it was a large black snake, so I can tell you it was quickly and violently dispatched with some implement I can not recall at this stage. My father and grandfather never left the camp without their snake bite



Thomas Robert Conner sawing Blue Gum Log at Scrubby Creek

kit. This consisted of a piece of bike tube to act as a tourniquet, a razor blade for opening the bite and some Condy's Crystals to hopefully counteract the poison. Thank goodness it never had to be used, as this treatment is completely contrary to today's standards.

Some elderly people have a tendency to talk about the "good old days". I can assure the reader there was nothing good about the old days in the bush for the women I knew in the later part of the depression years. From early morning to well into the night, it was nothing but hard work and drudgery, wearying their brain with how to prepare the next meal from very little and a continual life of deprivation and self-denial.

There were no washing machines or running water, and only a very elementary sanitary system. There was no electricity and a shockingly basic lighting supply. My mum only possessed two Pot's Irons for ironing our clothes. These were solid smoothing irons with a detachable handle that had to be placed on top of the wood stove to get hot. It was always a constant worry that you might scorch something as there was no control of temperature with these irons.

All washing was boiled in kerosene tins on the open fire and the actual washing and rinsing was done in two large galvanised tubs that we owned at this time. These tubs were also used

by us at bath time. Later we became more modern and had a four-gallon tin with holes in the bottom that we used to pull up by a rope and pulley and so enjoy a nice shower bath.

I suppose we were more fortunate than some families because my mother had her Singer sewing machine and was always busy patching and repairing our damaged clothes. It was remarkable the life she could give an old pair of trousers by patching the seat and the knees a few times.

I am very proud to say, that with my mother's excellent sewing ability, we were never shabbily dressed and we always owned a good set of clothes for when we made some of our infrequent visits to town and the annual show.

On one of our trips to town mum had to visit the dentist to have all her teeth out, top and bottom. How she survived the trip home to our camp, I can only wonder, because our old truck at the time had no windscreen or cab and the road consisted of only two wheel tracks through the bush. I hope it was only the imagining of a young boy, but I honestly thought she would die from loss of blood, as two or three towels we had with us became thoroughly soaked. My father was lucky enough to obtain a thermos flask of ice for the trip home. Late that night after many applications the haemorrhage finally ceased. Incidentally, this was the first recollection I have of feeling and tasting ice.



Thomas William Conner at Scrubby Creek

After relating some of the hardships my parents and the people in the bush generally experienced at this time, I would like to reassure the reader that I personally had a wonderful childhood. I was blessed with extremely caring parents and grandparents, and whatever was

humanly possible was given to me. I possessed at this time a three-wheeled trike and also a pedal car, and it was only when I reached manhood that I realised the sacrifices in money, that my family must have made to buy that car.

Like thousands of other working class children in these hard times I experienced one lasting disappointment. It was Christmas time and we were looking around Heatley big store in Flinders Street, when I spied a Hornsby Train Set. Oh how I longed for that train, but it was completely out of the question. I think the price was about £4.10 and that was far too much. All we could afford was a number 6 Meccano set that cost about £1.10 and I still have some pieces in my possession fifty years later.

If it were possible to relive my early childhood, I would change nothing. I was completely happy in the bush with my family and pets and I suppose you could say I led a very sheltered life. Protected from the extreme peer group pressures that children experience now a days, and the seedy side of life.

Looking back I feel I could be accused of being a mum's boy, but I loved my mother greatly and could not bear to be parted from her for any length of time. Very little physical discipline was used on me, and I cannot remember my father ever raising his hand to strike me in all my life.

It is very fashionable these days to accuse people in past times of not working hard enough or long enough to achieve great wealth for themselves or their country. I consider this to be one of the most blatant and dishonest lies and drivel ever-perpetrated on hard working people. Mostly these statements are made by people who have no concept of manual work, and have only acquired their superiority through the labours of others and their extreme cunning and luck.

All my young life I witnessed men like my father, working like a bullock, from daylight to dark for very little gain in the timber industry. Men digging ground for mining, men cane cutting, driven by a futile desire to succeed and provide a better life. I recall my father returning home late one evening with his bare back completely covered with big heat blisters caused by drizzling rain and the extreme heat we suffered out there at Scrubby Creek.

Sarcasically, I will try to explain the brilliant system operating for timber cutters at this time. Firstly, the cutter would approach the Railway Stores Department for an order to cut "X" amount of sleepers or transoms at the lowest price possible. If another cutter was out of work and tendered a lower price, he received the order. When the cutter received the order, he had to go to the Grocery and Hardware Store, and the Butcher, to try and negotiate some goods on the strength of his order. Nearly everything was bought on tick in the "good old days".

Possibly the reader has formed the opinion that cutters enjoyed great camaraderie and mateship, but this was not always the case as there was no other single thing that caused more friction and bad-feeling than the wonderful tender system.

My father and grandfather always worked as a team in the bush, but sometimes they would take in a new cutter to help them fulfil a particular order and he would always share in the profits of the job, provided he supplied his own tools. Firstly, they journeyed into the bush and selected a large Blue Gum tree, about eight foot girth and after scarfing the front with the axe, they proceeded to fell it with their six-foot cross cut saw. The tree was then cut into seven-foot lengths and each length was rolled onto skids preparatory to dressing. Firstly, the length was marked out into saleable sizes for either hogback sleepers or transoms, and then grooved out with a large broadaxe along the length and completely around the log. A twelve pound hammer and steel wedges were used to bust out pieces in readiness for squaring into the finished product.

Fishing line rubbed in charcoal and water was used to line up the billet prior to chopping in and squaring with the broadaxe. A broad-axeman was an extremely good tradesman who could dress an eight by four inch transom perfectly square, and equally as good as the sawn product that appeared much later on.

To give some idea of the work involved, my father had to square with the broad-axe, four transoms a day to make £1.00 and not forgetting the fact that this timber had to be carted to the nearest rail head for inspection by the railway inspector. All the timber cut and transported to the rail siding had to be stacked neatly in the yard so as to facilitate easy inspection by the inspector. Each piece of timber had to be painstakingly turned, so the inspector could ascertain the correct size of the piece, or if it might have too much sap.

At this period of time, railway inspections were extremely strict. If a piece of timber was slightly outside the specification it was immediately condemned. This was a dreadful blow to the cutter, who had put so much time and backbreaking labour into supplying the product. For instance, if the two-rail scarf's on a hogback sleeper were slightly out of plum, the inspector would reject the whole piece. This is quite contrary to today's standards, where

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virtually anything goes. Timber sawn to a very rough standard and species cut that were completely unacceptable in the old days are common practice now. Trying to arrange an inspection with the Railway Department was largely a hit and miss undertaking because telephone communication for people in the bush was non-existent. You could only arrange verbally with the inspector for a particular date in the future for an inspection. As a large number of cutters could testify, this was very unsatisfactory, as it was not uncommon for the cutter to travel to the rail siding to have his timber inspected and find there was no inspector. This sometimes meant that one or two days were lost, plus travelling expenses that the cutter could not really afford.

I will now relate a particular distasteful episode regarding our life in the bush. To try and supplement our meagre budget my father and grandfather decided to participate in the possum-shooting season. This was completely obnoxious to my father, who could not even kill a fowl, but as the possums were quite prolific in the blue gum forest at Scrubby Creek the enticement of extra money was too strong.

After setting themselves up with .22 cal rifles and headband spotting torches, purchased I might add from Hollimans on time payment, they went into action at all hours of the night. Wire snares were also set just on dusk in all the likely places so in the morning the mortality rate was very considerable with anything up to fifty possums ready for skinning. Thank goodness this episode did not last long, as there became a glut on the market and the price of skins left a lot to be desired. What a relief this was for my family, because never again was an animal killed for monetary gain.

When the inevitable and periodic slow down of timber orders occurred, my men-folk always used to help with the mustering and dipping of cattle on the Ferguson property, and sometimes erecting new fences and repairing of the yards. This work was quite acceptable for my grandfather and father, as in their earlier days they were manager and head stockman respectively on some big cattle stations in the mid-west. Nothing was beyond my grandfather as far as cattle work was concerned and he enjoyed all aspects of the trade, including the ability to spay young female cattle. My father was also an excellent horseman, but never seemed to be keen on cattle work and after this period, never rode a horse again to my knowledge.

While we were on the property, Mr Ferguson gave me a young poddy calf that we were able to raise with the aid of some milking cows we were loaned at this time. Years later when living a Mt Spec, Mr Ferguson sent me the money he received from the sale of this bullock, the one and only profitable transaction I had in the livestock industry.



Different view angle from page 3, Thomas Robert Conner sawing Blue Gum Log at Scrubby Creek

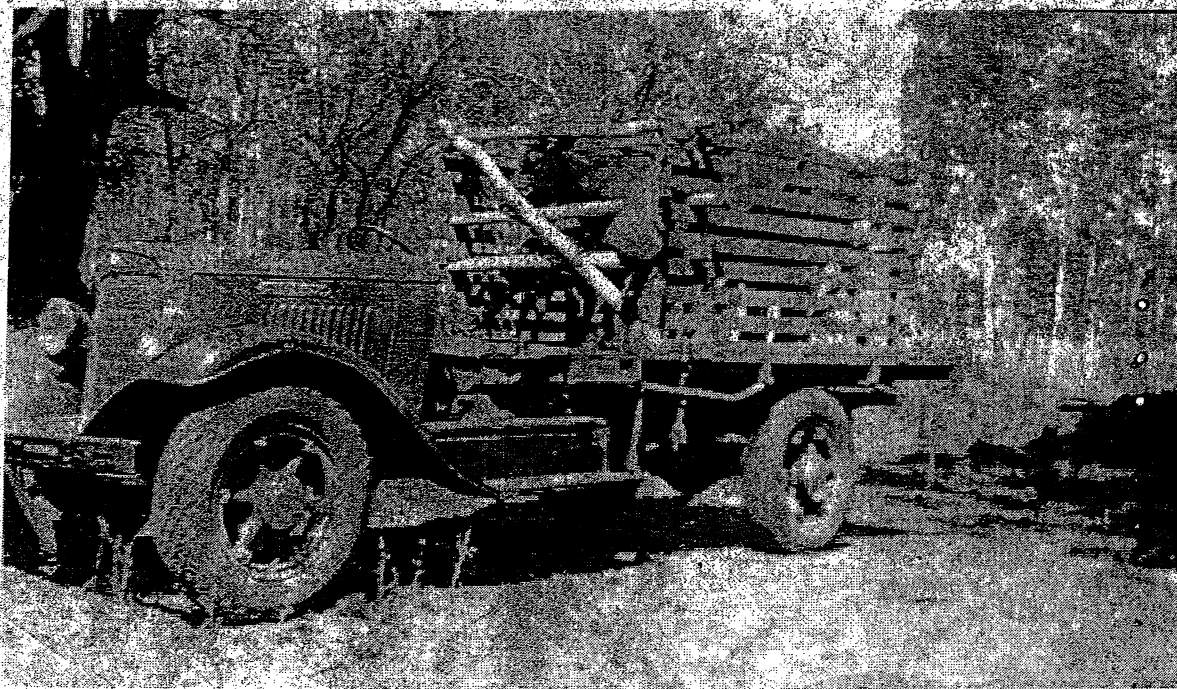
My mother was also given a small old pony by someone who's name I cannot recollect and she used him to round up the milking cows and

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calves to be penned overnight. These were not the traditional milkers so some form of persuasion had to be used to combat their cantankerous and untrained nature, and I recall what could have been a particularly dangerous accident that happened late one afternoon when we were having considerable trouble rounding up the cows and calves. Dad vaulted onto the old pony and took off after one of the wayward calves, through waist-high spear grass. They were travelling at a flat gallop when the pony collided with an anthill concealed in the grass and with a cloud of dust, crashed to the ground. My father was fairly shaken up but the only injury sustained was a broken finger, which without treatment remained crooked for the rest of his life.

Needless to say, in all the commotion, one of the cows jumped over the twelve-foot bank of Scrubby Creek and got her back leg caught in a protruding root. She was left bellowing and dangling headfirst in the air. With much profanity my grandfather produced an axe and with a few strokes severed the root allowing the cow to crash to the creek bed, where she staggered to her feet with, thankfully only her dignity hurt.

Throughout one's life in the bush there occurs some very queer and unexplainable incidents that remain in your memory for life. I would like to relate one such incident. Late one night my dog Joe awakened us with his loud barking, and general carrying on. After an investigation, my father noticed two bright lights that appeared to be about two hundred yards away from our camp in the open flat country. As was the custom, Dad bellowed a greeting and asked whoever it was to identify themselves. By this time all my family were out of bed and showing a great deal of interest in what was going on, so the men-folk decided to walk towards the lights. As they advanced forward the lights receded, and as they retreated the lights advanced. This became a very frightening situation and it was the only time in my life



Our C30 International. This is the truck that used to cart tow 50FT Piles on each side

that I observed my father and grandfather show extreme anxiety, to the extent of arming themselves with their rifles. Thus the lights remained in the pitch-black night until just before dawn when they completely vanished. One minute they were there and the next they were gone. These lights coincided with the description of a man holding two hurricane lamps at

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waist height and in no way resembled a light with beams or of an electrical nature. Early the next morning, after an examination of the area, no marks in the grass of a human or animal could be found, so the mystery remains with me today.

Around about this time my first playmates arrived in the form of the Haskins family. The children were called Bill, Mick, Beverley and Shirley. They built their camp some distance from ours on Scrubby Creek. Mr Phil Haskins was a well-known timber cutter and was one of the best crosscut saw sharpeners I have ever known. The family remained very friendly with us both there at Scrubby Creek and for many years at Mt Spec. So my early recollection of our life at Scrubby Creek has come to an end. My father and grandfather continued to cut "and I am sure they would support my view", some of the toughest Blue Gum in Australia for very little gain. Young people today, and I am sure some older ones too, could never understand why men would work so hard, but it must be remembered that this was the depression years and work was almost impossible to obtain anywhere. Another contributing factor that influenced the thinking and work of the bushmen, was the freedom of being your own boss and not being tied down to a set regime.

After much thought and taking my own experience into account, I have formed the opinion that timber work becomes a disease and even after it has become obvious that you were only existing, you still persist in chasing that money at the end of the rainbow. Mining is another example of men and sometimes their families working and depriving themselves in the hope of making that big strike some day.

I think it was with some relief that my family learned of new timber stands at Mt Spec and decided to up-stakes and leave the iron-hard timber of Scrubby Creek and proceed to Puzzle Creek. But that is a continuing story.

PUZZLE CREEK

It was either late 1937 or early 1938 when my parents and grandparents arrived by truck at Puzzle Creek on a wet and pitch black night. I would like to convey to the reader the extremely uncomfortable trip we had up the range in our International truck, which incidentally had no cab, only a wooden seat and windscreen, with no cover to protect us from the elements. It had been a long day since we left the Ferguson cattle property at Scrubby Creek, midway between the now settlement of Rupertswood and Hervey's Range, and made our way over the old northern roadway to the foot of the Paluma Range.

Little did we realise as we climbed up this wonderful road, the hundred of times we would travel its course and marvel at the workmanship of the stone bridge over Crystal Creek and the ingenuity of the road design itself.

The main reason for our move to Mt Spec was to be one of the first timber contractors to tap the virgin forest for its magnificent turpentine trees, they were in great demand for bridge girders and piles, and also decking that was required at the time. To give the reader some idea of the vast quantities of these trees, my father and grandfather harvested two hundred and fifty, fifty-foot piles off about ten acres at the well-known 18½ mile. Mr Bill Freeman and his tractor driver also cut timber in this area and had their camp at the 18½ mile.

Our first camp on the beautiful Puzzle Creek was literally right on the waters edge, and was constructed over a frame of bush timber left by a family by the name of Jones, who used to scratch for tin in the area before our arrival. Our new home consisted of corrugated iron for the roof and rolls of hessian around the outside for walls. My grandparents' tent was pitched further up the bank but we all used to eat in my parents' abode.

Puzzle Creek at that time was a beautiful clear, full flowing creek, with a deep hole just outside our camp. It was about 12 foot deep and 20 foot across, with an abundant supply of water all year round. A far cry from what it is today, a little muddy trickle. This was caused, in my estimation, by all the logging in the headwaters in the years past. Puzzle Creek also contained a large number of turtles and the largest eels I have ever seen, some that I caught as a young boy measured 3 foot and as thick as a man's arm. Sometimes when we were short of meat, my mother would mince the flesh and make rissoles, and boy, were they tasty.

Late in our first year of residence on Puzzle Creek, there was a cyclone in the Townsville area and our little camp was flooded through by the swiftly flowing creek. This reinforced my father's belief that we should shift to higher ground, but not before we were scared out of our wits anticipating a huge red stringy tree would be blown over our little house by the very strong wind. After this episode, we moved camp up about 30 feet to high ground and there remained with a few improvements until we left the district.

Our new house consisted of bush timber frame, but this time with weatherboard sides obtained from Mr Torelli who owned a sawmill at Running River. We still possessed the hard earthen floor that was always the bane of my mother's life. We also had a large open fireplace to keep the house warm in the very cold winters and rainy days we experienced in those times.

For our water needs, my father constructed a flying fox. This consisted of a long strand of wire, stretching down into the creek, and it had suspended from it a bucket on a pulley, which

was returned full, with the aid of a draw rope. This was particularly hard work if you required a lot of water, but surely beat carrying it up in buckets from the creek.

As a young boy of seven and a half years, this was a wonderful if lonely period in my life, no other children to play with but always drinking in the wonders of nature and learning every facet of my father's work. All my young life was spent in the company of bushman, listening to their many and varied tales, and observing their diverse ways of making a living, either timber cutting, tin scratching, or watching and tasting their very colourful cooking.

Every Wednesday and Saturday, my mother and I had to walk the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile up to the main road to meet the bus. We had to collect our bread and meat and most importantly to dispatch my correspondence lessons and receive my new weekly work by mail. This was the only few minutes my mother had to socialise with the people on the bus and to talk to Mr Devine who was the owner at that time. The only time we went to town was on the truck with a load of timber, about every two months, to collect our groceries at Hollimans and allow mum to purchase a few necessities that we may require. No luxuries in those days, because things were very tough. I can remember mum collecting all the Sunshine Milk and Bushells Tea labels to send away, because in those days, if you had a set quantity, you could receive a tea towel or a bath towel or two. As the years have passed and I reminisce about this time, my admiration and love go out to my mother and virtually all women, for their extreme ability to produce meals from the most basic of food stuff. No refrigeration to store fresh food, only fresh meat that arrived once a week by bus or meat supplied once a month by Mr Furber, who, used to deliver meat by packhorse for one shilling and four pence per pound, all the way from Running River. No fresh milk or fruit in those days, they were only luxuries you acquired when we went to town, so it was only the ingenuity of the women folk who kept us fed. They spent all their days either cooking or washing and ironing.

On the first night we arrived at Puzzle Creek, one of the very first things we unpacked were our forty or so chooks, but incredible as it may seem it was only a few hours later that the native cats started to attack our flock. After a terrible commotion, with much running around and shouting in the dark, we discovered that the mortality rate was six chooks dead and one native cat shot by my father. Ever after that episode there was an absolute terror in the chook community, with the consequence that they all used to roost at night high in the oak trees, sometimes 30 feet from the ground to escape from the native cats. We used to nail strips of tin around the main tree to stop the cats from climbing.

Up to this time I have been very negligent in mentioning one of the most important members of our family. He was a mixed-breed dog called Joe, who substituted my affections for a playmate or brother, and was my constant companion in those early days. I cannot remember when I received him as a pup, but I will always cherish the years we spent together hunting and playing and appreciating the comrade that he was. Joe was a mid-size white dog with a big black spot on the butt of his tail and black ears, plus a very intelligent face and a repertoire of tricks we had built up when quite young.

Sometime in 1939 my father acquired a Allis-Chalmers model M crawler tractor, which based to today's standards would only be considered a toy, but at that time it was a remarkable piece of machinery. It was used for snigging our piles and girders and was an essential investment to our timber plant. Before the acquisition of this little tractor my father had to rely on Mr Ben Whalley and Mr Bill Freeman who both had tractors which they contracted out to snig our timber for us. The loads these little machines pulled was truly amazing, considering none of them were more than 25 HP. As a nine year old I became quite proficient in the driving of this little machine and at every opportunity used to help my father snig piles and girders out of

the scrub, much to the annoyance of my mother who was very concerned for my safety and my education.

The only communication for news and pleasure back then was a twelve-valve radio we purchased from Mr Stephenson who used to manufacture the best radios on the market. This machine was powered by dry cell batteries and was a great source of pleasure at night, namely the many serials broadcast and one particular programme I enjoyed was called the Argonauts because I was a member of their club. Many times dad used to sit up until midnight to listen to the cricket test or Wimbledon, broadcast with a lot of static, all the way from England on short wave. If I remember rightly, we had to restrict our listening to the most important things, as the batteries only lasted for about two months. Reading at night was always a problem because we only had Kerosene Hurricane lamps and sometimes Carbide lamps. These lights were of some anxiety to the people concerned because of their unpredictable habit of bubbling up gas and catching fire, necessitating, with much profanity, a quick dispatch outside.



William Thomas Conner snigging 50FT Pile with 22 Caterpillar at Puzzle Creek.

In 1939 two momentous events occurred that had a vast effect on my life through to manhood, and the other was to change our secluded way of life forever at Puzzle Creek. The first was the death of my mother's brother in a truck accident at Proserpine, which after a horrific meeting with highly emotional relatives and the viewing of the body, left me extremely afraid of death for many years.

