

The War Years at NBHS

Frank Newell [1941-1946]

1/51A Best St
Devonport 7310

Dear Bill,

I was surprised [but excited] that you and your History Committee friends might want to hear of NBHS in the War years. I thank you for this and hope that I might be of some use to you.

First of all, I had better let you know how Tasmania came about. In 1961 to 1966, I was in a 1 teacher school at Canbelego, between Nyngan and Cobar, in the dusty Outback. I had a good schoolhouse, but no electricity. I had to butcher my own mutton. My wife Margaret's health collapsed in the heat, so I drove her to her mother's house at Waverley, while I must give thought to taking her away from the heat.

So, I had a thought that Tasmania, being so cool, might have an opening, so after a year's correspondence, they accepted me, and placed me at Geeveston [2nd last stop before the South Pole], in the middle of the famous Huon Apple Valley.

A brand new house - things were so friendly - but, just 3 days of teaching, on 7 Feb, 1967, horrendous fires ravaged the whole south of Tas. resulting in 73 dead. I came to be cool, but the temperature that Black Tuesday was 105°, with 100 kph wind. It was very pleasant to be accepted as a true Tasmanian, which I certainly am, but - I still have good memories of NBHS.

The war years in Newcastle were serious - 9th June 1942, the shelling by a Japanese submarine had we students terrorised, as we were so close to the targets - B.H.P. and the State Dockyard. However we were bound by discipline, such as, at a given signal, we were required to move out to the trenches that took up the parkland area on both sides of that wide cement pathway that led to Waratah Railway Station.

Yes, I remember Mr N.R. Mearns. We were forbidden to be in that foyer region between the middle staircase and the Office until we were in 5th Year. Mr Mearns' Office is remembered for the blanket of sweet smelling blue pipe tobacco smoke. Mr Mearns was so small that, with lack of height, and the smoke screen, it was very difficult for us to see him.

The upstairs and downstairs staff rooms seem to be so crowded, so the Science staff being some distance away, seemed to be more comfortable, as far as space was concerned.

15 August 1945

Apropos of Science. Wednesday, 15th August 1945. An event to remember. We were in a "doubler" of Physics, with Jake Simpson. [The topic was Friction.] An announcement came over the P.A. at 10 a.m. "Gentlemen, the war is over - Japan has surrendered. Classes are finished for the day. There is no public transport immediately available. Those who wish to stay at the school may do so, until transport is available. Those who wish to walk may do so." We kids from Adamstown, Kotara, Cardiff, Boolaroo, Speers Point, WALKED. Traffic was not an issue, as there were very few vehicle owners who had petrol coupons.

Clive Evatt [brother of Dr H.V.] was Minister for Education in 1943. He managed to make a fool of himself [our opinion] by riding Jock Anderson's bicycle around that quadrangle between the Hall and the Tech. Drawing hut. He was on a parliamentary visit to tell us how kind he was to Staff and Students.

Song

The School Song sings about "the Blues from the limit man to the scratch". Some of the famous Blues in the War Years:

Dr Alan Knott - a classy full back in Frank McNeil's football team
Dr Dick Tooth - Australian rep. 5/8 in Rugby Union
Albert Paul - Kangaroo 2nd Row forward
Ken Halliday - I could not believe there could be a faster bowler
Preben Maehl - Sprinter supreme

Kevin Gosper - a sprinter who has the supreme confidence of trainer, Charlie Goffet, who won and lost certain amounts at the Inter-School Carnival. An Olympic Games Official.

Eric "Butch" Long - son of the newsagent at Tighes Hill. "Butch" churned out the "A" passes at Intermediate / Leaving exams.

Michael Miller - star Hannell House Sprinter. I met up with him at Cobar many years later, where he was an electrician at Cobar Copper mine.

Clive Churchill was a star "enemy". 5/8 with Hamilton Marist Brothers. He did not become a full back until he went to South Sydney.

Dr Kelper Hartley - difficult to imagine that he was a Doctor of French, who spent his academic years at the Sorbonne, which, to my immature brain, was impossible to understand. Was the mystery of his Will ever finalised by the university lawyers?

I really respected that Staff. I would assume that some of them would still be there the time you, Dick and Peter were there. Charlie Goffet was the Pride and Joy of Cardiff Primary School. Cardiff parents were so poor in the Depression years, that although many students passed the Q.C. tests, Charlie was just one of a handful who were able to attend NBHS on a bursary, and whose parents could afford to keep him there. He must have been so honoured to return as a member of NBHS Staff.

