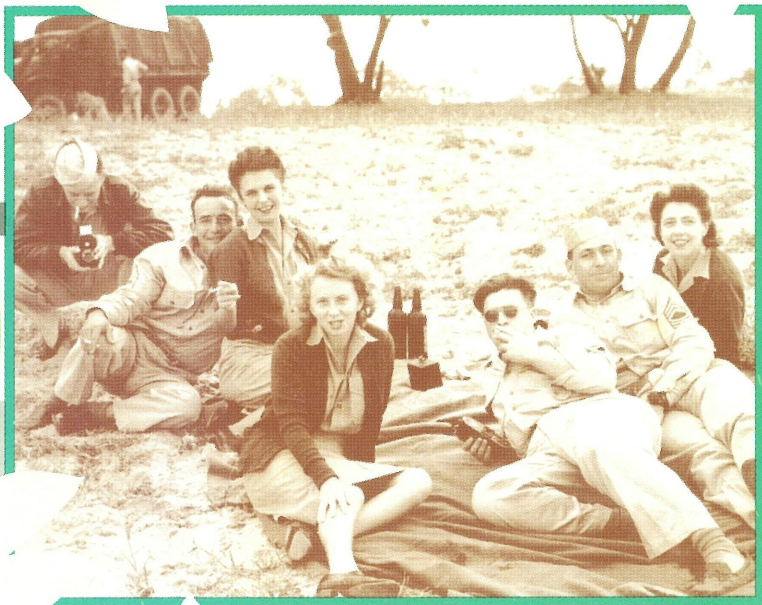


TOWNSVILLE AT WAR A SOLDIER REMEMBERS

HERBERT C JAFFA



**TOWNSVILLE AT WAR:
A Soldier Remembers**

by

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PROLOGUE

2 *Townsville At War*

Once, not long before she died, when he had written to Dorrie and told her that some day he might write about Townsville, she replied that she hoped he wouldn't glamorise it.

"It was a filthy town during the war, Bud, remember," she wrote, "no paint on the houses, no gardens because of water rationing, boarded up shop windows because there was no glass to replace the smashed panes, fire-gutted buildings just allowed to stand empty. Only the sea was clean and bright."

There were also the people.

He returned to Townsville last year (1980) for the first time since 1942, when he had left the beleaguered city for New Guinea where the battle for Buna was nearing its climax. A professor at an American university, he had been invited to lecture on Australian literature at James Cook University.¹

The *Townsville Daily Bulletin* made something of his return, noting that he had once served as an American enlisted man in Townsville during World War II and that his first book, published in 1971, about the Australian poet-journalist Kenneth Slessor, had been dedicated to a Townsville family, some of whose members still lived in the city. The dedication, reprinted by the *Bulletin*, read: "For the family of Harry Dinsmore who lived in Townsville, North Queensland, Australia."

Harry, or Bluey as his mates called him, was gone, that tough red-headed bantam of a man who, the *Bulletin* said, had "risen [before retirement] to become northern division manager of Queensland railways." The *Bulletin* didn't say that it took a war and a change of government for the railroad to forgive Harry for having been secretary of the strike committee that had stopped its trains in the late thirties. And gone also was Mum Dinsmore, the rock of the family which the *Bulletin* said "all but adopted the 21-year-old G.I. after he had met a girl called Dorrie at a wartime dance." Dorrie, too, was "dead," but the professor "was to meet the remaining members of the family." The story went on to refer to the fact that from his room at the luxurious Travelodge he could "now view beaches on the Strand free of the war-time snarl of barbed wire," and concluded, rather sentimentally, that when he left Townsville after his lectures, "the professor would leave in more style than [that in which] he arrived as a young man — aboard a Dutch freighter" a few weeks before the Battle of the Coral Sea.²

In the sharp sky, the frosty deepnesses,
There are still birds to barb the silences,
There are still fields to meet the morning on,
But those who made them beautiful have gone.