What a trip we had to Cardwell for my uncle's funeral. The Northern highway in 1939 was an extremely rough track with most of the creeks without bridges, and the trip from Townsville to Cardwell taking anything up to 7½ hours.

My grandmother would probably never forget this trip either. We were sailing along at a fair clip in the old ford car we owned then, when dad hit a large pothole, crashing gran's head against the roof, knocking her unconscious.

The other event I referred to earlier was the declaration of World War II.

The most important event in 1940 for our family was the birth of my sister, but as there is nine years difference between our ages, I still never had the playmate I desired.

As you can now imagine my little sister kept mum very busy. The big problem was drying clothes in that climate, where for most of the time it was overcast and drizzling. Any sweaty woollen clothes left out were immediately flyblown and had to be washed or disposed of. Another great worry for the women folk was sickness or accidents as the doctor was at least three hours away.

As a young lad I was extremely fortunate to make the acquaintance of Mr Jack Farrell who was a timber cutter camped down the creek from us. He was to remain one of my best senior friends for many years.

Jack always tried to treat me as an equal and many times helped me to construct the different toys and projects I undertook. Jack was an exceptional bush cook, so his camp was always stocked with goodies such as herring and tomato sauce, sardines and always some lollies for me out of his order. Many the colourful tale Jack told, (not always true I might add) but always interesting to a young boy.

I will always remember the joyous occasion when Jack returned from one of his infrequent visits to town with a pet goat for me. His name was Bill and being a goat was always up to some dastardly act, such as getting into the bread dough that my mother had left to rise under the warm stove, or chewing the hem of a dress on the line. Bill was also involved in another horrific accident when he knocked my little sister out of her high chair very nearly causing her death, but thank goodness she survived. The children in those days were extremely tough.



Bill the Goat at Puzzle Creek

Bill was quickly forgiven his indiscretion and continued to be a very enjoyable pet right up to his tragic death some years later. I still treasure his memory as being one of my best animal friends.

About this time Mr Harry Rooney and his new bride moved to Puzzle Creek to be our first married neighbour. Harry cut timber with my father and grandfather and was a good friend of the family for many years.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention two very colourful men who used to inhabit the area at this early time. The first was Joe Clay who was the policeman for the small town of Ewan and periodically used to patrol the area from Ewan to Mt Spec. To a young boy, Joe was a very striking character. He was over six feet tall, dressed in riding trousers and leggings, spurs, and always with his revolver and cut-a-way holster on his hip. Joe always travelled by horse and packhorse and was a very welcome visitor to our camp to partake of the inevitable cup of tea and scones. This was the standard hospitality extended to visitors in those days. The stove was always hot, the kettle was always boiling, so it was no problem to make a batch of scones or Johnny cakes, because time had little meaning when there was plenty of conversation.

Mr Arthur Benham was the second man I made reference to before. He was a man who was well advanced in years with snow white hair and beard, and even then was strongly built and of fine bearing. Mr Benham was one of the first inhabitants of Mt Spec and had his camp on what used to be called Cloudy Clearing at Paluma. He scratched for tin in that area long before the road was built up the range. The only access then was by pack horse up the then called Sheys track which I am lead to believe started at the head of Waterview Creek on the way to Ingham. Mr Benham could always relate some sterling tales about the richness of the alluvial tin mining back then and the hard work that was done, some of which can still be seen to this day.

So those early years progressed with my father and grandfather getting enough orders for piles, girders and decking for the main roads, sleeper blocks for the railways and turpentine piles for the harbour board.

TOM'S DIARY, THE FIRST 23 YEARS

What great difficulty they experienced carting 50 and 60 foot piles down the range. At this period in time, the road was completely unsealed and each major bend was divided down the middle with guideposts forming left and right lanes, thus making the use of a long trailer a very hard exercise indeed. Most of our piles were carted two at a time on each side of the old International truck with the ends protruding 15 foot out the front and a big overhang out the back. No police or loading restrictions in those days. Incidentally these guideposts were removed early in the war years, so that made the use of timber jinkers more efficient.

What a remarkable old truck the C30 International proved to be. Sold as a thirty-hundredweight carrying capacity, it would only be considered a utility by today's standards, but the work it performed was truly remarkable. When you consider that two 50 foot turpentine piles with bark on, weighed in the vicinity of 3½ tons, it was a mighty load indeed, especially in that rough and hilly country. It only possessed mechanical brakes and the degree of stopping distance was governed by the power of your leg.

Unfortunately I have no record of the start of the Mt Spec timber supply. Some time in late 1941 or early 1942 men from the Main Roads Department came to Puzzle Creek and under the authority of the government impressed our tractor and truck and conscripted my father and grandfather into the Civil Construction Corp. My father was put in charge of the timber camp as it was commonly known and my grandfather became manager of Mr Torrelli's sawmill at Running River.

Mr Torrielli was one of the truly great gentlemen my family had the pleasure of knowing, but he was interned at the beginning of the war, much to sorrow of everyone who knew him.

Almost immediately our tranquillity at Puzzle Creek came to an abrupt end. Men and their families started to arrive and the first buildings were started. One of the first people to arrive were the Dowd family who had four children, so at last I had the playmates and people of my own age to associate with. At this early stage there was no accommodation available, so people had to build their own camps and provide for themselves as best they could.

People who come to mind are Mr Charlie McKergow who was the first timekeeper at the timber camp. Mr Bill Little with his Maple Leaf truck employed as main stores carrier from Townsville. Mr Tom Armstrong with his International truck from the Tablelands. Mr Jack Jarrett with his International timber jinker. Mr Arthur McCloy with his old Mack truck and many timbermen too numerous to mention at this time.

As time progressed this was possibly the greatest concentration of skilled timbermen Queensland has even seen. They were recruited from all over the country, and with their machinery and tools they were impressed into the service of the Civil Construction Corp to cut and haul timber at Mt Spec for the war effort. They cut hundreds of



William Thomas Conner dressing timber with the Boardaxe at Mt. Spec.

piles and girders and literally millions of super feet of decking and building timber, that was urgently required in those troubled days.

The first large tractor to arrive at the timber camp was a Caterpillar 3 cylinder D6 with the first timber winch we had seen. This machine was owned by a Mr Taylor from the Tablelands, and was impressed off him for work at the Timber Camp. It was railed to Moongabulla Siding and was driven very slowly and painfully all the way up the range and out to Puzzle Creek by a man called Deafy whose last name completely escapes me. The reason this machine was driven was because at that time it was too heavy to transport by the trucks available. Shortly after Mr Les Willett arrived with his International TD14 tractor, but not before he nearly lost it over the Mt Spec range, when it slipped off the back of a grossly overloaded truck driven by a man with a wooden leg. A couple of very anxious days were spent on the range righting this vehicle.

The first substantial building erected was the storehouse quickly followed by a Mess House and a huge dormitory for the single men. The new storehouse had a multiplicity of uses. A small area was set aside for the various children to learn their correspondence school under the guidance of a lady by the name of Jean McKergon. This was only for a short time as the lady inadvertently left. It was also used as a dance hall and on rare occasions the scrub around Puzzle Creek vibrated with the best music you could possibly hear. With a bit of sawdust and kerosene on the rough floor, people for miles around danced their enjoyment until the wee hours. It was truly amazing the number of good musicians who worked around the timber camp area at the time. Johnny O'Shey was a very sweet button accordion player and with a few glasses of the amber fluid could really lighten the feet of the most hefty timber cutter. The Barch brothers were extremely talented violin players and what Joe and Colin couldn't do with a fiddle was nobody's business. Les Price was exceptional on the Banjo, and his talent was justly rewarded when he won the Australia Amateur Hour years later.

Somewhere in this early period a great sorrow was to overtake me. All my life I have had a good affinity with animals so I was completely shattered when my old friend Bill the goat was poisoned by a glass bottle bait. To this day I can never forgive the man who perpetrated this shocking act.

For all the adult population this was a very worrying time. The Japs were rampaging down through the Islands and landing on Cape York was thought eminent by all. This was a very exciting time for a young lad.

As my father was the manager of the timber camp I enjoyed certain privileges not extended to other kids in the area, so I was able to accompany him on some of his trips and move about the camp to a certain extent.

One night an all male meeting was called to discuss the seriousness of the invasion, and one of the men proposed that all the women and children would have to be killed rather than have them fall into the hands of the Japanese. This statement really made my hair stand on end and frightened the life out of me. Shortly after this meeting the Volunteer Defence Corp was formed and some of these men were issued with an assortment of old weapons. They were restricted to five rounds of ammunition per man and some of the guns including my father's 310 had no rounds at all.

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It was quite a humorous situation. They were issued with slouch hat and uniform but no ammunition. At infrequent times a military instructor arrived to train the men for a few hours in the art of guerrilla warfare, such as placing dinner plates in the road to represent mines and the shoving of crow bars in to the tracks of enemy tanks. Also many of the culverts on the range road were mined with explosives and some of the old identification markings are still visible today.

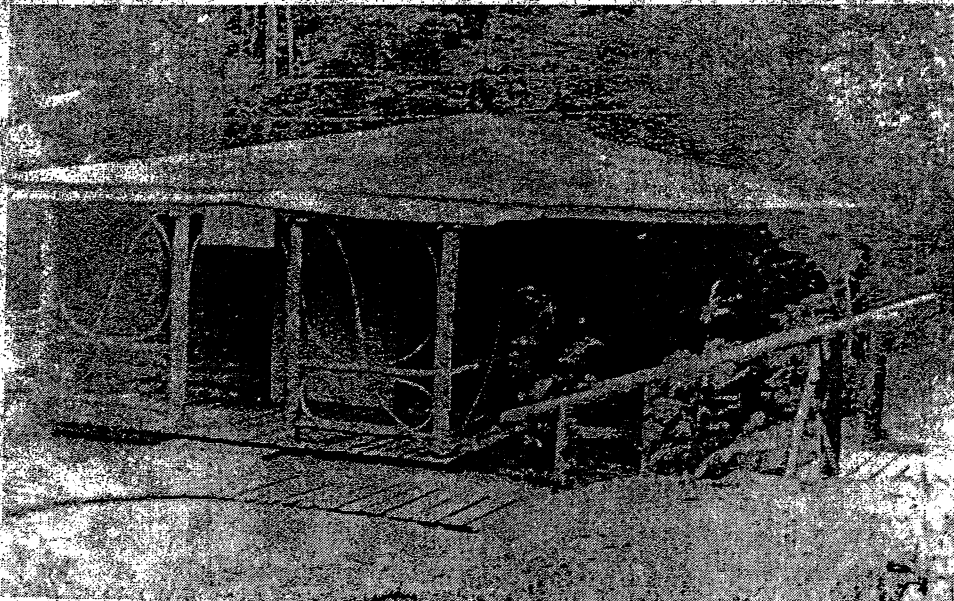


Troops from the American Radar Unit

The highlight of one of our trips was a visit to the newly arrived American Radar Unit that had established their camp at

Paluma. It was under the command of a very charming man by the name of Lt. Newbold. He made quite a to-do about the meeting and presented me with two souvenir bullets, one a 45 and one MK1 calibre and some army chocolates. Two other men we met that day were called Forbes who was the mechanic and Alabama who I think was the cook's offside.

Their camp was situated opposite the old Cavalcade guesthouse that was owned in this era by Mr and Mrs Burt Cavill and their daughter, Thelma. Many the joyous dance and singsong was spent in the company of the Americans in this old establishment. Incidentally it was my great joy and privilege that I married their grand daughter many years after these particular events in the war period.



American Log Cabin at Paluma

The Americans also built a genuine log cabin out of scrub timber and it was situated right opposite the present police station. It was extremely well built and was used as a recreation hall and canteen for the

troops and for many years it remained a very historical building. It finally decayed so much that it was bulldozed and burnt, and so was tragically lost to posterity.

About two hundred yards down the range from Paluma, the Yanks, as they were commonly known, set up a guard post at the junction of the main road and the Loop. This was manned day and night by an armed guard and all traffic up or down the range were required to halt and produce identification and a pass before continuing on their journey. Situated alongside the Guard Box was a white main road guidepost with most of the American contingents and some Australian soldiers' names carved upon it. This also disappeared after the war when the road was reconstructed. What a valuable piece of history lost!

The Yanks were extremely nervous in the early part of their stay, and it was their habit to blaze away at the phosphorus in the scrub, particularly on a pitch black wet night at the guard post.

1942 was possibly the wettest year on record at Mt Spec. It rained for 42 weeks in the year and the road past Paluma became a quagmire. I distinctly recall a small Buckey Bulldozer driven by Mr Joe Miguel, being used to pull all traffic through the knee deep mud and so keep all transport moving.

Another event that caused extreme havoc to the transport system was a huge landslide that occurred on the range road about a quarter mile north of the Crystal Creek bridge. The whole side of the mountain, with huge trees and boulders slipped across the road and brought all transport to Paluma and the timber camp to a stand-still.

For about 3 weeks the road was closed, and the period was sufficient to test the ingenuity of all the people concerned, because supplies became very scarce indeed, especially bread and meat which had to be carried by hand over the slide.

Right in the middle of this dreadfully wet year, units of what we were led to believe were Australian Ninth Division troops carried out their jungle training in the Mt Spec rainforest. The living conditions they endured were absolutely appalling, so it must have carried them in good stead when they were later transferred to the island war theatre.

One of their most super-human tasks was hauling a 25 pounder gun by hand and donkey up through the virgin rainforest. They started somewhere at the head of Ollera Creek and hacked and struggled the gun up the mountain and along the ridge to a spot a few miles from Paluma where it became completely bogged down. One day an officer from this unit negotiated with my father for the use of a tractor to help pull this gun from its almost impossible position.

Time slipped by and the timber camp continued to produce vast quantities of



Tom Armstrong carting 92ft pole in 1942.

timber. On the 24th April Mr Tom Armstrong carted what was possibly the longest piece of timber off Mt Spec. It was a 92 foot pole required at Moongabulla Siding for a wireless aerial and at that time it caused a bit of bother negotiating the range road.

Another lucky experience for me was being present when ten GMC six wheeler trucks and fifty American Negroes arrived at one of the timber ramps to load over a thousand nine foot posts. These posts were cut and loaded in two days and they were required for a prison stockade in the Townsville area. What an extremely happy and jocular mob of men they happened to be. With some of the cutters, I was invited to join them in lunch and thoroughly enjoyed the delicious tin of rice and meat and some other substance that I have never been able to taste since.

This happy day was short lived, because on the return journey one of the trucks failed to negotiate a sharp bend and careered over the side spilling posts everywhere through the scrub. Luckily, nobody was injured in this mishap.

As the reader will have begun to realise, I have no memory of specific dates, and as my family kept no record of the events I cannot be precise in their interpretation.

One day, Mr Boyes who I think was Chief Engineer then delivered a shattering blow to my family. He informed my father that with a group of other Civil Construction Corp men, he was to proceed to Jacky-Jacky Cape York and there help to set up a saw mill and timber industry. Because the Japanese were so close in New Guinea, my mother and I thought we would never see him again.

On the day before he left we spent an enjoyable evening together. As the sun was setting down through the huge white Rose Gums, my father asked me to accompany him up the hill on the other side of Puzzle Creek and as we turned to retrace our steps, he took my hand and it was then, without a word, I experienced an incredible feeling of love and joy that I was only able to experience once again in my life time many years later.

So our era at the timber camp came to an end. After a few months my father returned from Cape York, we packed up and departed to another job at Kurukan, but that is another long story.

Looking back at the beginning of the timber camp I suppose you could say it was the start of a fairly prosperous period of most people. In 1939 most people in the bush lived a very meagre existence, but when war was declared there was full employment and good wages to be made on day labour.

If the tourist happens to visit Puzzle Creek, like I have done dozens of times since, they will find nothing. Gone are all the men and their families. Gone are all the buildings and houses. The only thing that has returned is the quietness, and the relentless forest that has slowly but surely relegated the old camp into history.

TOWNSVILLE

Soon after my fathers return from Cape York he was ordered to proceed to Kurukan Rail Siding to work on a huge road works and ammunition dump project for the American Army.

The move started what was possibly the most unstable period in our lives as over the next couple of years we seemed to be continually moving from one job to another, because in those days most men were under the control of the Man Power Dept and were ordered to work in any essential service that was required. If you happened to be a married man and had no permanent place of residence, your family was forced to tag along to these places and as we fitted into this category we set up our typical camp at the Main Road Depot which was only about a half mile from the actual construction site at Station Creek.

The Kurukan bomb dump, as it was commonly called then, consisted of the construction of a large U shaped road system that had its entry and exit bordering on the Bruce Highway. It stretched, with the addition of ancillary roads and bomb bays, some twenty-two miles back to the foothills and around in a big semi-circle.

Every individual, including all the workmen, had to possess a special pass to travel to and from work and also had to stop and give the pass-word to the American Negro guards who controlled the guard posts at both the entry and exit points of this road. Even with all this security as a young lad I quite often travelled with my father all around the area and observed the frenzied activity of construction and the constant transport of every conceivable piece of ammunition and high explosive.

Some of the American guards carried on their own small black market operation with Chesterfield, Lucky Strike and Camel cigarettes being very covertly available and at ten shillings a carton my father was always a good customer.

This was an exciting time for a young boy, who at that time, was absolutely captivated by soldiers and everything military. I remember a horse drawn artillery unit I witnessed one day on the road near Bluewater travelling north. It consisted of a large number of horses and mules with every conceivable type of gun strapped to their backs. Some carried the barrels, others carried the wheels and most carried large boxes on their packsaddles. Most of this caravan was lead by mounted soldiers, but some teams were being led by a man on foot with about six horses in line.

On of the things that struck me as being a bit odd was the way they were haltered together. The horse behind appeared to be tied to the butt of the tail of the horse in front and so on down the line, but it seemed to have no effect on the leader. This was the only time I ever saw an American Army unit with horses around the Townsville area, but at that time they were a very colourful sight to behold.

Kurukan rail siding was always a mass of activity with dozens of GMC six wheeler trucks with their Negro drivers loading all manner of equipment from the rail wagons. It was amazing the amount and diversity of machinery the Americans had available in those early war years.

No one in North Queensland had ever seen a self-propelled grader, let alone a giant D8 caterpillar bulldozer. Most of our road making equipment consisted of iron tyre, four wheel graders pulled by a 22HP tractor or a hand operated scoop pulled by a horse. Most of our tip trucks were of two or three yard capacity and had to have the body tipped by hand with the aid of a crank handle and rope and pulleys.

Almost over night there appeared on our roads great Brockway and Autocar low-loaders with forty-ton capacity and huge Bay City truck-mounted cranes with huge lifting capacity, sleek fuel tanks and eighteen wheel trailers. On the military side there was great activity around the place with hundreds of Willeys Jeeps, GMC troop carriers, ten-ton Mack trucks that were used to pull an artillery piece with accompanying soldiers and many more pieces of equipment that I had never seen before.

All roads around the Townsville district always had fairly heavy military traffic and it was not uncommon for civilian traffic to have to pull over and let an army convoy of about fifty vehicles pass with much noise and dust and whistling from the troops if there were women present.



American Troops, very popular with the young girls. Names of these people are not known.

Even though we still lived in a fairly basic camp in the bush, this was possibly the most prosperous period in our lives up until then. My father and grandfather were fully employed on day wages and they had their old truck working as a water truck in the construction site.

We were able to receive fresh meat and bread almost daily on the Rail Motor and some other things from the canteen that was operating then. Sometimes we were invited to a movie at the American Army camp nearby and I thoroughly enjoyed myself as, up until then, I had seen very few movies. We only went a couple of times as my parents were a bit nervous being only a handful of civilians amongst all those soldiers, especially when the whites were segregated from all the Negroes.

After a few months at Kurukan we were once again required to pack our belongings and travel to Eungella Range, situated out from Mackay. My father was to take up a position as tractor driver in the essential timber industry that was owned and under the control of a man named Grey at that particular time.

Little did we realise the terrible rough and wasteful trip we had in store. My grandfather and I set off first thing with our truck loaded up to the hilt with all our worldly possessions stacked up high, including my faithful dog Joe and all our chooks at the back of the truck. Father and other members of our family were supposed to overtake us on the road south, but when my grandfather and I reached Bobawabba late in the afternoon there was no sign of our little Ford 10 sedan. It was just before sundown when they finally arrived after a half-day

trying to fix the engine, which had burnt a valve. It was only the timely arrival of an army convoy that gave them a tow, and so enabled them to catch us before dark.

We had to make camp in the open that night and because we had trouble starting the car we failed to get an early start the following morning. This required us to camp once again in a creek bed before reaching Mackay after two solid days of travel.

The main highway south in these times was mostly unsealed and appallingly rough, with corrugations and potholes for most of its great length. Most of the creeks and rivers were devoid of bridges and the great Burdekin River had only a corduroy crossing laid across the sand. This has always been a wonderment to me of how we fought a war effort with such a dreadful and inadequate road system.

When we reached Mackay we were forced to stay at a boarding house until the men could inspect the job and find a place for us to live at Eungella, but to their great dismay they found that the job had already been taken and that the man-power bureaucracy had fouled up somewhere.

I was told about a big row and that someone got punched, so with considerable anger we turned around without unpacking a thing and headed back to Townsville. This move without sanction of Man-power completely upset the authorities and was used to deny and harass my father in future jobs that he tried to undertake for a long period of time. Actually they never forgave him for leaving Cape York and it was very lucky that they didn't jail him for leaving without sanction.