In those days when French was a pre-requisite for tertiary attendance, there was Albert "Dippy" Denham [a tribute to his achievements, rather than the opposite.] Mert. Duncan was the Subject Master, a man of very loud voice, who was forced to take my working-class class for attempting to bring us more up-to-date with lessons in Jones' French Grammar, when we were sadly neglected by Monsieur Roland Motte [a real Frenchman, but with no interest in us]. Mert. had a habit that I copied when I became a teacher. Tom O'Connor [Maths] had a large Town Talk Tobacco tin, crammed full with every miniscule scrap of chalk, that he refused to discard. On the other hand Mert. would use $\frac{3}{4}$ stick of chalk, and would throw the other $\frac{1}{4}$ away, or at some misbehaving student. I did not throw any at a student, but I refused to use small stumps of chalk.

Tom O'Connor [TOC] - Maths - I have mentioned [a top golfer with the Steelworks Club]

Jock Anderson - Economics, Book Keeping, Business Principles

Errol Sweeney - Latin Bert Milne - Latin Albert Pellham - Latin

Frank McNeil - English, History and Rugby League

Dan Davies - Maths; did not survive one year of a well-earned retirement

Ken Barnard - Library

"Spot" Burrows - English and Cricket

AND that most efficient Science Staff of W.S., Jake Simpson, Fred Gray, Noel McDonough, Bondiett?

A.W. Bears - Vice Principal, English

Clarrie Lipscombe - Music. I felt sorry for the way he was treated in the Hall "Music" lessons, although he produced a notable pianist, Ken Short, of the ABC in Hobart for 30+ years. Ken & I meet a couple of times a year to reminisce on NBHS. Ken also was a specialist Gilbert & Sullivan performer in Hobart. I'm sure he has attended one or more of your Annual Dinners.

Before I embark on Cardiff conditions, just a couple more memories.

As a timid kid from Cardiff, NBHS in my early Grade 7 days, did nothing to bolster my confidence. Firstly, for a school to have a tennis court in its area, was just impossible for me to comprehend. These were the days when tennis was a gentlemen's game, not for the likes of us [before we won the Davis Cup].

In 1942, 43, 44, the serious war years, our timetable for the likes of us, featured Squad Drill on Thursdays at 3 pm, the last $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. The teachers were the Prefects. Until I read Dicken's David Copperfield, the power that the Prefect has, was unbelievable. They dispensed punishments that were also unbelievable.

Picture the trenches area between the toilets and the cement pathway, the 6 foot wide pathway. We would be assembled near the toilet area in columns of 6. One Prefect was instructing us in the left wheel / right wheel technique where the inside columns marked time while the outer columns wheeled around to the new direction. He was practising his technique of left wheeling us on to the pathway using the whole width of the pathway.

One Thursday, he miscalculated, resulting in 3 columns finishing up off the grass, with half the pathway's width being bared. When he shared his anger [it was naturally our fault], a loud

roar of laughter greeted him. From the admission rolls, every name was allotted a detention of a page full copied from some book or other. He used the word "prose", which I had not heard before - so much so, that I had to go to my English teacher "Spot" Burrows, to tell what was "prose". I have never forgotten how "prose" became part of my vocabulary.

Wartime restrictions were evident everywhere. The blackboards were deficient of black paint, meaning that we really had to strain our eyes to read what was being written on the bare wood.

For all the distractions, I have respected the school and the teachers, and I'm sure that my teaching careers in 1 teacher schools in NSW Outback, and my large school days in Sydney and Hobart have benefited.

Thanks again. Bill for your invitation to indulge in memories of NBHS. I'll now go on to your other suggestion of days in Cardiff.

Cardiff and NBHS in the War Years.

I was a child of the Depression. Poverty was everywhere. My Cardiff years in the late 30s were known as "everyone was in the same boat", meaning that we boys attended school bare feet and patched hand-me-downs, although the girls showed signs of having practical mothers and older sisters who were efficient at their Singer sewing machines.

The men were coal miners and orchardists. The sad thing was that in 6 months, the fruit fly wiped out any chances that the produce could be accepted at the Steele Street Markets, although the fruit trees were left in the orchards for years.

A feature of the Winding Creek area: the State government had gangs of men constructing the cement watercourses, to allow employment.

Transport.

The transport system was so highly efficient, although very uncomfortable for those that did not have seats on the double-decker buses. Buses left Telford Street at 1/2 hourly intervals on 10 to 20 [estimation] bus routes. Each bus had its own departing place in the square bounded by Scott, Telford, Hunter and Pacific Streets.