Kenneth Slessor
("The Country Ride")

CHAPTER I

Flinders Street and Dorrie

I read my first Australian verse at Darley, an Australian army camp near the lovely village of Bacchus Marsh some miles inland from the port of Melbourne. It was the fall of 1942 in Australia, and we had come there after crossing a month of southern ocean from San Francisco. We were to have ten days at Darley before scattering northward to war, and when we weren't writing "V" letters home, drinking the fine Australian beer, or exploring the beautiful clumps of green hills with white sheep, some of us discovered "a jolly swagman camped by a billabong/Under the shade of a coolibah tree."

We were to meet the jolly swagman of "Waltzing Matilda" many times during the next two years, often in verses other than those composed by A.B. ("Banjo") Paterson and not always appropriate for the family dining room. We listened to and sang the folk ballad as we moved northward — to Townsville, North Queensland, along the Great Barrier Reef, to Port Moresby in New Guinea, and then over the Owen Stanley Range into Buna, Dobadura, the Markham Valley and Lae.

I relate the circumstances of this early contact with Australian verse because, from it, coloured by memory, came the impulse years later to study the literature of Australia. The present lecture series on the poet-journalist Kenneth Slessor is one expression of that study.

I did not come to the poetry of Kenneth Slessor until after the war, though during the war I had heard of his work as a newspaperman. He had served as a war correspondent first in the Middle East and later with the Australian forces at Finschhafen, New Guinea, not too far from the Nadzab-Markham Valley area where I was located.

Townsville, in the beginning, was just the main street, Flinders Street, to which a faded green and white open-aired wooden bus would deliver him periodically from the tents of Hermit Park, where the American army had set up headquarters for the anti-aircraft guns that were beginning to circle the city. The bus would come in from the south end of Flinders Street, move creakily north past the railroad station on the right adjacent to the corner embraced by the wide verandah of lattice-work of the Great Northern Hotel, and continue slowly for a few blocks through a kaleidoscope of open and shuttered shops owned by Shaw, Heatley, Chandler, Lear and McKimmins, offering specials in men's and women's clothing, timber and building supplies, honey jars, and insurance. It would then come to a final stop in front of one of the recently opened milk bars or old cafes housed in the predominantly wooden buildings with wooden awnings that lined and shaded both sides of the street.

This was the heart of Flinders Street, and to him in the beginning, of Townsville itself. And though the street continued past the pink-stoned Victorian Post Office and the two swinging doors of the storefront Town Hall to meander up the hill and down to the bay, it was within these three or four blocks that Townsville was most alive.

Flinders Street swarmed with people, and it was the people and the profusion of sounds, movements, and colours associated with them that he remembered most of all. They gave the street its aliveness; the split railings and broken boards of the Commercial Travellers Club and the taped and cracked windows of the Blue Bird Cafe hardly mattered.

In April 1942, still early autumn in Australia, Townsville was not yet the complete Allied garrison city it was to become, but already in the heterogeneousness of the crowd of soldiers and civilians that moved along Flinders Street, he, still the student, sensed the coming together of all people to fight back. Along the shaded walkways and spilling into the street they moved and mingled; sun-bleached Australian militiamen in rumpled woollens, white-faced Dutch and American airmen in stained shorts and faded khakis, and proper Australian matrons in printed dresses and tightly bunned hair; they walked together with whiskered French sailors in pomponed caps, long-gowned Chinese greengrocers with nets of mangoes, and small groups of turbaned women with sarong-clad little girls.

Among the military, Americans seemed most numerous, recent arrivals like himself in new and neatly pressed khaki, sporting caps with

colours of the engineers, of anti-aircraft units and the orange of his own signal corps. Five weeks out of the States, they were the untested, "casuals" in army terms, unlike their battered-looking compatriots of the air corps who had escaped from the Philippines to fight in Java and had had to flee again. The airmen had made their way to Townsville a month before to continue the battle in nine patched up and rebuilt B-17s.