It was completely dark when we reached the outskirts of Townsville and with the blackout in force and no street signs visible we became hopelessly lost. We drove around for what seen like hours trying to find our way through town and it was only when we attached ourselves to the end of a military convoy that we were able to find our destination at Mr and Mrs Bill Burdells residence in the middle of the night. What a relief this was to everyone concerned because our little ford 10 car after much coaxing along the way, decided to give up the ghost on the hill leading up to the Burdell residence and had to be pushed the last few yards of the way.

The Burdell family had been very good friends of ours for many years so it was through them that we were able to move into a nice house at Bohlevale, owned at that time by Arthur Burdell. This was the first home I had ever lived in that had board floors and nice big verandahs all round and with the added luxury of running water at the turn of a tap.

Shortly after moving into our new home, my old friend Jack Farrell presented me with another goat that I again called Bill and also a duck and a drake that my mother and I named Sonjie and Silvester. These two ducks were quite unique for domestic fowl because they had the ability to fly long distances and it was a common sight to see them flying around at a great height, circling over the large dam that was situated down below our house.

Our house was situated about two and a half miles from the Bohlevale State School so it was inevitable that I was enrolled in my one and only public school. I still vividly remember my mother and I walking the distance to school for my first day and it was only a short time after her departure that I was set upon by a section of the larger boys and thoroughly roughed up. This was a great shock to me as I was always used to reasonably friendly men, so for the rest of my life I was very suspicious of large groups of people.

The Bohlevalle School had an enrolment of about thirty-five children under the tutelage of a single teacher by the name of Mr Faulkner. The name of some children still come to mind, Arthur and Eric Tompkins, Tim Baker and Grace and Eric Whalley. With the exception of the above named children, I have never seen any of that class again in my life.

I look back on this as being the hardest period in my life, because from the first day I never really fitted into this school even though Mr Faulkner was a nice enough teacher and man, and we got along reasonably well. I always dreaded going to school. Coupled with my school problem, my old secret fear of some tragedy overtaking my loved ones really started to overtake me. Many times I would wake up in the night absolutely terrified and in a lather of sweat, hoping I had not cried out and awakened my parents to my secret.

Even though my parents bestowed upon me all the love they possessed they were from the old stock, so never told me anything about the complexities of life. I was never able to discuss the controversial questions about sex, or death and dying with my parents at any stage, because in my early life these subjects were completely taboo. My mother truly believed in God and I have stated many times throughout my life, that mother was the only person I have met that I could call a Christian-thinking person, but somewhere along the line as a child I got a distorted and terrified conception of a very vengeful God.

As a very young child I was deeply impressed by my uncle's tragic death; so somehow I began to associate all death as a retribution for any wrong deed I might commit. I quite ashamedly admit that I carried this fear and secret well into my twenties, but thank goodness with a strong will I was able to come back to reality before breaking down completely.

Because our residence at the Bohle was only a short distance from the aerodrome it was absolutely fascinating to observe the large variety of military planes that were in the air in these war years. It was nothing to see twenty-five planes flying around at the one time and watch large numbers of them in practice dog-fights, with motors screaming at all hours of the day or night. It was fascinating to go outdoors at night and watch the searchlights crossing each other and to marvel at their ability to pick up a particular plane in the beam and follow it across the dark sky.

Like most children in the war years I became pretty adept at naming the various military planes flying around at that time. Every day the sky was filled with B17 flying fortresses, huge Liberator bombers, B26 Mitchell Bombers, Lockheed Lightning Fighters, Aerocobras, Black Widows and other planes too numerous to mention.

Often on our journeys into town we would be required to stop at Duckworth Street to allow the passage of a large plane being towed across Ingham Road from the aerodrome. These planes were taken down Duckworth St. to a huge gantry crane for maintenance and engine fitting. The American Airforce also had gigantic engine testing bays in this area, and the noise could be heard at all hours for many miles around. These concrete bays remained in the area for many years after the war and were only removed when the suburbs of Vincent and Mt Louisa came into existence.

On our shopping sprees in town we always had to have in our possession the absolutely essential ration book. A large number of goods were rationed and were only available on the producing of X amount of coupons. When you failed to have enough tickets the remedy was simple. You did without. Petrol and tyres were an essential item and of course almost impossible to obtain by the general public. It was absolutely amazing to see cars of all sizes travelling around with great drums built onto the back with a chimney and a fire going inside. These were called Gas Producers.

TOM'S DIARY, THE FIRST 23 YEARS

What a hive of activity and prosperity Townsville enjoyed in those early war years. I think the civilian population numbered about thirty thousand but it would be safe to say that the military forces could have numbered one hundred thousand at times and possibly more on a transit basis. Many times since I have marvelled about the water supply in the city in those times with a big population and no Paluma Dam to rely on.

Every night Flinders Street was full of soldiers and Saturday night was especially crowded with every cafe and milk bar full and pubs and picture theatres doing a roaring trade.

How amazed I used to be to stand on the corner of Flinders Street and Stokes Street and watch the Americans transport their prisoners in GMC six wheelers across Victoria Bridge and down to the Wharf to work. These men looked so comical dressed in white overalls with big broad arrows painted on them in black, and always guarded by a soldier with a Tommy gun. I was always led to believe that these prisoners were Americans who had committed some misdemeanour while being in the army and had to serve time in a work detail.

Flinders Street at this time had steel street light posts in the middle of the intersections and it was the law of the time for traffic to keep left of the posts when making a right hand turn. I can remember one semi-trailer bus that the Americans possessed that was over one hundred foot long and had to turn on the wrong side of the post, and mount the footpath to negotiate Victoria Bridge.

The American army always appeared to be very strict with their personnel with the military police cracking down on any drunkenness or rough behaviour before it got out of hand. This discipline was something our own troops were markedly lacking because it was common to see drunken soldiers sky-larking and generally taking the mickey out of someone with the MPs keeping a very discreet distance.

I recall visiting town with my parents to witness a march by a large contingent of Australian soldiers. What a thrilling sight it was for me to hear and watch the band as it led all these soldiers, four abreast, in full battle uniform down Flinders Street across the Victoria Bridge and down to the Wharf for embarkation to goodness knows where.

During this march there occurred an incident that at the time was extremely shocking and funny. A large number of troops broke ranks and with much laughing and boisterous play grabbed prams and strollers off people and proceeded to push each other down the street. Shortly before the march started some soldiers proceeded to Denham Street where an old Chinese gentleman by the name of Mar Kong had a small business. After some sort of persuasion they enticed him into a cage that was mounted on the back of a truck and rejoined the march. Much to the enjoyment and mirth of the crowd, poor Mr Mar Kong was depicted as the infamous Tojo of Japanese fame.

While we lived at the Bohle my father was engaged in cutting and carting wood for the army. This was an essential service at that particular time and wood was in great demand all over the town. Some people that controlled the Wood Department made vast amounts of money, but unfortunately not my father.

After much difficulty in travelling to Ayr and the expenditure of a large amount of money for that time, he purchased a portable Laws circular saw to cut wood for the contract. After using this saw for only a short time, he returned to work one morning and found it had been stolen. In those times things were not insured so this was a great financial loss and also meant the curtailment of the wood contract.

Grandfather was immediately employed as a night watchman for the Civil Construction Corp at Garbutt and as my father was still under the control of the manpower he was offered a job as tractor driver in the timber industry at Kirama Range north of Cardwell.

So once again we packed our possessions on the Maple Leaf truck we owned then and set off over the very rough northern highway to Kirama. This turned out to be another red tape bungle, because the lodging we were supposed to move into was already occupied. We were extremely fortunate that my mother's sister and brother-in-law Ruth and Gal Healy were camped at Kirama, so we moved in with them under very cramped conditions until something could be sorted out. For some reason I cannot remember our stay at Kirama was very short lived, because it was pack up our gear again, including my two ducks and return to the Bohle where my grandparents still resided.

One incident sticks in my mind about the trip home. We were forced to camp the night on top of the Cardwell Range and during the night a great thunderstorm inundated us with a terrific shower of rain. What a dreadful night we experienced with everyone including my little sister absolutely wet through and chewed the whole time by swarms of mosquitoes. I think everyone was greatly relieved when late the following afternoon we arrived back at the Bohle.

My family's stay at the Bohle on this second occasion was quite short lived. My grandfather finished his job as a night watchman and my father was negotiating employment with a chap named Paddy Briody who had a contract to supply timber to the Michael Creek Mill at Mt.Fox. Paddy Briody had worked at the Mt.Spec timber camp carting timber with his five ton Maple Leaf truck in the early period and was well known to my father. So it was load up all our belongings onto the old truck, our thirty odd chooks, two ducks and old Joe the dog, on top of the load. I was very sorry to leave Burdell's property at the Bohle, because it was the most comfortable house we had ever lived in and also it had a small library of old books that I became very interested in.

About this time in my life I became an insatiable reader. I tried to read anything and everything, especially Animal Stories, War and Adventure Stories. One of the first books I read was The Desert Column by Ion Idriess and it gave me so much pleasure that I have been reading every spare moment for the last fifty years.

The trip to Mt.Fox was a long slow one. The road was all narrow, but not as high or as long as the Mt.Spec range. My mother and grandfather were extremely pleased with our house at Michael Creek. It was a very large weatherboard place belonging to the sawmill, which was located down on the creek and quite close to the houses. Our next door neighbours were Mr and Mrs Moretti and their two daughters Florry and Joy. Mrs Moretti was a nice friendly lady who always seemed to be happy and cheerful, Mr Benny Moretti was the mill manager at this time. The sawmill was situated in open forest country and in the wintertime could become very cold, the frost and vapour rising up from the water of Michael Creek early in the morning and mixing with the smoke of the old steam engine. The steam engine was mostly fired by the off cuts from the mill. The beautiful short lengths of Silky Oak, Maple, Black Pine and all the other species of timber came from the scrub. Looking back on it now, wood turners and joiners would give their right arm for this timber today.

As a young lad the mill had a great fascination for me. Every spare moment I had was spent watching the men sawing the logs into boards and delighting in the smell of sap and water. With steam gushing from the old steam engine, hearing the whine of the big saws was magic. I was fascinated by the breaking down saw with its mighty twin blades quartering up the huge logs. This was a time consuming process as all the logs had to be man handled on to the

breaking down trolley and turned with the aid of a hand winch and pinch bars. Then sent down the skids to the No.1 bench to be cut into boards of varying widths and thickness.

A lot of time was spent hunting with my dog Joe, stalking an abundance of Wallaby and Curlew around the hills and gullies of the area. I possessed at this time a small .22 single shot rifle that sometimes I would fire off in the direction of an animal, but never to my knowledge did I hit anything. The fun of creeping up on the prey was the main thing, to see how close the old dog and I could get before he took off yelping and barking and having the time of his life. I never wantonly killed anything, without it was justified, with exception of the odd scrub turkey that mum would cook if we were short of meat. My family was not too partial to scrub turkey, as it has a very strong game taste, which I suppose was lucky for turkey. Other people were not so fussy, with some of the men from the mill, shooting and eating anything with feathers, or hair for that matter.

One old interesting character by the name of Oliver Hussey who was camped down on the creek used to cook and eat Curlew and he claimed it was delicious. Oliver was the proud owner of an old Falcon Knight utility that he used when he went tin scratching in the district. It had very odd sized tyres that he found exceedingly difficult to obtain in the war years, so he used to cut the treads off old used truck tyres and place them over his tyres and lash them on with wet green hide. Oliver was able to travel around with this ingenious idea. Another old character by the name of Von Cluck used to visit us from time to time, selling much appreciated fresh vegetables. He would stay a short while, have a cup of tea and some tart and then return to his hermit-like existence.

I was still receiving my correspondence lessons but was spending less and less time studying. Much to my mother's annoyance I was learning to drive the old truck and going out in the scrub helping dad. Our mail was delivered by a chap named Eric Christensen who used packhorses for the mail contract. I think he used to cover the Mt. Fox area as far as Kangaroo Hills Station. Nearly every day there was a truck carting sawn timber going to Ingham, so it was possible to get our bread and meat sent up from Bob Taylor's Store at Trebone. On our first trip up, we called into Taylor's Store, and during a conversation between my grandfather and Mr. Taylor, they found they were distant relatives. When we were on a trip to Ingham we would drop in our grocery order and Mr. Taylor had it packed for us on the way home, there were no supermarkets in those days.

The road out to scrub was virtually just two wheel tracks. It wound around through the trees, over roots, the odd boulder and had some steep pulls up the hills and out of the gullies. This really did test the skills of the driver on the road; add to this the red volcanic soil that was very slippery when it rained and it could be quite hair raising. This was the road that I learned to drive my first timber truck on. I had been driving the old truck for sometime, but this was totally different from driving a heavily loaded lorry with a trailer loaded. As usual my father just told me to get behind the wheel and have a go. It wasn't so bad because I had travelled with him and knew what to do and how to change the gears.

My father was employed as the snigger for Paddy Briody and my grandfather was the Blue Tonguer, in other words the Sniggers offsider. The tractor they had at this time was an International TD40 with Armstrong Holland free spooling timber winch. At this early stage I consider this tractor the best available for timber sniggering. It was well balanced and low to the ground and kept its tracks perpendicular at most times under load. The winch was particularly powerful, and I have seen it break an inch and quarter wire rope under very heavy load with the tractor anchored behind a tree. This was common practice when the load was too heavy. Run the tractor out a head of the load, manoeuvre it behind a tree of suitable size

and start winching. If the driver failed to do this the machine would be pulled back by the winch. I enjoyed driving the old TD40 in the scrub, snigging big logs, mostly with the Bobtail. For the benefit of those people not familiar with timber, the Bobtail was hooked onto the winch rope behind the tractor. It was used to lift the end of the log slightly and stop it from digging into the ground. It was absolutely an essential piece of equipment for snigging large logs in the early days when the tractors were small. A Bobtail consisted of two wagon wheels with a large bolster across the axle and a six-foot pole to steer it by. All logs were dogged, with large pieces of iron shaped by a Blacksmith so they could be driven into each side of the log. Usually a notch was cut into the sides of a log with an axe, or a hole bored with a two-inch auger, so the dog could be hammered in with a fifteen-pound sledgehammer. The dogs had large steel rings through their ends. Three quarter anchor chain was then passed through these rings and over the top of the Bobtail. When the pull went on the Bobtail it lifted the log sufficiently and made it easier to snig. All these chains and dogs were exceedingly heavy for me, so I had to rely on my father or grandfather to hook up the log for me.

The scrub at Mt.Fox produced some big timber, one particular Silkwood log I remember snigging and winching out of the scrub, measured fourteen foot two inches girth by sixteen foot long. This log contained two thousand four hundred and eight super feet of timber, which was a big load for the TD40 to snig. Logs had to be cut into lengths suitable for handling by the tractors and trucks available at this early stage.

Paddy Briody's Maple Leaf truck was considered to be a very good puller, but owing to the steep pull out in the scrub the truck could only handle about twenty three hundred super feet of Silky Oak or Cadaghi, a heavy timber, or twenty five hundred feet of Silkwood.

There was always something unusual happening in the scrub. One particular day when dad was loading Paddy's truck, a cotter pin came out of the hand clutch on the tractor when it was engaged and he could not stop it. The tractor pulled the truck over on its side before dad could push the throttle forward and stop the engine, much to the relief of everyone. After a lot of profanity, everything was fixed and Paddy went on loading.

Paddy Briody and a lot of other timber carters used their tying down chains as loading slings. This was a very cumbersome idea and quite heavy work pulling the chains back over the load after every log was loaded. When the top logs had to be loaded, the skid logs were placed on the bottom logs and the chains



Thomas Robert & William Thomas Conner loading logs at Mt.Fox with the RD6 & our KS5

placed over the tops of the skids. I think this was the method used by the bullock teams and thank goodness was replaced with ropes, with eyes spliced at either end with a piece of chain

in the middle. A kidney link was placed around the chain to shorten one end or the other and it was quite a skilful operation to load logs from the ground with the bridle, because the big end of the log would always gain, so you had to shorten one end with the kidney link to compensate and thus keep the log straight up the skids.

One day there was great excitement at our house; Paddy arrived with a brand new Silent Knight kerosene refrigerator. My folk had to apply for a permit to purchase this fridge, as this type of luxury was still in very short supply in the latter part of the war years. How thrilled my mother and I were, because this was the first piece of furniture we owned that was capable of keeping our food cold and preserving our fresh meat. The fridge was operated by a kerosene light under the workings and provided you kept it out of the draught and kept the wick trimmed everything was ok. If not there would be plenty of smoke and no cold. What a time we had making malted milk ice blocks and trying to experiment with different kinds of ice cream. I think the fridge was the single most important purchase we had made as far as comfort in the bush was concerned.

Another important purchase at this time was a brand new KS5 International truck, this was to help in the carting of logs from the scrub to the mill. This truck was purchased from Hobbs and Luchich's Garage in East Ingham, after a waiting period of some months. It turned out to be a very good truck and was about equal to the pulling power of Paddy's Maple Leaf. It had four speed main box with a hand operated two-speed rear differential. Most timber trucks in this era had large wooden bolsters and the trailer was usually the back axle and wheels of another old truck. Our trailer was the back end of an old Ford. This was the first truck we owned that had a steel cab, with wind up windows and comfortable seats inside and compared to the other things around, was a pleasure to drive.

Most of the time my father and Paddy worked the scrub the weather played an important part in carting the timber. The track into the scrub was mostly wet and slippery and a lot of time was lost because of the wet. I have been with them pulling the trucks out of the scrub at nine o'clock at night, in teaming rain slipping and sliding all over the place with everyone looking like drowned rats, covered in mud and trying to see by the headlights of the trucks of where to hook on with the wire rope. As all this was going on there was another contractor carting timber from the scrub by the name of Henry Hussey and he also had a KS5 truck about the same age as ours. My family knew him from Mt.Spec days and as a younger boy I knew his son Ernie quite well. A couple of years earlier at Puzzle Creek, Ernie and I were playing with a tomahawk, when Ernie put the full face of the blade in his leg. This caused a hell of a commotion, as he had to be rushed to Townsville to have it stitched.

My correspondence schooling now came to a crisis point my mother put her foot down and insisted that I study my lessons or be sent away to boarding school. This put a temporary stop to my working in the bush, but I used to hurry through my study and then go out with the men at every opportunity.

I mentioned before that some of the timber at Mt.Fox was very big. One huge Silky Oak tree I remember was too big for the machinery available, so was busted in half with dynamite. This was completely against the rules but was sanctioned by the Ranger in this circumstance. Half a log was extremely hard to load but was eventually pulled up the skids with a rope on each end.

Eventually my father ceased work with Paddy and went driving a RD6 Caterpillar for a contractor by the name of Clary Easton. Clary logged the mango tree block on the top of the range, the timber being carted to the sawmill in Ingham. The old RD6 was a three-cylinder

tractor with a Waugh and Jophenson timber winch with a reversible drum. This was a cow of an idea, as you had to reverse the winch to pull out the rope. If you had to pull out thirty feet to a log, it was a mad scramble to get back to push the clutch in and stop the winch. The RD6 had no armour plating around the radiator and sump, so you had to be careful all the time and be dead scared that a stick didn't go through the radiator or a big rock hit the sump.

Like most timber men at the end of the war, Clarry bought a new six-ton White truck with a McGrath tandem duel wheel trailer. This truck could pull no more than the Maple Leaf belonging to Paddy Briody or our KS5. It was commonly called by everyone, the White Elephant, because it was always stalling on steep hills and having to be towed by the tractor. Looking back on it now I think it was quite a good truck, but was always overloaded with the big three-ton McGrath trailer.

My grandfather drove our KS5 carting logs down the range into Ingham and seemed to get by without having any problems, although I considered him to be one of the worst drivers I had seen. I think grandad was more suited to horses and bullocks. Going down the range was a slow grinding process, especially with our trailer that had no brakes. Most of the trucks carting then had no trailer brakes except Clarry McGrath's trailer and boy did he need them. One of the first trips up the range, Clarry carted a steam boiler for one of the mills. I think it was for the Cleanskin Mill. Sure enough up near the top, the little White truck got stuck on one of the steep grades. He was there for about two days before he managed to get over this particular pinch and carry on. It was not surprising, because this boiler weighted about nine or ten tons.

One day I was home doing my lessons when we were paid a visit by a well-known timberman by the name of Stan Hamilton. After a cup of tea he said he would like to see my father and did we know where he was working. I said I did and offered to show him the way. Up until then, this was the worst decision I had made and especially for my old dog Joe it was a disaster. We drove to Max Creek in Stan's old utility and then set off on foot to find dad. We hadn't gone far before old Joe started to bark and fight with something in the long grass. When I ran up I could see it was huge Brown Snake, it could have been a Faipan, although they were unheard of in those days. I dragged Joe away from the snake and began looking for a stick to wack it, but when I did find one, the snake had moved off. Stan and I continued on until we found dad, grandpa and the other chaps, Les Little and Danny O'Connor. We had scarcely arrived when I looked around and saw poor old Joe lying on his side, frothing from the mouth and close to death. I rushed to his side and he gave his old tail a bit of a wag but he was very weak. It was there in front of those tough men that I cried my eyes out. After examining Joe all over we found he had been bitten on the nose and there was nothing we could do. He did not die then but shortly after we got home he died, paralysed in every limb. For a long time I was devastated and terribly lonely he was my constant companion of ten years and all of a sudden he was gone. It was like losing one of the family.