No cars on the roads, due to lack of petrol coupons. All glass was taken out, the windows being tin, and painted outside, the buses in camouflage patterns. Headlights were masked, with 3 narrow slits pointing to the road for blackout purposes. All buses to the distant centres like Swansea, Charlestown, Cardiff, Boolaroo, Speers Point etc. were overloaded to the extreme. I well remember the steel-edged mud flaps sending out sparks, as the weight of the passengers on the back platform dragged on the road.

"Move down the centre, please" was the incessant plea of the conductors. I still have the greatest respect for those bus drivers and conductors and conductresses, who did such a magnificent job, that it was sad to see them replaced as the men returned from active service.

Travelling to NBHS.

The Railway System was just as efficient. 3 suburban trains left Toronto at 7.30 am, 8.00 am and 8.30 am, to take us to NBHS [and others]. These trains were pulled by those sturdy little Class 30 and 31 locomotives. These locomotives had to travel tender first, to allow them to negotiate the long slope from Cardiff Station to the Tickhole Tunnel.

We travelled to Hamilton, changed trains for Waratah. That wide cement pathway referred to earlier, was a mass of boys for the approximately 600-700 yards to school.

On a larger scale, the Newcastle-Sydney travel was also efficient, the ultimate being the 3 express services each way daily, pulled by 35, 36 and 38 Class locomotives. 2 hours 30 minutes Newcastle to Sydney was the trip of the famous 38 Class, built at the Railway Workshops at Cardiff in the 1943-1965 years.

Charlestown before it became a city.

One of my Outback schools was a 2 teacher school at Goolgowi, on the Great Western Highway between West Wyalong and Hay. I had a small bus contract to transport 10 students to and from school. On my vacation trips home to Cardiff, I always was pleased to pass Swansea and Belmont, and turn off at Charlestown Road, and on to Kotara Heights, and turn left at Main Road near the Lookout. My house was 100 yards on the Newcastle side of the

Wallsend Turn-off. In 1945 Lake Macquarie Council forced every new house to be built 10-20 yards from the road, which was to be widened. The road still has not been widened, and my house still stands out on the edge of the road. So much for progress. Could possibly be a Sunday afternoon drive to see it.

In the latter war years, when I was a little more mature, I walked the city, noting the Aust. and USA servicemen and their behaviour. The Bank Corner was notorious. Herb Narvo [Aust Rugby League 2nd rower] had a hotel near the Bank, but in Bishopgate Street. Herb had plenty of practice exercising his tough guy football days, controlling the fights.

I was a devotee of Leo Jensen, top professional wrestler who married a Newcastle girl, and later opened a gymnasium on the corner of Union-Hunter Streets. I think his son, Lee, conducted a physiotherapy clinic a couple of doors along Union Street.

My father was a marine engineer in the tugboat system in the war years. He was 76 years old, and really too old for wartime, but ships entering the harbour had to be attended to. He would be pulled from bed at all crazy hours. I enjoyed a freedom to show self control, and so I would be exploring the city, always being on the transport system well before sunset.

I mentioned Leo Jensen. Boxing and wrestling were top line attractions, and it was quite safe to attend the Stadium on King and National Park Streets in the days when boxing had the 6 Sands brothers, Billy Tollis, Arthur Westbury - all Australian champions. When I went to the Outback in the 50s, I think the Stadium still existed, in your times at NBHS.

I'll leave this subject with just one anecdote. After Leo opened his Gymnasium, I confronted my father with the words, "Dad, I'll be leaving school next week." [I was in 4th Year]. When Dad enquired as to what the job was about, I said, "I'll be cleaning the toilets, putting out and taking up the wrestling mats, and meeting visiting wrestlers from overseas."

Dad's quiet answer was, "Leo is a great man, but you will be at school next week." Strange thing was - I WAS at NBHS next week!! Conversation closed.

Bill, Peter, Dick. Reading a hand written account such as this will be boring for you to bear, but I do this to keep the brain matter active. Maybe when you are 80+ years, you might do the same. Thank you for the unexpected invitation to recall NBHS days in the dark War Days. It must be of some pleasure to you, Bill, to have your father being a part of Education in different times.

From what your Annual Dinner times convey to me, I can see there are plenty of ex-students who have enjoyed their NBHS days.

Very best wishes for your Committee Activities.

Frank Newell 1946

I hope all of this does not sound like one of Frank McNeil's essay assignments.