Two or three of these antiquated flying fortresses would waddle up into the warm darkness each night and manage the 600 mile stretch of Coral Sea to the Seven Mile Strip in Port Moresby at the southern end of New Guinea. There they would refuel in a frenzy before the Japanese morning air attack on the strip, and then take off for the north to pound recently occupied enemy bases in Lae and Salamaua. Not all the "17s" returned from their missions to the other side of the Owen Stanley — the wreckage of one was found only last year — but those that did, whose men were to mingle again with the crowds on Flinders Street, were to help turn back an invasion force in early May as it headed into the Coral Sea from Rabaul in the Solomons to move on Moresby and to attack Townsville. And if only three of the old planes were left by August with less than a full crew for each, they were important enough, together with a new RAAF squadron of Catalinas based in Townsville, to be included on the raid that smashed the Vunakanau aerodrome at Rabaul and thwarted the Japanese from supporting their troops fighting the marines at Guadalcanal and Tulagi.

Australian uniforms of all services, not only those of the militia and the RAAF, were also much in evidence in the crowds on Flinders Street. Few, though, showed the proud patches of the volunteer Australian Imperial Force, units of which had been disembarking in recent weeks in South Australia after two years of fighting a war a world away in the deserts of North Africa and in the mountains of Syria and Greece. During the months ahead men from these units and from others returning later, Townsville men among them, would pass through the city before joining the fighting in the jungles of New Guinea, hours from their homes. In April, however, most of the Australian upturned slouch hats that punctuated the crowd in various places, especially near the street entrances to the hotel bars, still belonged to members of the Citizen Military Force, militiamen conscripted for service within Australia and adjacent territories. He had not known that at first, nor that there was a difference between the CMF and the AIF.¹ The Australian soldiers he saw seemed the same in

their cockiness and swagger, and fitted the stereotype he had built of them while still in college and reading *The New York Times* about AIF action at Benghazi and Tobruk. That there seemed to be two Australian armies, as he was to learn over “stike and eigs” in the Blue Bird cafe, was confusing, and more so in that the AIF seemed to scorn the CMF as “chocolate” soldiers. Yet it was the men in the CMF who had been and were still, in April 1942, bearing the brunt of the struggle against the Japanese in New Guinea. Short on training and poorly disciplined — many had been rushed to the island in January — most of the militiamen or militia boys (some who had falsified their ages were only 16 or 17) were full of fight and fought well, according to the American airmen who made the nightly run to the Seven Mile Strip where some of the CMF guns were situated.

But among the Australians it was not the brash young men of the militia (they saluted no one) of whom he was most aware, nor was it a multi-uniformed group of older heavy-set soldiers from the Volunteer Defence Corps who, with their straight backs and a snap in their walk, gave a military sharpness to the slow flow of the crowd. Rather it was the innumerable Australian women soldiers who drew his and other Americans’ attention. They seemed to be everywhere, these soldiers of the Women’s Australian Air Force and the Australian Women’s Army Service. And though years afterward he was to see them in his mind’s eye working the RAAF wireless out near Garbutt, or manning the lights on Castle Hill that in July tracked the Kawanisi Jap bombers, or after duty, dancing with the Allied servicemen in the Red Cross building on the hill leading down to the bay, he remembered them most of all the way he saw them that first time on Flinders Street in all their prim prettiness in well scrubbed khakis and perky caps.

Other than those in uniform, there weren’t too many young Australian women on Flinders Street. In fact, other than militiamen there were very few young men, though along the street some freckled twelve-to-fourteen-year-olds in sleeveless shirts and short pants snaked through the crowd and joshed the Americans. Among the civilians it was those who were pointed out as refugees who attracted him the most. There were Chinese and some smallish men and women he thought might be from Malaya, but primarily there were women and children — from the Netherlands East Indies he was told — who splattered the predominant khaki of the crowd with the sharp colours of their sarongs and scarves, brightening up the drabness of Flinders Street and giving it a resonance.