Entertainment at Michael Creek was non-existent, so it was no surprise when mum, grandma and Mrs Farrell decided they would like to go to a dance over at Running River. I think it was about twenty-six miles across to Running River, over the worst possible road in the district. The road was just two wheel tracks that wound through the trees and across gullies and creeks. All we had was the KS5, so mum and Mrs Farrell sat on the wooden bolster at the back and grandma and my little sister rode in the front with me. What a terrible rough ride mum and Mrs Farrell must have had. They danced till daylight and then we set off for the return journey. Mrs Farrell, who was holidaying with us for a while, said she thoroughly enjoyed herself and would do the trip again anytime. The dances were held in the

schoolhouse at Running River and the musician on this occasion was Alf Cranston on steel guitar. Alf was a tin miner in the district and could play very good old time tunes.

Shortly after this trip I became terribly ill with some kind of fever that kept me in bed over a fortnight. I had recurrent dizzy spells, vomiting and could not eat a thing. Perhaps this sickness had a good side, because my weight dropped from eleven stone to about seven and a half. I mention this incident to highlight the attitude of people to sickness in those times. No one thought to take me to a doctor, mum and grandma treated me as best they could and I recovered without any ill effects.

I was still pretty weak when Mr Eddy Hobbs from Ingham invited dad and I on a duck-shooting trip to the Valley of Lagoons. There was five of us who travelled on an old tray top truck, with all our swags and camping gear and a big black Retriever dog to fetch the ducks from the water when they were shot. It was about twenty-two miles around the lagoons with numerous small islands scattered around the middle. We obtained permission from the station manager to camp and shoot on the lakes, as long as we didn't disturb his cattle and would close all gates after us. Mr Hobbs had his father-in-law with him and also Tom Rasmussen, who I think was the manager of the sawmill at Ingham. I never took part in the shooting, that was left to the men, who after a week had seventy six ducks and some Black Brim fish, that I helped catch in the creek that we were camped on. Mr Hobbs had a huge ice-chest on the truck, so we were able to take this supply home. Mr Hobbs cooked some memorable meals in the camp-oven, one I remember was four Black Ducks cooked with vegetables and a whole bottle of tomato sauce. Boy it was delicious provided you didn't mind spitting out a few lead pellets now and again.

Wild pigs were plentiful on the property, so one-day Eddy's father-in-law decided to get one. He set himself up in the bend of a gully and waited with both barrels cocked. Suddenly he heard footsteps, so he jumped out of hiding and let go with both barrels. Too late, with a gasp of horror, he realised he had shot a half grown heifer belonging to the station.

A couple of months after returning from this trip we moved over to Cleanskin Mill with all our belongings again to camp on a rise just before reaching the mill. My father was to drive an old clapped out KO Allis-Chalmers tractor and grandad was to cart logs with our KS5. The carting was very close to the mill and on a good day you could cart five or six loads provided the old tractor stayed in one piece. The injectors on this machine were always clogging up, so a few spares had to be kept soaking in a bottle of ether to clean them out. This always took considerable time and was a damned nuisance when trying to make a living on contract. All the tractors around then had to be cranked by hand to start them, no batteries to electrically start, so this old machine was a fair cow to get going on a cold morning. Caterpillar tractors had a small auxiliary petrol engine to start the big diesel, but they could be very cantankerous on occasion and many the time the air would be blue with profanity, when trying to start them with the pull rope. International tractors were first started on petrol and then after a warming up period were switched over to diesel.

There was always a fair bit of disagreement between tractor drivers and cutters about tracking in the scrub. All logs cut in the scrub had to have a track cut to them, so this represented a large part of the time and effort that a cutter had to devote to the job. Normally the cutter would move through the thick scrub cutting the selected trees until he got what was called a Crown by the Forest Ranger. This consisted of the cutter going around with the Ranger checking and recording the measurements of each log, and branding the end and stump with his Crown hammer. After this the cutter then had to cut a track to each log, wide and straight enough for the tractor to snig it out. Remember that there were no dozer blades in these days.

There were good cutters and negligent cutters so if the tracking was not up to scratch the snigger experienced a lot of difficulty. This is not to say that some sniggers were not paranoid about their tracks. Henry Hussey in particular insisting that every branch be cleared off the track and all stumps chopped below ground. Life was made exceedingly tough for the cutter.

By this time the war had ended and all over the place big auction sales of all kinds of machinery were taking place. Army disposal sales of American GMC six by six, NR Macks six by four, Chev Blitz four by four and Diamond T six by fours to name but a few. All timber contractors everywhere tried to acquire something bigger than was available for years so they were like dogs with new tails. I remember Gino Paris arriving at Michael Creek with a huge AEC Matadore four by four with, great big fourteen hundred by twenty single wheels. This truck had no cab and the driver was perched about eight-foot from the ground. By the way Gino was handling it, I would say you would need ten men and a boy to steer it.

So our time at the Cleanskin Mill was fairly short lived. What with the unreliability of the old Allis-Chalmers and disputes with the cutters, it was decided that we would return to Puzzle Creek, Mt. Spec. I think we enjoyed our stay with the Italian people. I know I enjoyed their cooking and I have retained a liking for Italian food ever since. One time some of the men killed a wild pig and Mrs. Grassi made some salami that was delicious, especially when eaten with Gorgonzola.

It took two trips to shift from the Mt. Fox and on the first trip we only got as far as Ingham, because of floods cutting the road to Townsville. We all had to stay at the Day Dawn Hotel for a few days with our chooks still on the back of the truck, and covered with tarpaulins to keep out the rain. Mr and Mrs Dooly Harvey owned the Day Dawn then. We used to go across the street to the White Rose Café for some meals especially Spaghetti Bolognaise; it was only one shilling and six pence a huge serve. Grandad got to know the owners Mr and Mrs Euclid quite well. They were very nice people. There was also another Café behind Frank Fraser's building that served good meals. Big Crumbed Steak and Spaghetti for two shillings and six pence.

On the second trip I cut across from Running River over the Jump Up and out to pick up our load of gear in the KS5, and saved a lot of time and miles. Our modest house at Puzzle Creek was still there. It had been occupied by various people, but was virtually the same as when we left it years before. Most of the buildings at the Timber Camp had been demolished and removed with the exception of a couple of small huts that were still standing. One of the family houses was shifted to Tobanna and remained on the bank of the creek for many years. Another family house went to Bluewater, and I think became a Scouts Hall or Church. They were painted bright blue in colour and remained prominent landmarks to the people who knew them.

My father secured a large order of girders and decking off the Main Roads Department for bridges being constructed north to Ingham. Some of the bridges we supplied timber for were Black Gin Creek, Little Gin Creek, Sullivans Swamp and decking for Big Crystal Creek. My grandfather and I carted most of this timber with our KS5, I did the driving then and grandad was the offsider.

Dad, grandad and Jack Farrell did most of the cutting with some of the work subcontracted to other cutters to help fill the orders. When enough timber was cut for supply, Dad used to hire a tractor off the Main Roads, usually a Caterpillar D4 with no winch. This was a wonderful little machine and could have been great, if only it had a winch. I used to love driving the D4, with open exhaust bellowing and the dust of the open forest swirling behind the load. There was an exceptional trick to driving this tractor, with a very heavy load. Ease off on the

throttle to just before stalling point and it would really pull. Open the throttle wide and it would only spin its tracks and dance around all over the place. Girder cutting was a particularly skilled trade. My father, Jack Farrell, Phil Haskins and Ted Campbell were very good broadaxe-men, and girder cutters but Ernie Hamilton and his brother Jerry were excellent with the broadaxe or sapping-axe. I pick Jerry as the best of the bunch. All these men could cut a girder, or a piece of decking with scarcely a blemish, and I have seen Jerry Hamilton cut an eight by four inch trailer pole twenty six foot long as smooth as if cut by a circular saw. All girders and decking at this time was cut from Turpentine timber.

The amount of work required to cut a girder in the bush was phenomenal. First you had to find a tree that was straight, large enough, and long enough to cut a thirty foot twenty inch diameter dressed girder. Then you had to fell it, remove the bark from the sides, leaving a strip on the top to stand on when shopping in the sides prior to squaring. If you removed all the bark you could not stand on the top because the sap would be too slippery. Then the sides had to be squared with a broadaxe. Then the corners chopped off so the log resembled an octagonal shape. Only then was the log rounded with a sapping-axe. A broadaxe was about twelve or thirteen inches long, and had a handle that was offset from the blade so the cutter avoided skinning his knuckles, on a wide cut of the log. A sapping-axe was usually a Broadaxe with most of the steel cut off to make it lighter and more easily handled when chipping small pieces of wood off the log to make it perfectly round and straight.

With all my association with broadaxe men from a very young age I never had the inclination to use the big heavy thing, even though my father tried repeatedly to interest me in the trade. It was highly skilled work but was one of the most backbreaking and laborious of all manual work. I didn't mind using the chopping-axe but at this time I much preferred the tractors and trucks.

While we were thus engaged at Puzzle Creek, Ben Whalley had a contract to supply Hoop Pine from Stone River Gorge to Brown and Broad Townsville. This was a particularly long haul, over the Jump Up to Running River and from the River to Paluma, up hill all the way. The reason I mention this is because it was music to my ears listening to Snow Whalley changing gears in the WA22 White truck that his brother Ben had then. Though we were over a half mile from the road you could hear the motor roaring, and the beautiful gear changes for at least a half an hour as Snow went past. Little did I realise then that in a short while I too would be driving this wonderful old truck.

The timber business was at an all time high. A number of timber men had contracts to harvest timber from the virgin rainforest for the Forestry Department and were in full swing. The main contractors then were Dallas Beedell, Johnny Pelleri, Bill Pappin and Henry Hussey.

The road out to the Paluma Dam was still under construction but it enabled Bill Pappin to log an area the Paluma side of Birthday Creek. Bill was camped on top of a very steep pull on the road that was ever after called Pappins Hill. This was the steepest grade on the Swamp Creek Road and was always a sever test for trucks working then. Henry Hussey worked the Camp Creek block that was about three-mile further on.

While we were still camped at Puzzle Creek the Forestry Department called tenders for the harvesting of Flooded-gum, Red Stringy and Turpentine from the Puzzle Creek area. This was a wonderful hardwood block, open forest country with some great stands of Flooded-gum, so my father made a hasty trip to Townsville to visit one of the many Army disposal auctions and purchased a Ford Marmon Herrington four wheel drive truck for One Hundred and Eighty pounds. This truck had a very powerful winch on the back and would have been

quite suitable for snigging timber in this forest country. When he applied for the contract to the Forestry, he was knocked back because he didn't have a tractor and therefore was ineligible to tender for the job. This was a disappointment for me personally, as I always had a desire to have our own Logging Contract.

A few weeks after this failed contract bid the Government of the day instituted a law forbidding the cartage of any material in opposition to the Railways. This required that all logs had to be unloaded at Moongubulla Rail siding, and then reloaded on Railway Trucks for delivery to Townsville. My father applied for the job and was accepted by the Forestry Department as contract log loader at Moongubulla.

It was pack up time again for our move to the siding. My family built their camp on the bank of Ollera Creek but this time we had two Army Disposal Masonite huts which were placed end to end with about ten feet separating them. This area in the middle was covered by corrugated iron, and had a prefabricated wooden floor. This space was open on both sides and was used as our eating area. The huts on each end were bedroom and kitchen respectively. Our bathroom consisted of four posts set in the ground with roofing iron on the outside for walls. There was no bath, as such, only an overhead shower that was filled with water and pulled above your head with the aid of a pulley and rope. All our water had to be carried from Ollera Creek, but thank goodness this was only a few yards away. Our toilet was typical of toilets in the bush then, four posts in the ground with hessian around the outside and the doorway open, but facing the thick bush. Instead of the traditional hole in the ground we had the latest model purchased from Hollimans in Townsville, with nice Bakerlite air tight lid and flash Baked Enamel can. This was ok as far as comfort was concerned but was a damned nuisance when it had to be emptied. My grandparents lived in a tent and fly about fifty yards from us, but we all ate together in the main kitchen, and this was the custom for as long as I could remember.

The log-loading contract started as a bit of a disaster. There was always a shortage of rail wagons from the Railway and at this time after the War it didn't matter how many you ordered for the week, you would only receive one or two each time. Quite often a whole week went by with no work at all. The log contractors were still carting into the siding and had to be unloaded, but this was double handling and something you could ill afford. We only got paid for the timber that was loaded on rail trucks.

The one redeeming feature about our stay at Moongubulla was the availability of our fresh supplies. We had a standing order with Keiry's Butchers who sent our meat out in a hessian bag on the rail-motor from Townsville, and our bread came from Cerutti Bakers from Ingham. The guard on the rail-motor used to throw the bread or meat into the little rail shed so it was only a matter of walking a short distance from our camp to pick it up.

On the days when my father and I had no loading to do I used to go for a ride up the range with Jim Robertson who was driving a WA22 White timber truck for Dallas Beedell, called by some people, Bill. This was a great learning experience for me. Watching how other drivers handled their machines and observing the different loading techniques of the drivers. Bill Budell was logging the twenty-one and a half-mile block carting hardwood and some softwood at this time, and was snigging with the trusty old TD40 International tractor. He had two trucks, the above mentioned WA22 White with double reduction differential and air operated hydraulic brakes, and a GMC 6x6 American Army disposal truck, driven by Joe Vella. While still snigging at the block Bill acquired a new TD14 International tractor with no winch. He used this machine for many weeks without the winch, but with much difficulty.

TOM'S DIARY, THE FIRST 23 YEARS

In low range the GMC was very powerful, but in high range it was nothing to write home about. As there was such a reduction in low range the truck had to be travelling at slow speed to facilitate a reasonable gear change, so it was virtually impossible to change into low range on the fly. I remember one time when the White broke an axle on a steep pull at the Rock Cutting. The White had about four thousand four hundred super feet on and the GMC had about the equivalent load. Joe Vella hooked the GMC onto the front of the White and pulled both loads to the top of the Rock Cutting. This was a mighty pull considering the GMC was only rated about a three-ton truck. I must mention that this truck had wonderful light steering, almost like a car.

On the Tenth February 1947, after a very long illness my grandmother passed away. She had been sick in the camp at Moongobulla for about two weeks, but was such a stubborn, head strong woman that she refused to go to a doctor. In the end an Ambulance had to be called from Townsville to make that long rough trip, but she died that same afternoon at the Park Haven Hospital. I was very sad at her passing, because over the years she had been a marvellous friend and grandmother to my sister and myself. As a young lad she was always telling me stories about the Kelly gang and other mystical people, and singing old time songs with me, like Springtime in the Rockies, Tipperary and a host of other one's. She never uttered an unkind word to me or chastised me at any time. In other words she spoilt me rotten. Grandmother was a physically strong woman who could work with the best of them, but in her young days had been involved in an accident with a run-away buggy that necessitated the removal of one kidney. Periodically this caused her much sickness in her latter years and I think contributed to her death.

Not long after this sad event dad decided to sell the Marmon Herrington and the loading job at Moongobulla. Two brothers by the name of Ces and Bill Gerard from Mutarnee bought the truck and job for two hundred and fifty pounds and continued to load logs for a length of time. They eventually sold out to Rolly Macchetta from Ingham who loaded logs there for many years.

Once again it was shift time, but only a short trip up the range to Paluma. Before everything was loaded on to the old Maple Leaf truck my mother baked a beautiful meat pie for us to have when we arrived at Paluma but just before we reached the Crystal Creek bridge dad had to brake suddenly. Down came Spot the dog from high up on the load, fair on top of the pie being carried on mum's lap. What a commotion, with much swearing from dad and dire threats against poor little Spot, it took us some time to see the funny side of it all. As I mentioned before the Maple Leaf had no cab, so the passengers had no protection from any thing that fell out of the sky.

When we arrived at Paluma we moved into a small house situated at the end of the tennis court. It was fairly crowded for our family, and was extremely dark inside requiring a kerosene light most of the day. Things quickly returned to normality. My father obtaining orders for girders and decking for the Main Roads Department and my mother trying to keep clothes dry in Paluma's wet and misty conditions.

A short time after our return to Paluma I was driving our truck past the Cavalcade guesthouse when I was stopped by Jack Clupfel the Ewan Policeman. He asked me if I had my licence yet and when I said no, he immediately suggested I fill in the forms and obtain my first drivers licence. No test for me as Jack considered if I could drive up and down the range I must be alright. Really it was amazing the things people did in those days. Wide loads, long loads and trucks overloaded to a dreadful degree. The Rollingsstone Hotel was a very handy stopping off place for the drinkers travelling up the range under the weather, but nobody was

TOM'S DIARY, THE FIRST 23 YEARS

worried about the police. People never considered this was law breaking. Without you were a complete rogue we had very little to complain about as far as the law was then.

About this time a very pleasant event took place that was to have a wonderful impact on my life. Dad, mum, Ernie Hamilton and myself were invited down to Mutarnee for a sports day they were holding. They played tennis on the school courts and had a great day. I was so impressed that when we got home I could not wait to get on the Paluma court and learn to play. Mum and dad were quite good players, and in their earlier times had represented Cardwell, against Tully and Ingham on many occasions. So with some help from mum and my good friend Jim Linton I struggled to learn the game. What a tragedy it was that my mother had contracted asthma some years before and could not play for any length of time. Even when it was raining Jim and I would be on court hitting the ball, and enjoying it one minute, and being totally frustrated the next. Any spare time I had was spent playing tennis, so it was only a short while before I was matching it with my father and Ernie Hamilton. Mostly we played late in the afternoon, with the fog and mist swirling in, so that it was almost impossible to see your opponent at the other end of the court. This played havoc with our rackets and strings, but who cared. Apart from my mother, no one instructed me with the correct grips, or the tactics and rules of the game. I just went out there and hit the ball, and more or less taught myself. In later years this went against me and I was restricted quite a lot in the shots I could play. As time advanced, what an impact this game had on my life. It lifted my self-confidence and gave me the opportunity to mix with some of the most renowned sportsmen and sportswomen of Australia and meet with people from all walks of life.



Thomas William Conner playing tennis on Paluma court, he was not left-handed, just fooling around.

For some time now Henry Hussey had been logging an area at Camp Creek about half way along the Forestry Road to the dam. He was snigging with a TD14 Tractor with Armstrong Holland winch, and was in partnership with Les Little in a KS6 International truck. He had two New Australian cutters from Finland whose names I cannot remember. Henry had these cutters well trained because their tracks through the scrub were virtually swept clean. Henry and his lady, by the name of Ann Grogan, lived in a house at Paluma owned by Nielsens the Hairdressers of Townsville. Les Little boarded with them and slept in the back of an old Army truck that was supported on four forty four gallon drums in front of the house. What a cold and damp camp this must have been. Ann Grogan was a very nice lady, always cheerful and friendly and always kept a wonderful clean house. Many times she could go out snigging with Henry and help hook on the logs with the heavy snig chains and pull the winch rope out to the log.

Henry had recently purchased a brand new KR8 International truck with five-speed gearbox and a double retraction diff. This was a nice looking machine, painted a deep green with plenty of chrome around the grill and front lights. When the new truck arrived, I think the

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partnership between Les Little and Henry dissolved, because one of the first drivers was Jimmy Lynch. Later Les Little drove the KR8.

I never acquainted myself with the details, but Henry offered my father and Ernie Hamilton a partnership in the TD14 Tractor, which they accepted for two hundred and fifty pounds each. Dad started work driving the tractor and snigging. At this time Henry was driving the KR8 and as the road down the range was still unsealed he employed me as an offsider for one pound a day. This was my first job outside my family with my own money. We used to start at three in the morning and it was very unusual to finish before seven at night. This was for two trips to Moongobulla mind you.

My chief job was to go ahead of the truck down the range, and sweep any small rocks from the wheel tracks with a piece of pine board. I thought this was quite strange because none of the other trucks bothered about a few stones, but Henry had an obsession with stones on the road and this remained with him for as long as I knew him. I never drove the KR8 with a load, but I did drive it empty a few times. I always thought it was governed down too low in its revs, and was restricted in a flying run to the hills. Henry also owned a brand new 1947 Chevrolet utility with well type body and long mudguards. Often when the truck had to go to town I was given the job of driving Ann in the ute and boy was I careful of putting a scratch or dent in this nice looking machine.

My father's partnership didn't last long with Henry. My job ceased when Henry resumed driving the tractor and Les Little took over driving the KR8. Not long after these events Henry sold out to Arthur Godwin who with his son Bob Godwin and his nephew Chris Godwin had moved down from Kirrama Range. Henry and Arthur had been to an Army disposal sale at Thursday Island and purchased a practically new Caterpillar D8 tractor with Hyster timber winch.

Before I get too far ahead of myself I would like to relate a funny incident that happened when I was offsidng for Henry when he was carting with the KR8. An old chap by the name of Jack Ferguson owned a KS5 International tip truck that he used to cart gravel for the Main Roads. He was employed mostly on repair work on the range road, filling in pot holes and keeping the drains clean on the side of the road. Jack was a very ordinary driver, so inevitably, when he was turning the truck down near Crystal Creek Bridge he backed over the side of the Range. Down he went for about sixty feet, through the scrub and over rocks until he was stopped by a big tree. Luckily not much damage had been done, and apart from some bruises Jack was ok. When Henry and I arrived on the scene with a load of logs it was decided that Henry would have a go at pulling the truck back up the very steep precipice. With the aid of a pulley and long wire rope things were ready to go. Just then a serious discussion took place whether Jack would sit in the truck and steer it up, or tie the steering wheel in place with rope. Jack's insistence finally paid off, he would sit in the truck and steer it to the top. I seriously had doubts about this exercise because the rope was so small and it was a long way down, but who was I to question the experts and brain trusts on this day. As you have probably guessed, just when the front wheels were coming over the rim, the fastening on the truck let go and back down the hill went Jack at a terrible rate. This time he broke two ribs and had to go to hospital. This little episode paid off for me, because when Jack's truck was repaired he approached me to drive it for a short time carting gravel for the range road.