From all parts of the archipelago they had come: from Timor, Java, Sumatra and Borneo, revealing by their flight the crumbling of the last barrier, except for New Guinea, to an attack on or an invasion of Townsville and the northern coast leading down to Australia's life-line in the south. He, too new, could not know that at the time, and so was taken up mostly with the refugees' exotic appearance and excited chatter as they walked along Flinders Street, stopping to look in shop windows with cardboard reproductions of merchandise that was no longer available. Nor could he know that by their presence in the city these refugees represented for some of the people of Townsville an image of what they themselves might become. Only afterward did he appreciate this when Dorrie told him that following the outbreak of the Pacific war the first flow of refugees from the neighbouring islands and from Hong Kong and Malaya had precipitated a flight to the south of hundreds of people from Townsville. That had been in February, two months before, and Dorrie attributed the exodus of her usually steadfast neighbours to the shock caused by the loss of Singapore and to the presence of refugees that dramatised that loss.

The British surrender of their "impregnable" naval base which "the Japanese would never get past" made the people of Townsville feel, as they were in fact vulnerable, alone, unprotected. The loss of Singapore in February was for them the greatest disaster of the war. "Australia's Dunkirk," Dorrie's dad, who had been at Gallipoli, called it, and had maps on the kitchen wall in the house on Mitchell Street to prove it.

"Look up there," Harry said more than once, pointing north to the great arc of islands that hung protectively over Australia. "Because the Poms gave them Singapore in two weeks, the Nips now are everywhere; except for a piece of Papua in New Guinea, there's nothing left to block them." The postwar texts were to say in more formal terms that once Singapore fell and the Malayan-Indonesian barrier was penetrated, much of Australia was exposed to direct attack.

Certainly it was because of that piece of Papua at Port Moresby and, in fact, of all of New Guinea, that he had been sent to Townsville. This may not have been clear to him in the beginning when he first walked along Flinders Street. It was, though, later on, after Dorrie, and before he himself left for the dragon-shaped island up the coast from where the Japanese were already broadcasting breakfast threats, addressing Townsville people by name and promising "visits" in the days ahead. ("Mr Ohensorgen [local grocer], we will soon bomb you.") Unlike the

response to Singapore, threats no longer triggered an exodus from the city, and even later, when the authorities advised a plan for evacuation, the people scorned and rejected it. So too did the many refugees who, more sympathetically and uniformly accepted as the grim weeks passed, seemed to have become indigenous to Townsville. By then he too felt close to the city and would leave it only to defend it. Through the experience of love, Townsville had become more than Flinders Street to him, and the heterogeneousness of its crowds had blended into a humanity of which he, now less the observer, felt a part.

But that was still to come. In the beginning the people in all their diversity moved along Flinders Street and, watching them, he was particularly intrigued by the refugees. Brightly costumed and animated, they lent a gaiety to the crowd and also defined its seriousness. For they explained, in part, the endless procession of traffic, mostly camouflaged grey-green Australian military vehicles, but also commandeered commercial trucks and civilian cars with newly painted U.S. Army insignia, that moved painfully in opposite directions along a median strip of flower beds and palm trees that divided Flinders Street and ran much of its length. In peacetime the strip, with its profusion of tropical flowers and graceful palms, must have made the street as lovely as Dorrie remembered. Now it was different, for large rectangular concrete air raid shelters had been built at intervals along the median with slit trenches dug between them, and the flowers had been left to die.

It was at a Heatley dance in a storefront building off Flinders Street that he had first seen Dorrie. (And closing his eyes he could see her still in her slimness and quiet gaiety as she moved gracefully with her partner about the room.) It had been a private all-Australian dance, in a large rectangular room, uncrowded, with women outnumbering men, white-shirted civilians in short sleeves and rumped khakied soldiers of all services. He had talked his way past a patriotic matron minding the door with a tale of having just come down from New Guinea where an Australian Colonel Llewellyn had told him about the Heatley dances. The name Llewellyn had come to him from Richard Llewellyn, author of the

Welsh novel, *How Green Was My Valley*, which he had read on the long trip from the States two months before.