One of Henry Husseys last acts with Godwin was to arrive at Paluma with the first NR Mack truck in the district. This was an Army Disposal unit that they had bought at auction, and still had the big troop carrying body on the back. Of course, as soon as he arrived everybody came

to have a look, and someone remarked how big this truck was. Henry, being the exaggerator he was, solemnly told us that he did not believe he would make it around some of the bends on the range road.

When the truck was made ready for timber hauling, I went with Henry for the first load at Camp Creek. He loaded fifty five hundred super feet of mixed softwood for this first trial run. Considering this truck was equipped with huge 1400x24 tires it performed pretty well, although I thought Henry's gear changing was pretty ordinary. Like most of the drivers around then, he used to put the gear lever in neutral, stab the accelerator to gain revs and then complete the gear change. Not the way to change gears in that machine, I am afraid. After taking about two hours to travel down the range, I don't think Henry was too impressed with the Mack.

When we returned to Paluma, someone remarked how big a load we had, and Henry said that when he went past the Nuns, who were holidaying at Paluma, they were praying for him, and when he returned they were still there praying. This was said with a perfectly straight face, mind you. I honestly think he believed this statement.

About this time Johnny Pelleri and Les Little were logging the Paluma Area behind the township, with the old TD40 and the eight ton, single axle petrol Mack. The TD40 was in terrible repair. Quite often it would throw its tracks, or have some other annoying mechanical trouble. One could always tell when you were close to their loading ramps, by the yells and screams of profanity echoing through the scrub. One particular day I walked down to their loading area just in time to see one of the funniest sights you could hope to see. Johnny and Les were loading some logs on to the Mack with a long loading rope and sling. On this occasion the rope was a shade too long, so with Les yelling to Johnny to pull a bit more, the tractor hit the spur of a big Quandong tree and stalled. Johnny flew out of the tractor with the crank handle but couldn't fit it in because the front of the machine was hard against the tree. With terrible rage to see, Johnny fell to his knees and started to bite big chunks of bark from the tree with his teeth. All the time he was growling, and crying, with tears streaming down his face and spitting bark everywhere.

On the whole, though possibly not as extreme, this sort of behaviour was quite common in the timber industry. If you couldn't swear when you first came into the job, after two hours you could match it with any bullocky. Timber getting is a fascinating job but on some days, nothing seems to go right. Murphy's Law takes over and the smallest things become huge things. Frustration takes over for a short while, and some men explode.

Among the other contractors working then was Jim Bethel who was carting electric light poles for the Townsville Regional Electricity Board (TREB). Jim had a nice looking five-ton Chev Truck with single axle jinker. Archie Taylor used to cut and cart his own timber mainly piles and girders. Archie had an old Ford V8 truck with single axle jinker, and a four x four Army Blitz. Archie, although only a small man, was a very good axeman. He competed in many shows and was a champion in tree felling at these shows. In later years he was tragically killed at Kirama Range while working in the scrub. Ben Whalley had secured the contract at Puzzle Creek to supply Flooded Gum and other Hardwoods for Brown Broad Mill at Townsville. This was a very good block of timber. The Flooded Gum was nice and straight and in virtually open forest country. He started off with the old RD6 but very soon purchased a brand new D6 Caterpillar tractor with Carco free drum winch. Snow Whalley was driving a Chev Army Blitz with single axle trailer, and a chap by the name of Keith McKenzie was driving Benny's White truck. Old Phil Haskins and his son Mick were cutting at this time, sometimes with the help of different blokes that they knew from Townsville. As I mentioned

before, this area was a timber cutter's dream, good straight timber with very little tracks to be cut in the open forest and the snigging and carting was the best on the range.

My first job with Benny turned out to be a disaster. At the time his driver had left, so he asked me to drive the old White for a week until he obtained another full time driver. Remember that I was helping my father with his own girder contract. When I arrived out at the camp Benny assured me that Snow had given the White a full service and she was ready to go. We loaded up and I took the load down to Moongobulla, but coming back up the range I thought she was a bit sluggish, instead of coming up in low top I had to change down to high fourth. When I got out to the ramp I mentioned to Benny that something was wrong. Benny checked the points and plugs and we assumed that everything was ok. We loaded up again, but coming up out of Puzzle Creek, she stalled on the steep incline. Twice I had to jump the old truck up the hill. This consisted of roaring the engine to full revs and letting the clutch out, thus gaining about four feet up the hill. This was a very dangerous practice as in most trucks you could twist off a drive axle. When I reached the top I decided to check the rear brakes. When I touched the differential it nearly burnt my hand off. Snow had drained the diff alright, but never refilled it. We refilled the diff with oil and was able to deliver the load to the siding but the diff was ruined and had to be replaced.

Once again it was show time in Townsville so as was our custom we went down for a couple of days. In those days the show displayed a great array of cars and trucks and machinery of all kinds. It wasn't a matter of spending a couple of hours there, we used to go the full three days and I used to be one of the last out the gate at night.

At this show dad and I were completely taken by a beautiful KS6 International truck at Casey Motors stand. It was a nice looking truck painted a deep green with red chassis. On the day we saw this truck I came down with a terrible attack of the flu. Both my mother and I were confirmed to bed at my Aunt Alice's place in Hermit Park, when dad drove up in the brand new International. Though I was sick as a dog I got out of bed to go all over this new truck, and feel so proud that it was ours.

When we returned to Mt Spec we fitted the wooden bolster from the old KS5 and bought a good single axle trailer with hydraulic brakes from Henry Hussey. My father bought the new truck on the strength of orders for piles, girders and decking that he had then, and also any log carting that was available from any of the contractors.

There was always something happening, and believe me they could be really terrifying. Not long after we got the new truck into action I was delivering a load of girders to the Moongobulla yard when I came within a whisker of being killed. It was a beautiful looking load; ten twenty two foot long, by seventeen-inch diameter, perfectly round dressed girders.

It was late in the afternoon when I left Paluma, but I thought I could get down before dark and get unloaded while I could still see. Seeing the light was fading I ran one side of the truck up onto a slight rise to make it easier to roll the girders off. This proved to be a bad decision. I took the back chain off, ok, and very gingerly removed the front chain. Nothing happened. A lot of the trucks at this time had wooden bolsters, and we used to have a knotted D chain against the log to hold it on the bolster. When I flicked the end of this chain the whole ten girders let go. Every instinct I possessed propelled me back but high grass caught my feet and over I went. With the girders crashing around me and brushing my legs I managed to skid backwards on my behind, and some how, miraculously escape being squashed. When it all stopped, I was about eighteen feet from the truck with girders all around me. It all could have

ended there at age seventeen. Boy I was still shaking and sick when I returned home to Paluma, but I kept fairly quiet in front of mum.

The KS6 was a wonderful truck, and for its size could pull down to very low revs without stalling. One of the tricks of driving this truck when in low gear was not to over rev on a steep hill, but to feather back on the accelerator slightly. Apart from our own carting of piles and girders I carted a few loads of logs for Ben Whalley at the Puzzle Creek block and could handle thirty six hundred super of Rose Gum without any trouble.

I took great pride in keeping this truck in good looking condition, plenty of polishing and service but apart from a few loads with the contractors the log carting they promised beforehand did not eventuate, with the consequence the truck did not work every day. So it was on one of these slack days that I caught a ride with Jimmy Robertson as he went through Paluma with a load of logs for Moongobulla. I had two reasons for going, one to collect our bread at the railway siding, and two because I liked to see how other drivers handled their trucks. Just before we reached the Bluff, which is the sharpest bend, and one of the steepest parts of the range road, we pulled up to have a chat to Joe Vella who was travelling behind us with his GMC six by six. After checking the load, I heard Jim tell Joe that the tow hook on the White was a bit worn and that he would have to fix it when they were next in Ingham. We got going again, and as we were rounding the bend at the Bluff, there was a terrifying thud and an almighty screech of metal on metal. I looked around to see the whole load swinging around on the bolster and the logs disappearing over the side of the range. I reefed the door handle open and hit the door, but as the White was left hand drive and Jim was on the drop side his natural instinct was to try and hold me in by seizing me by the shirt. Very lucky for us it was universally accepted that you never chained your load to steel bolsters, as this was the only thing that stopped the truck from going over with the load and trailer. As it was the White was dragged back about six feet before all the logs slipped off the bolster. What a racket the logs and trailer made as they went over. The eight tyres on the trailer exploding one after the other and the logs bounding many feet into the air, before everything came to a halt about three hundred feet down. The noise seemed to remain for a long time, echoing up and down Chrystal Creek gorge.

Jim and I were still shaking when Joe Villa came around the bend and saw us standing there with the truck but not trailer or load. The look on his face was incredulous. The cause of this mishap was the worn tow hook. As we negotiated the bend the hook broke and the trailer and load proceeded straight ahead over the side. Shortly after they retrieved the trailer, but it was many months after that they decided to winch all the logs up.

Not long after this episode Dallas Beedell, Jimmy and Joe loaded up their tractor and gear and travelled down to Eungella Range near Mackay.

Things at Mt Spec were pretty slack, there was a first and only timber strike on, so plenty of tennis was played on the old court. My father and Ernie Hamilton were invited to play fixture tennis for Trojans Club at the West End School. After a couple of social games Mick Hamilton and I were asked to play fixtures for Mr and Mrs Jack Garbutt's team. This was my first competition tennis, and what a wonderful couple the Garbutt's turned out to be. Our team consisted of Jack and Mrs Garbutt, their son Warren, Ron Hall and Shirley McMillan. Most Sunday's Mick and I were invited around to the Garbutt residence for lunch and what a friendly time we had. They were truly very nice people. Most Friday afternoons we would leave for town, either on our truck if we had a load of decking or girders or by any other transport that was going to town. We all stayed at Malloys guesthouse in Sturt Street, which at that time was situated behind the old Olympia picture theatre. The accommodation at

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Molloys was extremely basic but cheap, it started at two shillings and six pence per night and over a couple of years it rose to five shillings. In those days there were seven cafes in the first two blocks of Flinders Street but mostly we all ate at the Blue Bird cafe. You could partake of a very large meal of crumbed steak, salad, bread and butter and coffee or tea for only two shillings and six pence. There was a café across Victoria Bridge on the corner of Palmer Street that provided a three course meal for one shilling and six pence.

Staying at Molloys was quite an experience. You always had to watch your shirts and socks because the Hamilton boys were always short of good gear to wear and it was not uncommon to find them wearing your shirt or your last pair of socks. This was always laughed off as a great joke and in a way there was no hint of malice or nastiness. Molloys was mostly an all male house with a lot of men as permanent boarders, but it was not uncommon to leave the door of your room open and nothing would be touched.

Sometime my mother and Sister would come down for the weekend and stay with friends, or out at my Aunts place in Hermit Park.

After we were playing fixtures for a while we decided to enter our first tournament in Cairns. This necessitated us flying to Cairns, and as this was my first flight I was terrified especially as we had to go by DC3. Dad, Ernie, Mick, myself and Ernie's girlfriend Fay made the trip, but everything came to naught, it rained the whole weekend and we never hit a ball.

On the flight back the weather was atrocious and I just made Townsville before I became violently ill along with a few others on board. Incidentally, Ernie and Fay later married and lived together for a lifetime and had many children.

About four-mile from Paluma on what we called Red Hill there was a good stand of turpentine. The Hamilton brothers with Ernie as ganger were cutting decking timber for the Main Roads Department. They had a Caterpillar D4 supplied by the department to snig the decking quite a long distance out to the Main Road for loading. It was my job to drive this machine with the help of my mate Jim Linton as blue tonguer. We devised a real ingenious way of snigging this decking, namely a big fork cut from a tree by the gang, about five foot wide by six foot long.

Jim and I would stack about ten pieces with the ends on the fork, and then pass the snig chain under the front of the fork up and under the decking thus forming a big loop. When the tractor took the strain the chain tightened on the decking, holding it together and away we went.

It was a fairly long snig up through the scrub, up hill all the way with some steep pulls and a couple of wet gullies we had to cross. Sometimes a piece would work loose and slip out of the load, causing much gut busting to reload it. When we got out near the Main Road it was the worst. We had to go down a very steep hill so when the slack went off the snig chain the decking tended to slip forward, sometimes causing a bit of a calamity and a much profanity.

As I mentioned before it was a good feeling driving the D4 even though she was not in good repair. With the throttle open and the open exhaust bellowing it was music. There is something about the smell of Diesel and the smell of dressed timber being dragged along a dry snig track, causing little puffs of smoke that stays with you for the rest of your life.

Wherever the Hamilton's were working there was always a lot of good-natured sarcasm and banter, so this job was no exception. One afternoon late Ernie decided they would fall a big

turpentine ready for the next morning. Now as they were always reluctant to sharpen a saw this task became rather funny and laborious because the old saw was very blunt. First Ernie and Mick started but after a while they started to feel the strain, so Les Little and Ashley took over but pretty soon they started to stagger. As it was getting late four of them decided to get on the ends of the two-man crosscut. Ernie and Mick, Ashley and Jim Linton, pulled and pushed with all their might until the big tree crashed to the ground. There was much laughing and joking but finally we agreed that they had burnt the tree down with friction.

It was very wet weather at Mt Spec so we all decided to go to town. We spent the weekend doing virtually nothing as it rained without a break. Our accommodation at Molloy's guesthouse was appalling. The owners were carrying out renovations and my room on the ground floor had six inches of water. They laid large planks on the floor so I could get into bed. We all decided to catch the Rail Motor to Moongobulla and then hitch a ride up the range, but unbeknown to us there was a landslide on the range.

We set off walking and when we got about three and half mile from the foot of the range we decided after much discussion to go over the edge, cross Crystal Creek and walk up the Saddle. Now I can tell you that it is terribly steep down and up there, but after a swim in Crystal Creek we made it onto the road at the saddle. Ploughing through the long wet grass over boulders and fallen trees we were really peaked.

We only walked a short distance up the road when along came a truck that was patrolling the road. This saved us a long walk up the second part of the range.

The D4 was giving a lot of radiator trouble. A couple of times I had to take it into old Bill Little to have it soldered. After the second time I don't think he was too pleased, as he was not getting paid from the Main Roads Department. After a while the department took the machine away to be overhauled. So ended Jim and my job with Ernie but it was interesting while it lasted.

The Forestry road was being pushed out over Swamp Creek the present site of the Paluma Dam when dad acquired the job of supplying the girders to span the creek, long before the dam was built. The girders consisted of eight big, Red Stringy logs with two sides squared off so they would sit side by side across the creek. The Forestry road camp was situated right above the falls on the bank leading down to the creek, and consisted of tents and flies with an open cooking galley at the end. As one



Construction of Paluma Dam, Swamp Creek, Mt Spec

of these was empty, we used to camp there a couple of nights rather than drive back into Paluma. At this time the road gang were working on a particularly rocky hill out past Prospect Creek when one day I went out to have a look at how things were going. There was

quite a lot of blasting to be done so the powers to be had purchased a large quantity of Ex Army Bangalor Torpedoes, and land mines to use along with the conventional dynamite. Bangalor Torpedoes consisted of a cylinder about six-foot long and about four inches in diameter, packed with T.N.T. I believe these things were used by the Army to blow up barbed wire entanglements.

Now this day the Powder Monkey; (incidentally this is the name given to the man doing the blasting) laid six Torpedoes on top of this big stubborn rock and two mines in a hole underneath. When things were ready it was common for the Powder Monkey to yell "Fire", and this was the cue for everyone to take cover, especially poor Freddy Copnell who used to run about a quarter of a mile with abject terror on his face. Fred was a returned Tobruk Rat and had suffered mild shell shock over there. Looking back I should have taken Fred's example, but instead I only went about fifty yards and got behind a huge Red Stringy tree.

When the thing went off it lifted me about two feet in the air and almost deafened me. The big trees shook and small limbs showered down, and after what seemed an eternity shattered rocks were still falling. After this it was very obvious to me that the Powder Monkey had no idea how to use these things and was only experimenting, so I took Fred's example and galloped about half a mile away when I heard that word "Fire".

It was very cold camped at Swamp Creek, especially late in the afternoon when you went down for a bath in the Falls; the water was like ice, but it was soon forgotten when you were sitting around the open fire eating supper that grandfather had cooked. There was a wonderful old dog at the camp, a collie X with something or other but a marvellous turkey dog. Take him into the scrub and if he couldn't tree a turkey in a short while, you could be sure that there were none around. The mark of a good turkey dog was to put one up a tree and sit there and bark, until someone came along and shot it. Old Digger never seemed to belong to anyone in particular, but was always looked after by the Main Roads or Forestry workers.

Late one afternoon dad, myself, Ernie, Mick and Les Little set off walking into the scrub looking for Turpentine timber that might be suitable for girders or decking. After quite a while of stumbling up and down creeks and gullies, we came upon some very old digging and extensive work that was carried out by the old pioneer miners' years ago. Some of the work was mind-boggling, for instance a trench cut through solid rock just wide enough for a man to walk through, about twelve feet deep and twenty foot long. It appeared this race was dug to divert water from the creek on to their pay dirt, thus facilitating the washing of the tin ore. All this work was done without the aid of compressors or jackhammers, only hammer and gad, crowbar and much backbreaking toil.

After Ernie had washed a bit of dirt with a miners dish that he carried with him it started to get fairly dark and gloomy in the scrub, so a move was made to head for the camp. After about half an hour of much discussion and argument it was obvious we were lost and in the dark. If the reader has never been in the scrub in the dark I can tell you it is some experience. You are falling over old rotten logs and rocks, getting tangled up and getting torn with wait-a-while vine and slapped in the face with branches and leaves.

Luckily for us it was full moon time, so when the moon came up it was a matter of walking in that direction because we knew we would strike the road. We came across some beautiful tall Rose Gum that night, shining silvery in the half-light they seemed to reach nearly up into the sky. A couple of years later I had the pleasure of cutting and carting some of these trees.

With much laughing and some profanity we finally found the road that was under construction, but not before I fell into a big stump hole that had been blown and had half filled with water. Of course this was the signal for much hilarity from my mates but I couldn't see the funny side of it at all. When we trudged into camp about ten o'clock, didn't old grandpa give us a dressing down, chiding everyone on their lack of bushmanship. He could talk, because he was an extremely good bushman.

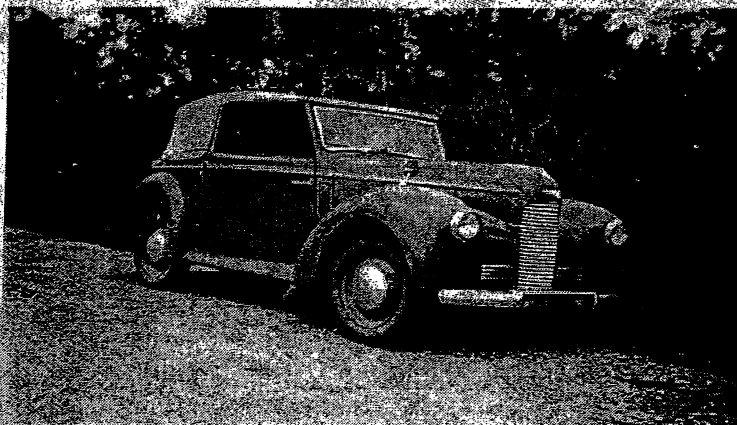
Dad, grandpa and I didn't camp too long at Swamp Creek, but it was a joyful experience then. Things were changing all the time in the Timber Industry, Bill Pappin had finished his contract and left, Arthur Godwin had finished at Camp Creek and left the Range. Bob Godwin, Herb Anderson, Jim Cooper and Keith Blackford packed up and left their camp at Birthday Falls.

Dallas (Bill) Beedell returned with his plant from Mackay and started logging from his old block at the Twenty One and a half mile, with the addition of a Diamond T Truck that he had purchased from an Army disposal sale. This was a massive piece of machinery, by far the largest and most powerful truck in north Queensland at this time. These trucks originally belonged to the US Army and were used primarily for Armoured Tank Recovery during the War. Of course they were left-hand drive and had a very powerful six-cylinder Hercules diesel engine. Mounted behind the cab was a particularly strong winch, but it was virtually useless on a timber truck.

The engine in this truck peaked at eighteen hundred revs and the top speed was twenty-two miles an hour flat. It had a four speed main gearbox and a three speed auxiliary box consisting of low, direct and overdrive. Most loads of six thousand super feet or more were easily handled in overdrive but I have seen it spin the drive wheels on dry ground, using both low gears, on a very steep pull. With both boxes in low gear, and the engine at full revs you could count the treads on the tyres as the wheels moved around.

One day I went for a drive with Jimmy Robertson to Moongobulla, and on the return he asked me to have a drive up the range. Boy what a shock. I had never driven a truck with such heavy steering, it was all I could do to negotiate the bends on the road. Most of the time I was half standing out of the seat to get purchase on the steering wheel. The range meant nothing to this truck, top gear overdrive at full speed if one could spin the big twenty two-inch steering wheel long enough. But more about this truck later.