He had repeated the story by way of introduction when he began dancing with Dorrie; it was permissible to cut in and he had done so as soon as he could. He told her about his coming down from the island because he had wanted to impress her. But as they danced and talked, he holding her tentatively about the waist (she was small but there was a fullness to her breasts and he was afraid of offending her), he was sorry that he had lied to her, for already she meant something to him.

Had he loved Dorrie that first night at Heatley's? He wasn't sure. But he did know she was important to him at once. He felt he had known her before and wanted to know her more.

Except that he hoped that she liked him, he had wanted nothing more from Dorrie then. She was small in his arms as they danced, and he felt protective of her. And later, when she had given up her ride with Madge to walk home with him over the hill toward North Ward and talked about being friends — for she had been seeing someone who was then in the Middle East — he had had no sense of jealousy or loss. It was enough that he could be with her.

It was late in the afternoon, and after one of the lectures he had wandered down to the beach in front of the Travelodge. The sun was still bright and hot in a remarkable solid sky of blue that was part of the sea, and as he walked along the shore, looking out across the small waves forming and shimmering with flakes of silver, he could imagine Dorrie and him together again at the dance and thought of their walking, in later weeks, along the same stretch of beach.

CHAPTER II

The War a World Away

There were about 150 troops, anti-aircraft gunners, field radio operators (he was one), telephone linemen, and engineers who had been moved twelve days earlier from Darley, an Australian camp near Bacchus Marsh, to the Port of Melbourne to board the *Maetsuycker*, a shivering mongrel of a ship that sneaked up the coast and carried them safely through the opening in the Reef opposite Townsville. Civilians, a few months before (most of them, in the beginning, at least), they were uncertain of the purpose of their Townsville landing. This was especially so since they had brought only themselves to this remote little city below the equator, arriving almost empty-handed except for some reels of wire, three radio transmitters and receivers, their own modest sidearms of Smith-Wessons, and some Garand rifles without cartridges which they had been issued and drilled with for the first time on the docks at Melbourne.

They were counted on by Washington to lend an American presence, and thereby contribute to Australian morale in a populated area closest to the Japanese thrust in New Guinea. This was only vaguely communicated to them, though more clearly than the fact that they were considered sacrificial troops, necessarily expendable in the case of a Japanese invasion. Only later did they come to appreciate that their being where they were was also part of a plan that would first stop the Japanese in New Guinea — and the Japanese would have almost all of it by April — and would eventually build Townsville into a major base for the Allied offensive in the Southwest Pacific. Sufficient to say that, if in the beginning they thought at all about why they had been sent to Townsville, they thought, and with only a touch of smugness, that it had to do with improving the morale of the people. Certainly, given the circumstances of their lives in early 1942, their morale seemed worthy of support.

The people of Townsville, as part of the British Empire, had been at war since September 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland. But it had been a war a world away and they had remained relatively untouched by it. Certainly there had been an uneasy sense of excitement during the first days after Menzies' broadcast¹, telling them that Great Britain had declared war on Germany "and that, as a result, Australia [was] also at war." ("A bleeding way for an independent country to go to war," Harry used to say.)

And for weeks thereafter the lives of at least some families in town had been disrupted when “Join the AIF” posters, burgeoning in every store window on Flinders Street, had pulled their husbands and sons to the recruitment hall above the post office and, after a hasty examination, sent most of them to the railroad station for the long ride to the training camps in the south. Yet, for most of the people of Townsville, the sudden wave of emotion and excitement, of stirred-up old feelings for the “Mother Country,” receded soon after the outbreak of the European war, and in the immediate months that followed only the occasional reappearance on Flinders Street of some of the Townsville volunteers, now uniformed and fit and on home leave before assignment overseas, would remind the people that their city was involved in a global conflict.

These early days of Townsville in World War II are largely from Harry’s memory. Dorrie, for one, never remembered seeing any of the volunteers after they had left for training. She did recall, though, reading about a tumultuous reception accorded them when, as part of the first contingent of the Second Australian Imperial Force (the first had ennobled itself at Gallipoli), they had marched through the streets of Sydney. She also remembered — and this vividly — having watched at the Winter Garden cinema a special newsreel of the event in Sydney, and having felt a sense of sadness as the screen showed cascades of confetti and paper streamers thrown by the jubilant crowd becoming entangled around the hats and bayonets of the marching men.

This was in early January of 1940, and it was to be another year, almost to the day, when the Townsville volunteers were to suffer their first casualties: two were wounded, one seriously, when units of their 6th Australian Division, the first infantry group to go into combat, broke through the defences of Bardia in North Africa to defeat a numerically superior force of Italians.²

The battle at Bardia and the role of the local volunteers in it were to be duly noted in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, although most attention at the time seemed to have been paid to the arrival, on New Year’s day 1941, of the Australian passenger ship *Nellors*, which steamed into the then still unmined Townsville harbour with 517 refugees, picked up on Emirau Island, about 1600 kilometres northeast of Townsville. Survivors of sinkings by German raiders which, it is now known, roamed the southwest Pacific disguised as Japanese merchant ships, the bedraggled men, women and children who walked or were carried down the gangplank

— Australians, British, Chinese, Dutch and French, a microcosm of the deteriorating Allied position in the area — seemed to have touched Townsville more than the heroics of their own men on the other side of the world.

This was less true for those families who were personally affected by the news from Bardia. But even for them, the battle in the desert seemed remote, part of some adventure started in Sydney the year before. For they still saw their men — sons, brothers and lovers — cocky and proud, marching to the din of a cheering crowd through the swirl of confetti and a dancing canopy of Union Jacks. That picture was to blur, but the blurring was still months ahead.

The arrival of the *Nellors* on New Year's day served to bring the war, if only briefly, closer to the people, and made it seem more real. Organised by the Townsville Red Cross — Mum Dinsmore was among its members — people rushed down to the docks to meet and care for the refugees, or over to Flinders Street to open their holiday-bolted shops to provide clothing and other necessities for them. Forgotten were the season's festivities and, for the first time, many in Townsville felt part of the war's urgency and even some of its threat.

Yet this feeling, too, could not be sustained very long after the *Nellors'* refugees had been sent south to more felicitous accommodations than Townsville could offer at the time. Nor was it revived in the months that followed by the spasmodic references in the *Bulletin* to the severe fighting in the African desert and across the Mediterranean. April of 1941 was truly the "cruellest month" for the Australian defenders of Tobruk and for their Stuka- and Panzer-battered mates at Thermopylae, but it was also the month that the response in Townsville to the war loan and recruiting campaign showed a downward trend. This did not necessarily mean that the people were apathetic about the war. Isolated and alone in the deep north of the continent, far from the hoopla and rallies of the large metropolises of the south, Townsvilleans had little opportunity to feel part of things, to feel as they did with the *Nellors'* refugees, that their efforts counted. But very few if any of them would have said, as did many of the sophisticates of Sydney, that "the war really [didn't] concern us."³ The war remained meaningful to most of the people of Townsville, though they continued to think of it largely in individual and personal terms. They felt no threat from the war except as it might affect kin and friends caught up in the fighting — and by this time Townsville men were on duty all over the

world, not only on land and at sea, but in the air, flying Baltimores⁴ over Italy and tracking submarines in Catalinas along the approaches to the English coast. Yet even these feelings of fear about happenings in faraway places were muted. The early dispatches from the front either hid the horror behind accounts of national heroics, or depersonalised the Australian effort by blending it with that of the British and the Allies.

Thus, though always mindful of the war during the months preceding Pearl Harbor, the people in this little provincial city generally still thought of it as remote from their lives. That actual battles were taking place not only in distant lands but also almost within sight of their own and other Australian cities was unknown to them. They were shocked, therefore, at the government's announcement of the loss of the Australian cruiser *HMAS Sydney* with its full complement of 645 officers and men after an engagement off the west coast of Australia with the *Kormoran*, a heavily armed German auxiliary cruiser that apparently had been roving at will in and out of the Indian and Pacific Oceans since the middle of 1940, laying mines, shelling neighbouring islands, and sinking Allied merchant ships. The people were shocked also because *HMAS Sydney* was well known, having served with distinction in the Mediterranean since 1940 — most of Australia's modest fleet had been placed at the disposition of the British Admiralty early in the war — and had returned, at Australia's request, to Australian waters only at the beginning of 1941. Her crew had been feted at the Town Hall in Sydney, and a plaque commemorating her victory over the Italian battleship *Bartolomeo Colleoni* placed on the gun turret of her quarter deck.