It was some years since my family owned a motor car, so on one of our trips to town we spotted a very smart looking little car in Casey Motors showrooms. It was a brand new Hillman ten horsepower, four-seater convertible, pale green in colour with plenty of chrome. My mother was quite enthused so we decided to purchase it after much deliberation. I think it cost six hundred pounds, so mum put in two hundred and fifty and I contributed the same



10hp Hillman owned by Elizabeth and her son Tom Conner

with the rest to be paid back over a short time. Now looking back I am filled with shame

because poor old mum got very little use of the car, I was always driving off to town for weekend tennis or sometime down to the pictures and then home in the same night. I never thought to take mum and my sister. I was too selfish in my young attitude to even give it a thought.

I was much in demand when going to town on the weekends. Sheila Rose the school teacher was a frequent passenger, my good friend Jim Linton who was my tennis partner, Mrs Bud Jones who lived on a small farm just outside of Paluma, Joan Hackett who was a relieving school teacher were some of my frequent passengers.

This little car was a vast improvement on some of the transport that Jim Linton and I used to hitch a ride to town to play tennis fixtures on the weekend. When Jim and I formed a partnership in tennis we got to town as best we could but nearly always we got a lift with Norm Geary who had a tip truck working on the road at this time. Normy would instruct us to be at Williams Store, then situated on the corner of Ingham Road and Meenan Street, Garbutt, between seven thirty and eight o'clock Sunday night.

As Normy was courting Grace Whalley at the time, these hours were not strictly adhered to. Many nights Jim and I were sitting under the awning of the store until eleven or twelve at night before he turned up. And we would be cold and cranky. One night he didn't turn up at all until the morning, and as we were climbing onto the back of the old truck, a chap by the name of Keith Anderson greeted us with the usual "Good Day" but Jim failed to hear him with the consequence that Keith said "When I speak to you I want an answer", Jim took exception to this and I could see he was extremely wild for the rest of the journey. Unfortunately there was a huge landslide about three quarters of the way up the range, with mud about two feet thick and spread about two hundred yards down the road. When the truck pulled up Jim and Keith got into it, some times up to their knees in mud but neither man fell. Normy and I and a couple of other blokes tried to stop them but they were too intense. After what seemed a long time they decided to quit, neither man uttered a word throughout and no insults were expressed after. Jim and I hitched a ride home on the other side of the slip and Keith resumed pushing the mud over the side with the dozer.

Looking back then I suppose I could be accused of being very obnoxious at times, and I know some people took a dislike to me, but all my young life I was sort of on guard, because there were plenty of men around who gained great delight in taking a rise out of you or thought it was abnormally funny to make a fool of you, especially in front of others.

Nearly everyone had a nickname but not me, not to my face anyhow. I admit I had a very short fuse, and how I never copped a hiding I will never know. I could never suffer fools gladly.

Like Ernie Hamilton, and Ted Spieglehauer my great mate Jim Linton met his future wife at tennis. One afternoon we were playing fixtures at Trojans court in Queens Park when Jim noticed this nice looking girl. Pretty soon he learnt her name was Francis Butler and things progressed from there, to marriage and a happy family. Incidentally Jim and I played B grade fixtures for that year and only lost one doubles match.

Work was fairly slack for our KS6. Some of the carting did not eventuate so dad decided to sell if he could. We had carted a couple of loads of girders up to Tully for the Jarrah Creek road when we met one of the timber contractors who liked our truck. He eventually bought it, much to my sorrow, but economically dad had no choice. The contractors name was Ray Bourke and boy, he purchased a grand little truck and trailer that he was able to put straight to work. Dad made no money on the deal, as a matter of fact I think he lost overall.

About this time, 1949 the Paluma Progress Association staged a very successful Paluma Carnival. A tennis tournament was one of the attractions played on the cement court and my cousin George Brabon and I were lucky enough to win the doubles. A chap by the name of Les Pascoe from Townsville won the Singles. Of course we had wood chopping events and these were dominated by Eric Sander off very substantial handicap. Eric also entertained the large crowd with an exhibition of tree felling off springboards. Eric was an exceptional show chopper, and for a big man was right up there with the best in tree felling, and carrying off many titles at numerous shows. As a log cutter Eric had no peers and I consider him to be one of the best I had seen. He had huge arms and was exceptionally strong, but in the scrub he never seemed to be working hard or in any great haste. He mostly worked on his own in the bush so when he was falling a tree he used what was called a dummy. This consisted of a long piece of rubber cut from a truck tyre. One end was hooked on to his saw, and the other end was tied onto any sapling that was near by. This acted as a second man when he was felling.

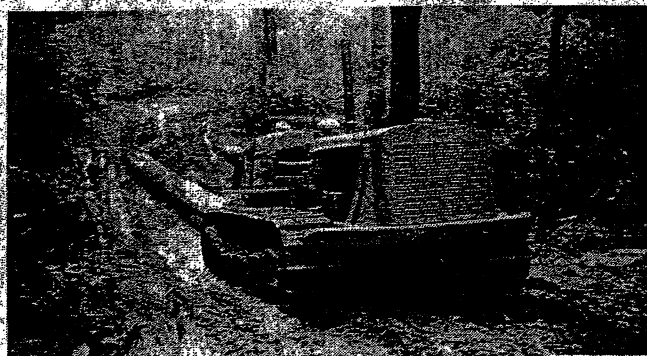
Eric was a good-natured big fellow who was always up to some outlandish prank. He took great delight in creeping up behind some poor soul, seizing him around the waist and hoisting him above his head. There was not much you could do about it because he was so strong.

Eric, Jimmy Robinson, and Beedell were camped in the old US Army log cabin at Paluma when they returned from Eungella and by all accounts Eric gave them what on. One night Eric smeared Tan boot polish in Beedells pyjama trousers, so when he put them on you could just imagine the result. This caused huge mirth and by the next day everyone knew about it.

But back to the carnival. My father gave a demonstration of Broadaxe work, there were sports for the children and a dance was held that night. I think either Les Little or Johnny O'Shea played the Accordion and sometimes between dances young Jim Linton sang some old favourites like Danny Boy, I Love You Only and Old Man River. Jim had quite a good voice and used to be well received by the crowd.

A couple of members of the Progress Association were Mr Jim Linton Senior, Tommy Nutt, my father and the others I have forgotten, but boy they put on a good show.

Young Jim Linton's parents, Mr and Mrs Linton were really nice, down to earth people. Old Jim as he was called ran a little shop and Mrs Linton looked after the Telephone Exchange and Post Office. Mr Linton was a First War veteran and Mrs Linton was an English War Bride. I became good friends with both of them, but especially Mrs Linton. Old Jim liked nothing better than a few runs and a good yarn about old times, fossicking, horses, cattle and virtually any subject.



D6 Snigging Logs at Mt. Spec

Periodically my father and old Bill Little would congregate at the shop, Old Bill would slide his long thin frame down a wall, onto his haunches, and slowly they started their yarn telling. This was quite a ritual. First out would come the tobacco pouch, next paper on the lip, and then rub the tobacco in the palms of the hand, before deftly licking the edge and rolling the smoke. Dad used to roll a fairly neat smoke, Old Jim used to roll a very loose one, cone

TOM'S DIARY, THE FIRST 23 YEARS

shaped with a bit of weed hanging out the end. Old Bill used to meticulously tamp the end with a match and then wet the end with his tongue before lighting. If one was a bit short of weed the standard phrase was "Have you got the makings on you Bill". Ernie Hamilton's approach was to hold his hand and say "Give".

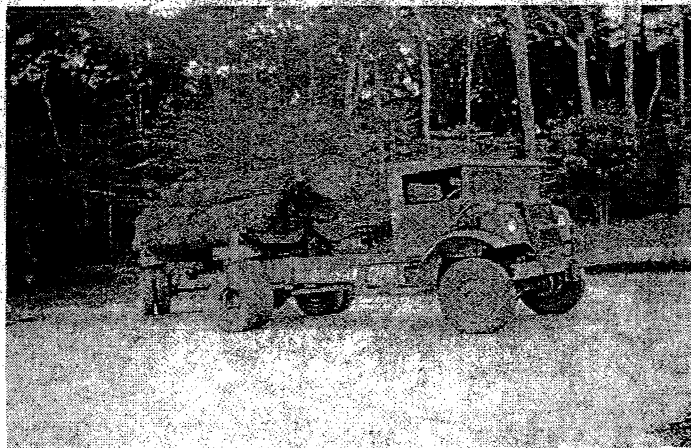
Mr Linton used to keep a varied stock in the old shop. Mainly tinned meat, powered milk and that sort of thing, but boy was it hard to see anything because it was so dark inside on a wet or overcast day. One day I went for a ride with Joe Anonymous to the Scrub in Beedell's Diamond T. As we left Paluma the truck started to boil but still Joe kept driving. I noticed the heat gauge was on the danger mark. I can't remember who I mentioned this to but pretty soon it got back to Dallas Beedell with the consequence he sacked Joe. Of course Joe blamed me. My father tore strips off me verbally and I felt terrible.

After a couple of weeks Beedell wanted a driver and asked Les Little and I if either one of us wanted it. We both went out to the twenty-one and a half-mile to have a drive with a load on and size up the situation. The pull up from the ramp was exceedingly steep, with a sharp bend to make it even more difficult. We had about six and a half thousand of Red Stringy and Gum, and with both boxes in low the Old Diamond incredibly just spun the wheels in dry ground. Jimmy Robinson had to winch us to the top with the TD14. A couple of times having to anchor behind a tree to do so. When we got out on the main road it was my turn. I couldn't believe it when I went up the Rock Cutting in second gear overdrive. Actually I didn't want the job, not after the hullabaloo with Joe so after much haggling Les took the job.

On the twenty second of October 1950 poor old Grandpa passed away after a short illness in Townsville. So passed into history a popular pioneer. Grandpa could be a jovial sort of person, extremely loyal to his family, generous to his friends, but ruthless to his enemies.

Grandpa never really recovered from the death of grandma. For the last few years of his life he was a lonely man, and I feel he worked on far too long. His death was a great blow to my father, because they had worked together all their lives and no decision was made without they consulted each other. Grandpa was a very complex man, in a lot of things he was pig-headed and cantankerous and could fly into a frightful rage, especially against railway inspectors or any other bureaucracy that he thought had wronged him or his. Looking back I think I inherited some of these traits, so what better way to honour a good hard working man.

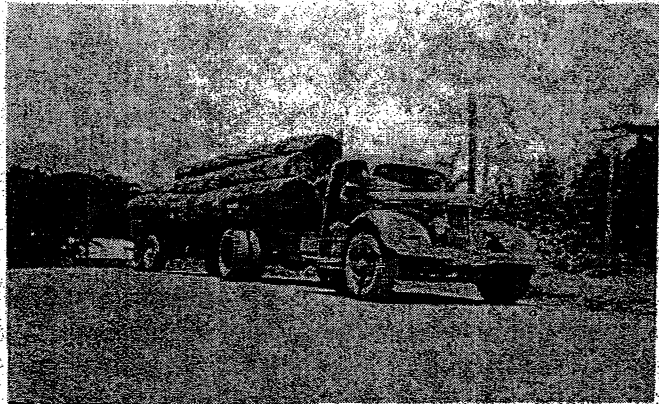
Not long after this sad occasion Arthur Godwin bought Ben Whalley's plant and job at Puzzle Creek. He purchased Benny's near new D6 six cylinder Caterpillar tractor and Henry Rebgetts and Roy Jackson bought the old WA22 White with TMC tandem single wheel trailer. Incidentally Roy Jackson was stand ply mill manager and Henry Rebgetts was yard Foreman at this time. The cutters were Phil Haskins, his son, Mick, Norm Starkie and Jim Lee, also periodically different blokes I have forgotten. They had their camp on a ridge mid way between Puzzle and Clarks Creeks, and was forever known as Phil's Camp.



Chev Blitz owned by Arthur Godwin. Tom Conner was the driver, 3300 super feet was the load.

Initially Arthur Godwin approached me to buy the old White and finance me into the bargain but I was too nervous of taking such a responsibility, so it was then he offered me the job as driver at 2.10 pound a load.

Now it should have been a good job, the timber was good, the average load was about five logs and we were working in the open forest but very soon Arthur sold the truck to Rebgetts and Jackson. Soon after we started, Arthur bought at an ex army auction, a Chev Blitz for loading. This was a very short wheelbase truck with a winch, and the theory was that the truck driver could load himself. No way would I have this on so after a bit of an argument Chris decided to switch off the tractor and load with the Blitz.



WA22 White Thomas William Conner drove for Arthur Godwin at Mt. Spec.

The bloody thing was a menace. The winch was too fast to roll a log up the skids slowly, and it had to be tied to a tree when you had to roll a big heavy log. It was really funny to see it bouncing with the wheels off the ground and the engine roaring but only if you were a spectator.

One day I was rolling a big Turpentine into the skids with the cant hook when my hand became jammed between the hook and the thick bark, and because Chris couldn't see me behind the big log I was pulled right over the top and landed in a heap on the other side. After this episode I refused to load with the Quad and insisted that Chris use the tractor.

Things were starting to get on my goat but I used to like driving the old White, boy she could pull. About four thousand four hundred super feet up out of Puzzle Creek which was one of the steepest pulls, up the rock cutting and then flat strap into Paluma changing gear with the engine nearly at peak revs. As I mentioned before she was left hand drive and to get from second to first you had to come right across the box from the left corner down to the right corner. Down the range in low third gear most of the way, with a change into low second on four different occasions of about a mile each to try and keep the brakes a bit cool. As it was the brakes got extremely hot, and on occasion I have seen other drivers with their brake drums glowing red when they reached the bottom of the range at night.

Brake over heating could be a serious problem, especially in a truck with hydraulic brakes and an inexperienced driver. The oil could boil and the pedal would go to the floor and then it would be "panic stations".

Carting on the weekends required plenty of attention, with the odd tourist sight seeing on the road and holidaymakers winding their way to Paluma. One particular time I was going down with a load when around a bend I met this old Ford Tourer with two adults and three children on board. I pulled over to the side as far as I could, but no way would the driver come past. I had to leave the truck and see what was their problem. After a very brief conversation I established that they were too afraid to pass the big high load of logs. The father got out and I suggested that I would drive the car past, much to his relief. I must admit it was very narrow and not much room. On the trip down the Old White used to backfire and pop through the open exhaust and make a considerable racket, thus warning a few tourists I suppose.

Possibly one of the most pleasurable sights you could hope to see is driving down the range between the Saddle and the Bluff and gazing out to sea as the sun rises over the water at day-break. On a clear day Palm Island stands out on a shimmering silver background, that for a short time made a great start to the day. Certain events stick in ones memory forever. I was about seven years old, when I was travelling with my father up the range in the old International when we met a chap by the name of Tom Langan right at the Bluff. Tom was an old friend of the family and I think he had been out to Ewen because his brother Barney had drowned while crossing the Burdekin River on horseback. It was about nine o'clock on a beautiful clear night, with a huge full moon shining on the water out to sea. I thought it was the most beautiful sight I had seen.

Dad and Tom started talking and fairly soon the topic got to Religion. They talked on for what seemed hours, about the existence of a God, the Universe and how it evolved. The scene became quite fitting, it was such a beautiful night that the conversation seemed really appropriate. About mid night they bid each other farewell, and since then I have never heard two men talk like that again with such a complete lack of animosity or malice.

At this time the Main Roads were preparing the range road for sealing with bitumen. The foreman's name was Henry Anderson and he and I were not getting on too well. He periodically pulled me up and accused me of speeding and of course this led to harsh words and threats. The Main Road's camp was situated at the bottom of the range on the right hand side of a gully that ran alongside of the road. It consisted of some tents and flies with open fires, and the odd bucket and tin dish for washing. On this day in question I was returning from Moongobulla empty, with the old White, when right in front of the camp the trailer became unhooked and careered with great speed up to the first tent in the camp. Hell broke loose, and accusations came thick and fast, and this incident only gave credence to Henry's belief that I was a menace. No damage was done, and some years later I met Henry at a tennis club and we became good friends.

The job with Godwins was starting to get on my goat. I was having considerable trouble with trailer tyres, blowing out or getting punctures and generally being messed around. I kept appealing for new tyres on the trailer but they would only replace them with ex army tyres that left a lot to be desired. Old Mr Arthur Godwin was quite a friendly man but physically he had never worked in the timber industry. Very soon after arriving at Mt Spec he acquired the nickname of "Boodles". I have a fair idea who gave him this name which was a miss quote of "Oodles", someone with a lot of money, but I will refrain. Periodically he would make a trip up to the bush in his big Chevrolet car, sometime in the company of a Priest who was a friend of his, or mill managers and business people that he was familiar with. The priest put a bit of a damper on us when he arrived with Arthur because we had to curtail our language a bit and generally put on a good show. Always when Arthur arrived on his own about lunchtime he would produce a tin of Corned Beef, an onion and a packet of Jatz like biscuits. He would always say, "have a bit of Corned Bull son".

One afternoon when Chris Godwin and I were loading we got into all sorts of strife. The logs Chris had snug would not fit on the bolster. He had one big log to go on the top, but no way could I get the load level. On a single axle truck you had to be fairly accurate or the load would be all on one side and the bolster on this occasion was nearly touching the rear tyres. As time wore on I flew into a hell of a rage and told Chris that I was finished as soon as I delivered the load. Henry Rebgett's came up the next day to try and persuade me to stay on, but as far as I was concerned that was "it". Now Chris was a good old stick, completely unflappable but with a mind set in concrete as far as timber getting was concerned, but after this episode we still remained friends.

Late one afternoon Johnny Pelleri arrived at Paluma with a completely new, second-hand timber plant consisting of a much used TD18 International tractor with a dozer blade of dubious manufacture, operated by the rope on the timber winch. The tractor was mounted on the chassis of a fairly old NR Mack Truck with a tandem, single wheel trailer of unknown make hooked on behind. This trailer had no brakes and the bolster was slightly bent on one side. Quite a few of us went down to see Johnny unload the Eighteen and generally pass remarks about how good the plant was. After much backing and filling and screwing and turning Johnny managed to back the Mack into a bank just



NR Mack Thomas William Conner drove for Johnny Pelleri at Mt. Spec

below the Township and unload the tractor. The reason I mention the screwing and turning is because the Mack had a twenty four-inch wheel on one side and a twenty-inch on the other. When these trucks were converted from big single wheels to duels the spokes had to be cut down so in Johnny case they never got around to cutting one front wheel. With the tractor on the back this truck was devilishly hard to steer in a short space, so poor Johnny, who was only about five foot four in height, was all in when he finished. In other words he was "cactus" to put it mildly.

Early in the piece Johnny had a succession of drivers on the old Mack, none of whom impressed me very much. I went for a ride down the range one-day and the driver allowed the engine to over rev all the way and some of the gear changing was atrocious but all in all I picked up some good hints I could use later on.

Now my good mate Jim Linton Jr. was a very good inventive person and some where along the line he acquired an old Essex Ute that only consisted of engine, bonnet and chassis. Some how Jim got it going and with the aid of a wooden box across the back to sit on we set off for town. Well what a trip we had, it rained all the way and with no mudguards and windshield it was virtually impossible to see. When we eventually got to Blakey's Crossing there was about two-foot of water covering the road, but with a bit of pushing the old Essex Bitser made it through. We were like drowned rats the whole way, but somehow we kept our good town clothes dry and provided much amusement for the other motorists on the road. Possibly we were real lucky we had alternative transport at this time because Norm Geary who I mentioned before, went over the range about half a mile above Crystal Creek Bridge. His old truck rolled over a couple of times and came to rest up against some trees about fifty-foot down. Normy escaped serious injury, but a Blue Cattle dog he had tied on the back had all the hair pulled off his neck before the collar and rope let go, but apart from that he was ok. A short time later Les Little pulled the old truck up with the winch on the Diamond T and with the addition of water in the radiator, oil in the sump, and some boards on the wooden tip body, everything was back to normal.

Some time after this episode Les Little parted company from Beedell. I think it was about wages, but not before he carted the heaviest load up to this time; eight thousand four hundred

super feet of Oak in four huge logs. I am not sure if this was the largest load ever carted from the Swamp Creek area but at this time the Diamond T was the only truck capable of handling this load.

While this was going on a young chap by the name of Jim Lee took over my old job of driving the Old White for Godwin. Jim had been cutting timber with Phil Haskins so he didn't have to move too far to make the transition. Jim later on married Phil's daughter, Beverley, who I knew quite well when we were kids.

Meanwhile Jim Linton Jnr. bought an old CR40 International truck and was carting sleeper-blocks from Running River, but this job failed to last so he too joined Godwin driving a four by four Blitz. I had driven this truck for a couple of loads which for its size was very powerful. Thirty three hundred super of Turpentine from the Puzzle Creek block was about its limit though.

Everyone seemed to possess a Chev or Ford Blitz, timber-men, miners, graziers, they seemed to be everywhere. Jack Plant, who had a long history at Mt Spec, bought a Brengun Carrier for pulling Lawyer Cane out of the scrub but I never actually saw it working. A fellow called Bruer also bought one for snigging small limb-logs at Swamp Creek. These small logs were for a case mill he had at Garbutt. They never lasted too long because the Bren-Carrier was absolutely useless in the Scrub, especially when the ground was wet and muddy.

I forget who was sick in the Beedell camp but Dal asked me to drive the Diamond T for a week. Hells-bells what an experience. This truck was in appalling condition mechanically. The brakes were virtually useless and if the tourists on the range only knew how bad they were they would never have made the trip. In the cab there was a rope with a loop in one end tied to the seat. This had to be slipped over top gear in the main box to stop it from flying out of gear when going down the range. There was also a piece of board with a notch cut in one end to jam against the auxiliary box lever to stop it from flying out. One never knew when the starter could chuck it in or the fuel system give enough trouble to stall the motor.

On my second trip the engine stalled on Pappins Hill through a fuel blockage and the starter system refused to work. What a predicament, the air in the brakes used to leak out after ten minutes and the hand-brake was unserviceable, so I had to hold it in low gear. Everything had to be done very quickly because the truck was creeping back slowly with the weight of the heavy load so I reefed the gear stick into reverse started the engine on letting the clutch out and then smashing the stick into low while she was rolling back. I was extremely lucky that I made it, as the front wheels came off the ground, but she started to go forward. In any other truck it would have smashed the transmission but this machine was huge and powerful.

In my opinion this truck was completely unsuitable for timber carting at Mt Spec because it was too slow, and the steering was so heavy on the winding range road. When the week was up I wasn't sorry even though I had the privilege of driving the most powerful truck on the range.

About this time it slowly dawned on me that with the exception of a couple of blokes, these timber men who I used to admire were very ordinary indeed. They had very little knowledge of suitable machinery for the job and in most cases were against any sort of change. Mostly they were quite ordinary drivers and some of their theories were actually eccentric, bordering on the absurd. One particular contractor for many years had everyone convinced he was God, but by the same token he refused to let you use the two speed axle shift and insisted on jacking up the load overnight and placing stays under the bolsters.

Many the arguments could be had with a few blokes stressing the virtues of bullock or horse teams over the tractor. One of their favourite sayings was "Give me a good old bullock team any day". This was completely ridiculous of course, and could scarcely deserve answering because a tractor could be out in the scrub, and have three or four snigs out before a bullocky had his team hitched up.

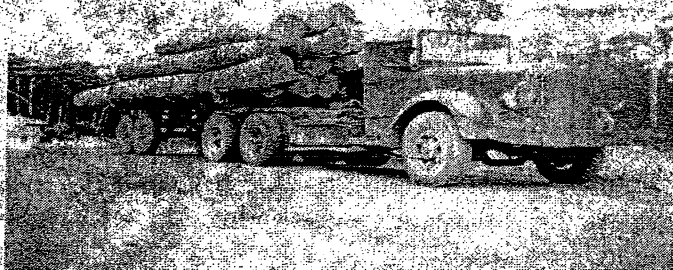
When I worked for Godwin, Chris was always telling me to have my port packed, because "Tom you will be going to Brisbane to pick up a new Mack". I never got the privilege, but one day Arthur purchased a second hand EH Mack single drive. This truck was originally owned by Kevin Flynn who used it hauling coal from Callide Mine and had done quite a lot of work. It had a hundred and ten horsepower motor, driving a ten speed Mono shift gearbox to a double reduction diff.

Jim Linton Jnr was the driver of this truck when one afternoon late he asked me to accompany him with the load down to Moongobulla and then for me to drive the truck back home as he was continuing on to Townsville by car. This was possibly the fastest round trip of all time because it only took one and a half-hours to go down the range, unloaded and return to Paluma.

For some time my mother and I had been discussing the option of trading in our little Hillman car. It was a good little thing mechanically but with age the canvas hood began to leak in heavy rain. As a matter of fact there was more water inside than out.

Hooly Motors in Sturt Street had a nice looking Hillman ten sedan in its showroom, so after a bit of dickering I traded in the old car. The sedan cost me six hundred and fifty pounds, but I was well pleased because this was my very first car purchased in my name. Much to my shame now my dear mother never received her share back from the sale of the little tourer.

For quite awhile Johnny Pelleri had been on to me to drive his old NR Mack so when the opportunity arose I started carting for him. The agreed pay was three pounds a load to Moongobulla Siding, and I will state now that I never had any trouble with pay from Johnny.



NR Mack Thomas William Conner drove for Johnny Pelleri at Mt.Spec.

When I started the old Mack was in very bad condition, the canvas hood had long gone and the exhaust pipe had broken off at the manifold, with the result the sun nearly burnt the head off you, the steel floor singed your feet from the broken exhaust, and the diesel fumes nearly choked you. The first thing I did was drape a piece of old tent fly over the stays, tied on with wire to act as a hood, and Johnny and I fashioned a piece of three inch galvanised pipe on to the manifold for a makeshift exhaust, but boy did it make a racket. My mother could hear me coming for twenty minutes out and had plenty of time to have breakfast ready. It was not unusual for timber-men to experience financial trouble so at this time Johnny was no exception. We found it very hard to purchase rust bands for the tyres with the result I was always having flats, especially down the range when the brake drums became hot, and it used to burn the valve stems out because of no rust bands. What an experience this was if I had to change a tyre on the range. Firstly I had to stop the engine in low gear get out and place a big

rock in front of a wheel for a chock, because the handbrake never worked. Jack up and change the tyre, then start up and reverse off the chock, stop the engine again and remove the rock, and then proceed down with the load.

This old truck had another alarming habit of melting the pipe off the air compressor when travelling down the range, so if you didn't hit the brakes before the air escaped one was in serious trouble.

Now the reason for this bit of trouble was not because Johnny failed to work, most of the time he worked exceedingly hard but his gear was just too old.

One morning I left Paluma real early in the old Mack and when I reached the ramp the other side of Swamp Creek it was just breaking day. There was no sign of Johnny or the tractor, which I thought was quite odd. I was setting the truck up prior for loading when I heard the tractor start up away down the scrub. After a time Johnny arrived at the ramp towing a log behind the TD18 and seemed to be in a hell of a state. The first thing I said was "Gee Johnny you must have started early". And Johnny replied, "Geez o'mighty I been here all night". It transpired that a track had come off the tractor and Johnny had spent most of the night fixing it. When ever you were loaded up and asked Johnny how much was on, his standard reply was "sisty sis hundred" meaning six thousand six hundred.

Now the most efficient way to change gears in the NR Mack was to keep the accelerator flat to the floor and obtain peak revs at all times. When the engine dropped about two hundred and fifty revs it was time to change gear, as an example, change from fifth overdrive to fourth, next to low range in the auxiliary box then into third and so on as needed. I found that splitting from high range to low was not very beneficial and only created extra work. The secret of good gear changing is the ability to listen to the revs and change smoothly, absolutely no jerking.

On very cold mornings the old Mack was very hard to start. The engine had electric glow plugs to heat the cylinders but the catch was that if you pressed the glow button for the desired thirty seconds then the batteries would be too low to turn the engine over. We used to buy ether from the chemist and hold it under the air cleaner to help the engine start and boy would she knock and rattle for a while. I am sure it was no good for the motor but we had no alternative.

Most of the time I used to start at six o'clock in the morning but on this particular day she would not start, as the batteries were too low. I tried to start it by running it down hill and letting the clutch out, but to no avail, it ended up at the bottom down near Linton's Store. Godwin had just purchased a Chev four by four that still had the army body on the back so I borrowed it to pull the Mack. I got my father to hop into the Mack while I pulled with the Chev. The Mack started but when dad unhooked the tow chain it stopped. Dad called me back to hook on again, but because of the big body I couldn't see where he was. As I was backing up Dad bent down to pick up the chain, and he bumped his temple on the corner of the body and fell down, and I ran the back wheel onto the side of he chest. Luckily I stopped when he yelled out and then I saw him stagger out from behind the truck clutching his side. When we took off his shirt we could see the track grip tyre marks on his chest. After a while he seemed to be all right and went out to work that same day. He was an extremely tough man my dad. It was only some weeks later when he went to the doctor that he was found to have two cracked ribs.

It was very hard to get any continuity of work out of this plant because there was always something going wrong. If the old tractor didn't give trouble the old Mack would. We had just moved over to the Swamp Block and Johnny had pushed a new track across a fairly swampy creek. Across the boggy part we had snigged some long logs and placed them end to end to form a sort of causeway, which was still covered by water and mud. On the first trip I got across all right but I had to really hook it into the old Mack to get up the steep bank. On the next trip with about six thousand on I hit her again but this time the single tyres on the trailer forced the causeway logs to part, with the consequence the trailer went one way and the truck another. It smashed the trailer pole and threw part of the load off the front bolster. When Johnny arrived with the TD18, we felled an ordinary scrub tree, and with the help of a couple of blokes who arrived on the scene we squared a pole with only the chopping axe. Johnny had an old brace and bit to bore the holes for the bolts but the bit was too small so we had to start a fire, heat the bolts to red-hot and burn them out. We were lucky enough to pull the load back on to the bolster with the tractor winch and I was able to continue with the load. On this block there was an exceedingly steep hill to come down from the loading ramp. Apart from the steep grade down, it also sloped alarmingly to the right, so it was predicable that strife was around the corner. One day I had a six log load with a very large log right on top which made the whole thing very top heavy. As I gingerly inched down the hill, trying to lean over to the left in the seat, (as if it would make any difference) the whole load let go. The centre pin through the front bolster had pulled up through the wooden turntable. Lucky the whole load remained intact and we were able to winch the load back on the truck. The only problem was the hole in the turntable was considerably enlarged and sloppy, but I carted for the rest of the week before Johnny took it to Ingham and had it fixed. Looking back I think I must have been mad, because it was dreadfully dangerous.

One week we had a great run and shifted about seventy thousand super feet in five days, considering the trailer had no brakes this was a good effort. The NR Mack had two big fuel tanks on each side so did not require refuelling for the full week. The largest load was seventy four hundred of mostly Silkwood.

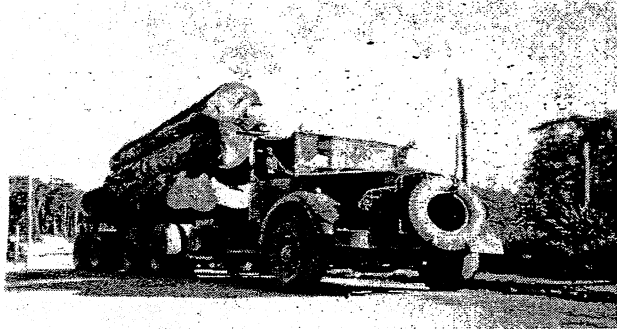
The unloading at Moongobulla could be a real pain in the neck at times. To deliver two loads a day was a very tight schedule and one couldn't afford any hold ups, yet on many occasions Rolly Macchetta would have about eight wagons to load and would require you to put a log on at least five of them. Boy, I used to get cranky. On a whole I suppose old Rolly wasn't too bad. He always had a sort of cordial made out of tamarinds boiled with sugar and when mixed with water out of the water bag it was quite a nice drink on a hot day.

One night there were no wagons so I had to unload on the ground. When the last big oak log rolled off it bumped against the truck and trailer wheels, but as this was a common occurrence I took no notice. I returned to Paluma but when I got up early the next morning to my great horror there were only three wheels on the tandem trailer. The axle had broken off at the backing plate. My first thought was that it has broken in the Moongobulla Yard. I jumped in the car and headed down to Rolly but to my astonishment the ten hundred by twenty brand new tyre and wheel were not there. It took about a week to have a new axle made and in that time, with the help of the Smith boys we searched in a number of places over the side of the range for that tyre and wheel. About a month later when I was travelling between the foot of the range and Moongobulla I saw the brake drum and hub lying on the ground about twenty feet from the side of the road, but no sign of the new tyre and wheel. The grass in that area had recently burnt otherwise I would never have known where the thing was. It was quite clear someone had stolen the tyre and wheel and dumped the brake drum.

Things were starting to get very unreliable with Johnny's plant. If it wasn't the old tractor breaking down, surely it was the truck. Too much time was lost, so with a bit of sorrow for Johnny I decided to leave.

Eric Sander invited my father to help him cut out a block of timber on the northern side of Swamp Creek so I joined dad in this job. As this block was nearly cut out the timber was fairly small. My father and I were a good team on the crosscut saw as not everyone is compatible. The art is to pull and push lightly, otherwise if you get a bloke who leans on the saw it becomes very hard work. We had a two peg and raker six-foot long for cutting the tree into logs when it was felled and a six foot six saw with the back cut out for felling.

Now to cut timber you required a fair bit of gear. As a matter of fact a man was loaded down like a packhorse on occasion. A chopping axe each, three steel wedges in a bag threaded over the handle of a twelve-pound steel hammer. The two saws, four spring-boards for climbing up a tree, two brush-hooks for slashing vines and light scrub so you could get at the tree to be felled, plus a sugar bag that



NR Mack owned by Dal Beedell and driven by Thomas William Conner.

held the sixty-foot measuring tape, a twelve-foot steel girthing tape for measuring the circumference of the log, a branding tool for marking the particular contract brand for that area on the end of the log when cut, also the length of the log and the girth. As an example PC Δ 28' x 6' 3". In this particular swamp block dad and I averaged about six to seven thousand super feet per day but this was before tracking. We would usually cut for about a week and then we would spend about two-day cutting tracks to all the logs we had cut. All up we made about six pound ten shillings a day each. The tracking was always part of the job, but a hell of a big part.

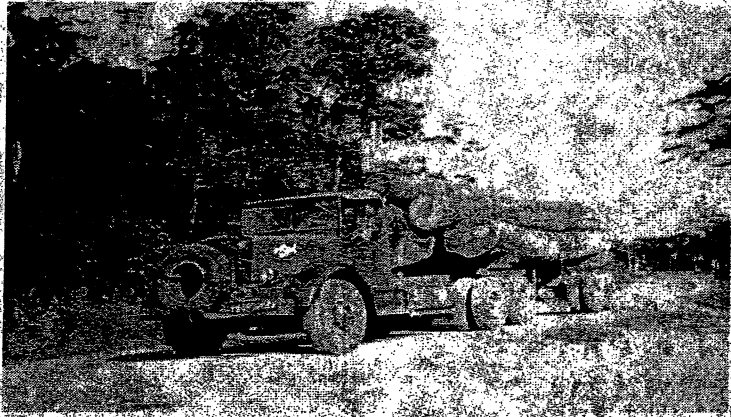
About this time the Fletcher brothers, Joe, Nugget and George arrived with a TD18 Dozer to push a road back along the ridge, starting at Windy Corner and eventually finishing about six miles on at what we called the Bull Ring. In the late forties the brothers were timber contractors at Kirama Range, but on this occasion they had the contract to build this road for the Forestry Department. This road was built to tap the softwoods and some Gympie Mesmate growing in this area. Incidentally Nugget was a returned Tobruk Rat and after the war had joined his brothers in the timber industry at Kirama Range, but more about this area later.

Our cutting together lasted about two or three weeks at swamp when Dal Beedell offered me a job driving his NR Mack. I forget the reason why this opportunity arose because Jim Robertson was driving the tractor and Dal had been driving the truck and I think he was sick and was taking an extended holiday. I made the trip to Ingham to negotiate a deal and we agreed on three pounds a load to Moongobulla and eight loads a week with the last load to Ingham Sawmill so we could service the truck on the Friday and return with the truck to Paluma in the afternoon. On the first week I was loading the eighth load when I mentioned to Dal and Jim that I would see them in Ingham. Dal looked astounded and said that no, there was another load, nine loads a week. I said no bloody fear, we had agreed to eight loads. He replied that I must have misunderstood. I virtually blew a fuse and told him that if he wasn't satisfied, that he could get in the truck there and then and drive it himself, or words to that effect, only with much more colourful language, I might add, he back-pedalled a bit and told

me not to be too hastily, so I told him if it was nine loads, I wanted an extra £3 pounds. He moaned a bit but finally agreed, but not after telling me how tough I was. After this bit of verbal combat we got on famously and I considered it a pleasure to work for him, even though he was away most of the time.

I consider Jim Robertson the best snigger I had worked with in the timber industry. He was superb at assembling logs for a load, and never once did I have trouble getting logs to fit on the bolster, or arriving at the ramp and finding the load not ready.

Every time Jim had the logs for the load entered in the book, the loading skids ready and the wire sling placed out ready for coupling up. As a team we were quite proficient at loading. I could usually load a six log load in about fifteen or twenty minutes and most of the time the logs sat so well that I only required one chain around the middle. Jim was also a very good machine man, never abusing the tractor in any way and always cleaning it down



NR Mack owned by Dal Beedell and driven by Thomas William Conner.

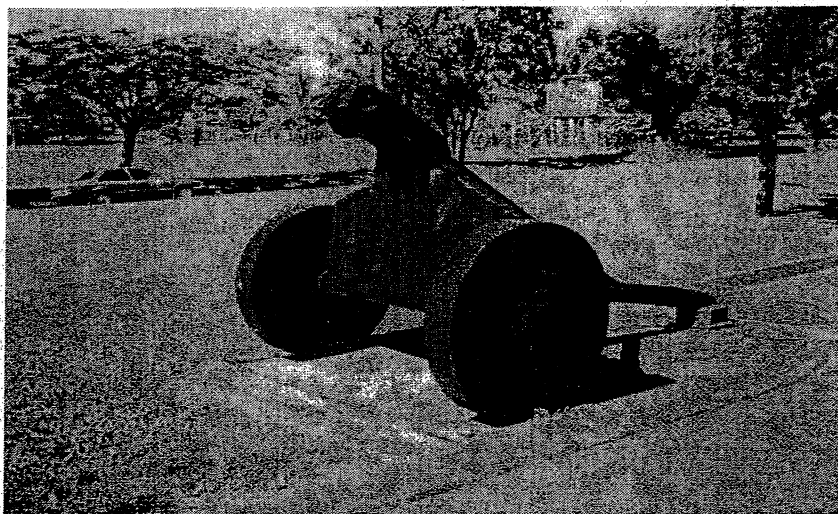
after a days work, come what may. Every night it was covered with a tarp and was always fuelled and greased ready for the next day. Never once did I arrive at the ramp and find Jim not there ready to load.

Beedell's NR Mack was a wonderful truck and in very good condition, so I tried to keep it that way for as long as I had the pleasure of driving it. The brakes on the truck and tandem trailer were extremely good, so it made negotiating the range road with a heavy load that much easier and a little quicker.

On the good weeks when the weather was kind to us, Jim and I used to work to a fairly good timetable. I would arrive at the ramp at six in the morning, load, arrive back at Paluma at about eight forty five AM, have a bit to eat, then down the range, and providing Rolly didn't hold me up unloading I would be back in Paluma in two hours and five minutes. In this truck I could go down the range in fifty minutes. I would travel down to the Saddle in low third gear, then into low second for about half a mile, back in to low third past the Crystal Creek bridge then into low second for another half mile and then into low third again to the bottom of the range. Most of the time I would be finished the second load and be at Paluma about five, five thirty and that was it for the day, except Thursday where I loaded three loads, with the third load finishing at Paluma, ready for delivery to Ingham on Friday.

All our loading was from the ground up skids, and if I had any complaint regarding this method it was because we never loaded from a ramp that was level with the bolsters. The TD14 at this time was fitted with a dozer blade so I thought it would have been a lot easier and quicker if we had pushed the logs on with the blade from a high ramp.

Now we certainly shifted some timber, but like everything in the timber game it wasn't all plain sailing. The Main Roads were in the process of sealing the range road with bitumen so on certain days the road was closed until about five o'clock in the afternoon. We could still get a load down early in the morning but in the afternoon there could be three or four timber trucks lined up waiting for the road to open. On this particular day I was the first in line but when I set off, horror of horrors, I found they hadn't covered the wet tar with crushed metal. This was a nightmare. The tar was like glass, but I was committed to going forward, because if I touched the brakes the wheels would have locked and the whole thing could have skated over the side of the range. The truck was left-hand drive so I was on the drop side. In some places the camber of the road was quite considerable so even though I was just creeping along the whole truck and load had a tendency to slip side-ways. Thank goodness it came to an end, but not before I had rolled up the tar, and annoyed the hell out of my old friend Henry Anderson who was foreman-in-charge.



View of a Campbell Bobtail

A few weeks before I started with Beedell he had purchased an all steel Campbell bobtail. This was a vast improvement on the old type I mentioned earlier, because it was hooked directly on to the drawbar of the tractor, allowing the winch rope to run over a big pulley on the bobtail. This pulley was about five foot six from the ground, so the end of the log could be lifted clear of the ground using the winch rope, thus making the log or logs that much easier to snig.

Approaching the end of Beedells contract we had to harvest all the timber on the Swamp Creek block prior to the clearing for the Mt Spec dam. Jim Robinson pushed a road about three quarters of a mile into our ramp but the pull out was very steep. This hill was a severe test for the NR Mack and only increased my admiration for this old truck. The absolute maximum load was fifty eight hundred super feet of Red Stringy and even then it was touch and go. Nearly every load the old motor would drop to four hundred revs but still hang on. I used to try and steer for the slight hollows in the road and then the old engine would pick up a couple of hundred revs until we reached the top. On a couple of occasions the load was just too much and the old truck stalled. When this happened I had to hold the brake pedal down with my right hand, roar the engine to full revs and then let the clutch out. She would always respond a few feet until we reached the top, keeping in mind that the handbrake was virtually useless.

As this was a clean out block and everything had to go, some of the timber was quite small. It was not unusual for some of the loads to have seventeen or eighteen logs and the steel chocks on the bolsters to be out to the last hole. One afternoon I had a fifteen log load with the

chocks right out to the last hold when the pin let go and the whole load shot off when I was taking a sharp bend in the road about a quarter of a mile from Swamp Creek. What a hell of a mess, but thankfully no damage was done to the truck or trailer. I had to walk back to the ramp and get Jim with the tractor so we could clear the road.

At the time, these sort of things give you a great shock and for a while your hair stands on end. On another occasion I was travelling in with a load when I reached the bend before Birthday Creek bridge and was going flat out to get a good run at the hill on the other side when I spotted some tourists right on the end of the bridge with their picnic table set up. No way could I pull up, so I had to keep going. I got past some how but all I could see in the rear-view mirror was the tablecloth go flying in the clouds of dust and diesel smoke. I can tell you I could scarcely keep my foot on the accelerator for shaking.

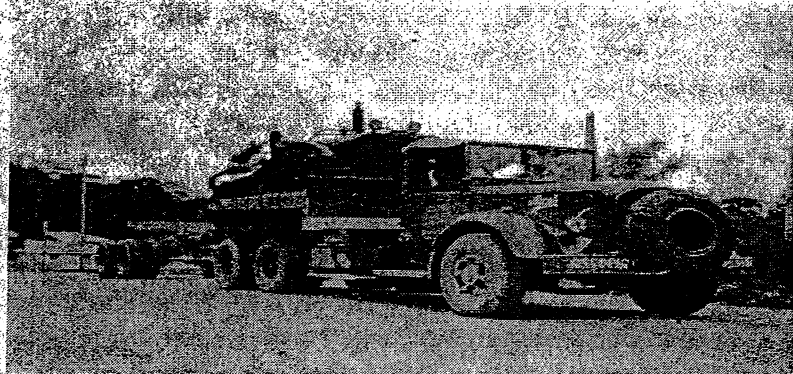
One Thursday night I was travelling in with the third load, when just past the Running River turn off I saw headlights approaching from the opposite direction. As I drew closer I could see the lights were still in the middle of the road. As I tried to steer further to the left the front wheel cut into the soft shoulder of the road and there was no way could I steer it out. Before I could blink the truck and six log load had rolled on its side. I was very lucky the right hand side wheels had remained on the hard road because there was a fifteen-foot drop on my side. It was a hell of an effort to get out of the driving seat because in the dark I was scared to move in case the whole thing toppled down the embankment. When I did get out here was Joe Brabon parked in the middle of the road with his truck, with the lights still on. He claimed my lights dazzled him so he pulled up. Next morning Chris Godwin came with his old Quad truck and we were able to unload the logs, pull the Mack and trailer out and reload the six logs. There was no damage so I was able to continue on to Ingham with the load.

About this period big changes were taking place in the timber business. The sawmills were dealing directly with the Forestry Department via the Stampage Sale and were using their own logging contractor. This was virtually the end of the old system of private timber contractor and Beedell was the first to go.

Bill Robinson was the new contractor for Brown and Broad and arrived with a Ford Thornton driven by Joe Vickers and a NR Mack with big single tyres driven by Doug Ladner.

My last load with Dal Beedell was the one lost on the Swamp Creek road some time before.

We had to load from a very steep part of the road and it was without a doubt the toughest load I ever had to load. I delivered it down to Moonbobulla and then came back and loaded the old TD14 and blade on the body and bought it back to Paluma. That was the last time I saw the NR Mack and I was very sorry to see her go. It was a great truck and mechanically was a pleasure to drive. When Dal stepped



NR Mack owned by D. Beedell, driven by Tom Conner is leaving Mt. Spec

into the old truck at Paluma that was it. I never saw either of them again.

Around the area at this time there lived quite a few real characters, mostly tin scratchers and hermit-like fellows who could relate some outlandish yarns and falsehoods. I was broken

down on the road one day when old Tim came along and stopped his 4x4 Blitz to see what was wrong. I asked him for a lift but when he put her in gear nothing happened. He reached under the seat and pulled out a big rock and got under the truck and gave it one or two great whacks. He got back in, put it in gear again and off we went. "Geez Tim" I said, "if I were you I'd take it to a mechanic as soon as you can". "What's the point?," said Tim, "It was the mechanic who gave me the rock."

I was out at Running River one day when the Hawker arrived with all his merchandise for sale. Included were some highly coloured pyjamas. "Young Bill," who was about sixteen, asked Stan, "what's them," "pyjamas" said Stan. "What's them for" asked Bill. "For wearing at night, would you like to buy a pair," said Stan. "Nah, I never go anywhere at night, except to bed," replied young Bill.

Another time I was talking to old Alfred and he was telling me about a farmer he knew who had a talking pig. He never let anyone know about it until one day Alf heard the pig talk. "How long have you had this pig?" asked Alf, "two years," replied the farmer. "And you never told anyone about it?" said Alf. "No," said the farmer. "I thought he might out grow it."

We were sitting around the campfire at Swamp Creek and Frank was telling a yarn about his time at Ewan. As he relates it he had spent the whole day at the pub and was pretty inebriated when he left in the dark to return to his camp. He was stumbling along when all of a sudden he fell down a mineshaft. He instinctively threw up his arms and caught the windlass across the top. After much struggling he was able to wrap the rope around him and hang there absolutely terrified to move or callout in case he plunged to the bottom. When daylight came can you imagine his relief and how funny it was when he discovered his feet were only a foot off the ground?

Another time Frank and his mate were down at Mutarnee when they lost their way in the dark. "We've wandered off the road," said Frank's mate, "and I think we are in a cemetery." "I've just stumbled over something that feels like a gravestone." He struck a match and had a look. "Yes," he said it's a gravestone alright, and look at this. "This joker lived to be a hundred and ten!" "Yeah, can you see his name?" said Frank. "Yes here it is - Miles - Tully."

Johnny Pelleri was organizing a trip back to Italy with his wife to meet up with his relatives, so he approached my father and I to work his plant while he was away. He offered dad two shillings a hundred super feet to drive the TD18 and myself three pounds a load to drive the old NR Mack. The arrangement was for us to service and carry out any mechanical repairs, and have access to a working account at his bank. This seemed like a good deal so we were only too pleased to accept. Johnny had been clearing farmland at Bambaroo before he left, so our first job was to go down and load the old tractor. Dad started her up but when he moved forward I noticed the whole final-drive-casing move. On closer inspection we found all the retaining bolts had sheared off. What a hell of a start to our new job. We had to go to Ingham and organize a mechanic to come out with a welder and gear to get the old girl going. Bramo Romanello from Ingham was organized to transport the tractor up the range on the KR8, previously owned by Henry Hussey, but on the way out to Swamp Creek he got stuck on a very steep hill just past Camp Creek. We were there until about nine o'clock at night before I decided to give the whole thing a miss. Next morning I think dad unloaded the tractor and

drove it on to Swamp Creek, I don't know because I was at home pretty well pinged off with things, too put it mildly.

We eventually started snigging and carting, and the timber was quite good but inevitably the machines started to breakdown. This was bad enough but Johnny's bank was very reluctant to release money to have it fixed. Where we could my father and I built loading ramps the same height as the truck bolster. This saved a lot of work as we always pushed on the bed logs with the dozer blade and with the aid of two short skids we pushed on the second layer of logs as well.

The money situation became desperate. We couldn't even buy enough fuel or oil for the tractor or truck, so after about a month the bank sent an urgent message for Johnny to return home. I never did find out if he did get to Italy. After Johnny's return, dad left to cut girders but I remained driving the old NR Mack under much difficulty. The largest load I carted for Johnny was seven thousand five hundred super feet of Silkwood in six beautiful logs, a real feat considering the state of the old Mack. After leaving the ramp about a mile the other side of Swamp Creek, I used to flatten the old Mack down across the bridge, which was only ten foot wide, and up through all the gears until I reached the top never lifting the accelerator. This was the only way to drive these NR Macks.

For me, things on the mountain were starting to get me down. My mother was becoming increasingly sick with asthma, our wonderful pet dog Spot, who used to go into raptures when he rode with me in the truck, collected a shellback tick and died a horrible death, and work in the logging industry was becoming a real drag.

I had left Johnny for the last time and spent more time in town. Dad came back and drove the Mack for a while but nearly got killed. He was travelling along the Swamp Road one day when he had to brake suddenly and the whole load came forward, pinning him against the steering wheel.

Shortly after this episode, my father obtained a contract to supply firewood to Macknade Sugar Mill at Ingham. We were to cut the wood on a property owned by the Lynham Brothers on the seaward side of the railway track at Moongobolla. First of all Dad bought a brand new Mobilco circular saw from Hooley Motors at Townsville. Now this saw could be turned onto a horizontal position for felling the trees, and then back to vertical for cutting the trees into five-foot lengths. He started this job some time in October and boy we experienced some dreadfully hot weather. The cutting of firewood is only part of the hard yacka. The loading on the lorries was the killer when forty per cent of the wood was ten inches in diameter and had to be lifted or rolled about seven feet off the ground. It was only about a mile and a half to the Moongobolla rail yard and then it all had to be unloaded on to rail wagons, so I can tell you gallons of water were drunk and oceans of sweat were lost. Angelo Marmo who lived at Moongobolla and owned an old truck did a lot of our carting but could not keep up the quantity. Ted Fitzpatrick who bought Beedell old WR22 White also carted for us when he had a slack period carting logs for Godwin, but really this truck was unsuitable for carting fire wood because it was too high off the ground.

My father and I decided we would expand and buy another Mobilco saw. I approached my old mate Jim Linton Jnr to come into partnership with me and we would do the entire cutting up, while dad did all the felling. Now these circular saws were extremely dangerous to use, but boy they were fast cutting. It was possible to cut down a ten-inch diameter tree in a matter of seconds, and as a matter of fact if you were not careful it would slice the tree off at the

stump and leave it standing. Cutting up required two men, one operating the machine and the other prising up the log with a small pole to stop the saw from jamming.

These saws consisted of a four stroke motor mounted on a frame with two handles protruding out the back, and the twenty four inch saw was fixed on to a small differential at the end of a pipe about six foot long out the front. All this was mounted on two pneumatic wheels about fifteen inches in diameter.

Now all this was happening in November in a terribly hot period, but still we had about thirty or forty cord of wood cut when the wet season started. We were lucky enough to get the saws out before the flood but all our wood was swept out to sea. All that gut busting and work for nothing. We just walked away.

My mother's health was not improving so after all those years in the bush the decision was made to move to Townsville. Mum and dad rented a unit at Clearview Flats situated at the top of Denham Street, right opposite St. James Cathedral. Mick Molloy of Molloy's guesthouse owned these flats, at this time. Initially my parents paid two years rent in advance, and it was here we called home for many years.

Almost immediately after our shift, my father and I started work cutting timber for Arthur Godwin. We made our camp in the old American log cabin at Paluma and boy was this some experience. The wooden floor was only about six inches off the ground and was potentially a great harbour for snakes. Periodically a red bellied black would make an appearance in the rafter ceiling over the open fireplace, and I was always terrified of finding one curled up in my bed. As a matter of fact the first thing I always did was gingerly strip the blankets off to have a look. A man was always on his toes because even in the daytime one required a light burning because it was so dark inside. When you first walked in it was a cow of a place to see anything. One day before we left for work I placed some corned meat in the billy and hung it over the open fire to cook while we were away. When we arrived back late that afternoon I took the meat out of the billy, started the fire again and put on some potatoes and pumpkin. When these were cooked I carved off some meat, added the vegetables and we started to eat in the gloomy darkness. When we had nearly finished dad pointed to his plate and said, "What is that?" I got the torch to have a look and sure enough across his plate was inching a live maggot. On closer inspection we discovered about half a dozen dead ones floating over the water that I had cooked the spuds in. I think dad felt a bit nauseous to put it mildly, and I felt a whole lot worse, even though I failed to have a live one on my plate.

Another time we had two other blokes camped with us in the old cabin, Jim Church and Cliff, whose surname clean escapes me. These fellows were really afraid of snakes so with the consequence they pulled there beds very close together. One night we were sitting around the open fire telling yarns and dad was really dredging up some spooky experiences he had seen. When we decided to turn in, our two mates and I were a bit edgy. I pulled the blanket over my head and went to sleep. Sometime in the pitch-black I awoke to the sound of something hopping right through the big room. Jim leapt out of his bunk and let out a yell "What was that?" Cliff and I got up and with the torch had a good look around. We all agreed that it was something big but what. After a while things quietened down and very sheepishly we went back to bed. Now after a long period I was still laying awake when there was this terrific crash and some awful cursing and someone struggling on the floor. Cliff let out a roar and bolted for the door in the inky dark, but in the process fell over a stool and only added to the bedlam. When we finally lit the lamp we discovered the leg had fallen off dad's bunk and he had crashed onto the floor. In the commotion we thought he has being attached, but when we

had a bit of light we could see the funny side of things and had a good old nervous laugh. Next morning Jim and Cliff left. They reckoned that episode was enough?

My father and I started cutting a stand of Rose Gum at the eighteen and half mile, just down from Rock Cutting. Boy, this was good timber, nice and straight and the butt log averaging about eight-foot girth. We used to cut up to fourteen thousand supers a day, which was cut into logs and finished. As this was open forest, the tracking was virtually nil, only a bit of brushing of the light undergrowth.

Up until now, all our cutting was done with the crosscut saw, so what excitement there was when dad purchased the first chain saw on Mt. Spec? This was a Mall two-man saw made in America and sold by Hollimans in Townsville. This saw had a five foot six inch blade and by swivelling the blade could be used for felling and then back to vertical for logging up. At this time there was no one-man saws on the market. About a week after our purchase Eric Sander arrived up with a two man Blue Streak but man alive it was heavy.

When we finished cutting on this block we moved out to the Kowla Block where I consider some of the best Gum on Mt. Spec grew. On a whole the trees were not big in girth but they more than made up for it in length. The longest we cut was three, thirty foot logs and one, eighteen foot to the first limb. Eric Sander cut one that had four thirtys.

The chain saw had many advantages but the main one was the cutting of the scarf. For those not familiar with felling a tree the scarf was always chopped in with an axe in the front of the tree and in the direction one wanted the tree to fall. The size of the scarf depended on the size of the tree and sometime on the lean of the tree. The greater the lean, the deeper the scarf had to be chopped in with the axe. Anything up to half an hour or more on a big tree. With the chain saw it only required two parallel cuts about five inches apart to the depth desired, then a heavy hit with the blade of the axe in one of the cuts and the half circle of timber would come out, making a perfect scarf. Sometime if the scarf was not deep enough the tree could split in half if the lean was great enough, but this was very rare and only applied to new-chum cutters.

If one was standing on the steep bank of Swamp Creek and you looked across the valley to your left, there was a great stand of Gum on the far ridge. Everyone used to remark how they would dearly like to get a cut of this stand so one afternoon dad and I decided we would check it out. We checked out a few trees by the time honoured action of driving the chopping axe into the tree, up as high as you could reach. If there was a hollow sound you could be pretty sure it had a large pipe in it, or on the other hand if it had a solid thump then you could bet it was solid wood. On this occasion we were not impressed, as nearly all the trees we tested sounded hollow. Unfortunately for us the Forestry decided they wanted this timber cut.

Now this required that we cut a snig track half a mile through the scrub, down a very steep gorge, across a creek and up a steep grade to the top of the ridge. The soft wood timber we cut on the way was real small and one had to work hard to make any sort of a tally. Herb Godwin and his mate Stan joined us on this block, and boy did they make heavy weather of it, with their big six foot six, four peg tooth raker cross cut saw that neither of them could sharpen properly. I cannot remember Stan's name but he was a new Australian who left Europe straight after the war where he suffered badly as a young boy.

He was only a small fellow but a hard worker. He had to be pulling that big blunt saw.

The Gum when we started to fell it was no good. The heart was chewed out with ants and there was very little wood at the butt. After all that tracking through the scrub, we moved out and left it to Herb and Stan. Arthur Godwin had just acquired the new block on the forestry

road down to the bullring. My father and I started cutting this block soon after the Forestry Road left the Main Road at Windy Corner. Before starting the Mall saw had to be returned to Holimans because of defects. One of the drawbacks of this saw was its light construction. It

was made of Duralumin to keep the weight down but over a period of time at peak revs, parts would fall off and bolts work loose and strip. The first cutting chains were what we called snaggletooth and were fairly rough to use. Thankfully these chains were replaced with a planer blade as time moved on.

So it was back to the old cross cut and all our gear. As we moved along the ridge we cut all the available timber in patches, right into the bullring. On the left side of the road going in there was very little timber because the mountain fell away very steeply to the coast. On the right side the scrub fell away, sometimes gradually, other times steeply, into gullies and creeks.

One day we had to cut a fairly big Quondong that was standing on the bank of one of these gullies. Now Quondong always has spurs or buttress roots running down the butt so it is necessary when cutting with a cross cut saw to get above them with springboards. On this occasion I was two boards up and over the gully. About nine feet up, dad and I were sawing away when I felt my board give slightly. I thought, "if I move in close to the tree I would be alright" but in a split second the board had split a piece out of the tree and dumped me down into the gully. As I fell the saw ripped a nasty cut down the inside of my wrist and I had puncture wounds to my leg and thigh when I fell onto the sharp stumps of the underbrush we had cut around the tree. We had no bandage or first aid kit so we tied up the wrist with a couple of handkerchiefs and continued to fell the tree, but I can tell you I felt sore and sorry until we arrived back at the camp. Really the wound should have been stitched, but as I heal quickly it turned out O.K.

When we eventually reached the bullring we had to cut a snig track half a mile through the virgin scrub to tap the timber along its length, and as I remarked before this was an arduous task indeed. Dozer blades were forbidden, but one good thing we got the Mall saw back. Our chief means of transport was still my little ten hp. Millman Minx Sedan, and believe me she was loaded to the hilt most of the time, what with petrol and oil for the chainsaw, hammer and wedges, axes, and our smoko and dinner. There was very little room for anything else. Dad and I always carried our lunch in bulk, mostly in a small pine packing case, consisting of bread, butter, corned beef, tomatoes, cheese and treacle or jam. We had cake and biscuits that my mother had cooked for us. We never had to carry water, because in the scrub there was always plenty of little streams and creeks with beautiful water.

Starting a fire in the wet scrub is a real art. First you have to look around for a small tree called Jitta or Jitto, preferably one that has fallen down and with the axe pare some splinters off it and form a small heap, and then put a match to it, and fan it with your hat. Bingo instant fire. I would say without a shadow of doubt that Jitta is the hardest wood around. There is no way you would cut it with your good chopping axe, because it would take a piece out of the blade before you could say Jack Robinson. The best and quickest way to light the fire was to use a bit of petrol from the chainsaw.

Serious accidents in the scrub are very rare but the potential to get killed or maimed is ever present on a daily basis. Accidents creep upon you, it only takes a lapse in judgement or negligence and it has got you, but the story I am about to tell you is not like this. For a few days we had put off felling a small Silkwood because about thirty feet up it had a huge great limb broken off from another tree caught in the branches. Now this dead limb was about

twelve feet long and about two-foot thick. Dad and I had walked around it, studied it and decided it was too dangerous. But in the end it had to be cut. Our strategy was to clear as much as we could around the tree and then cut a small track away from the side of the tree to run up with the saw. When the tree started to fall, I was supposed to go with the small end of

the saw and dad was to follow very quickly with the engine end carried by the two handles.

With extreme caution we cut the scarf in the usual manner and started to cut



American troops bought this snake from Australian troops after it had been caught and killed at Mt. Spec

the back. In about two minutes she started to go and so did we as fast as possible. The only thing we overlooked was a vine that tripped dad and sent him sprawling, wrenching my end of the saw out of my hands and somehow knocking me over. Down came the big dry limb, end on spearing into the ground between us and just missing the saw. I think dad was shocked, but I know I was shaking all over and dry in the mouth. We decided that was it for the day and went back to the log cabin to sharpen the saws and get over our fright.

We cut on in this area for sometime but the wet weather was setting in and that meant time lost. One day it really set in and fell down in buckets. We carried our gear out to the road, covered up the chainsaw with a tarp and like drowned rats we set off for home in Townsville. Travelling down the range all the waterfalls were roaring and Richardsons Fall was flowing right across the road and over the car. In the intervening time my father had secured a contract with the Railway Department to cut girder logs in the South-Townsville railyard but that is another yarn.

With the exception of going back to Mt. Spec to finish some tracking and pick up the saw and our gear that was it. That is the story of my first twenty-three years. We never cut timber there again.

I have no figures but for the size of Mt. Spec it must rank as one of the best timber producers in North Queensland. Over sixty million super feet of softwood and hardwood logs, thousands of girders, piles, corbels and thousands of linear feet of decking were cut with broadaxe. I do know that from the start of the timber camp in late 1941 to the 23-10-1942, production was 3,487,121 super feet of mill logs with 15,715 linear feet of girders supplied, with 3,918 on hand in the bush.

Piles:	12,141 linear feet	3,854 on hand in bush.
Poles:	6,296 linear feet	1,543 on hand in bush
Blocks and Posts:	840 linear feet	800 on hand in bush

And after the war about thirty eight thousand telegraph poles of all sizes were supplied to the Electricity Department.

In retrospect I think I lived through the most exciting period in the timber industry, especially at Mt.Spec. The forests were virgin and timber was required in huge quantities and work was abundant at all time. Paluma was a thriving community, made up of the American Radar Unit of about forty men. About the 19-10-43 the Australian Radar Unit arrived and took up billets in some private houses. On the 13-10-43 the Medical Rehabilitation Unit arrived. I am led to believe that between 800 and 1,000 patients passed through the depot in the short time of the unit's existence. Also quite a few timber men and their wives rented houses in the township.

I really enjoyed my time and consider myself privileged to have been at Puzzle Creek, the heart of the timber industry in the early years, and the site of the huge timber camp during the war.