The announcement, then, on December 1, of the *Sydney's* loss affected the people deeply, bringing them together in a collective grief which could not be "tempered," as was asked for at the time, by the knowledge that the ship and her men "had found a glorious end in the high seas in the service of a just cause."⁵ The death of 645 Australian servicemen, all at once, so close to their homes, in iridescent waves that washed the endless beaches of their own land, was difficult to absorb and seemed incomprehensible.

But more than grief and disbelief moved many in Townsville. There was also anger, anger at the enemy, the German, seen now with a sudden lucidity, but anger also (together with a sense of frustration) at their

own government for having withheld the news of the tragedy for weeks. "They spoon-fed us," Harry was to recall, "spoon-fed us news like children."

On the morning of Monday December 8, however, the fact of the people's not having been as informed as they might have been about the incursion into their home waters of the distant European war suddenly seemed less significant. Earlier that day, at 5.45 a.m., a fragmentary broadcast from the United States, picked up by the Australian Department of Information's monitor station in Melbourne, reported the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. By noon most of the adult population in Townsville seemed to know about it and to appreciate its implications. The *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, printed and distributed earlier, had to wait until Tuesday to banner "Japan Brings War to the Pacific Area" across its eight columns, and to editorialise that now there was "World War in Reality." Here, though, the people did not need to be informed or instructed. They knew, almost instinctively, that something momentous had happened, that they were part of it, and that henceforth things would be different. Nor did they have to be reminded, as they were by Prime Minister Curtin that evening, that Australia itself now "was in peril" and that it was facing the "darkest hour" in its history.

Since the month was December, the schools in Townsville would have been closed for the summer holiday, Dorrie's brother Ron remembered last year. Being only eleven at the time, he had been at home listening to a regular ABC children's program when it was interrupted by a bulletin about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The bulletin hadn't frightened him; he didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. But alone in the house that morning he had felt uneasy about the Japanese, more so certainly than he had about the Germans two years before when the war in Europe had broken out. Germany, on the other side of the world, had seemed unreal to him and compared to the many red patches that made up the British

Commonwealth of Nations in his school atlas, had seemed insignificant. Japan and the Japanese were different. Yet he hoped nothing would happen to the old man who sat outside his clean-smelling laundry on Denham Street near Mah Kong's greengrocery.

CHAPTER III

The War at Hand

Living as they did in a small port city in the tropical north beneath the hang of the Pacific islands, the people of Townsville had seen more of the Japanese than had most provincial Australians. Townsville had been a port of call for Japanese merchant ships, and their crews, together with Japanese fishermen and pearl divers, had walked Flinders Street and shopped at its stores.

This familiarity with the Japanese, superficial as it was, nevertheless served to contribute to the apprehension that many felt at the outbreak of the Pacific war. For the "Nips," as Harry remembered them, hardly ever fitted the conventional stereotype provided by the prejudice about them. They were formidable little men, muscular and compact, not unfriendly but distant. When they came ashore they were neatly dressed. They made their purchases, and drank their liquor when they could get it. Then sometimes they wandered around town, as other seamen did, and often walked over the hill and down to the Strand. Yet the "Nips" were never drunk and never caused trouble. It may be that if the local authorities and merchants found it difficult to like them as much as they did their own "Chows" or Chinese greengrocers, they respected them more.

The average adult Townsvillean was fiercely Australian, though no less egocentric and parochial about his Anglo-Saxon roots. He shared in varying degrees the vague fears and feelings of hostility and disdain that many Australians, alone in the South Seas, sometimes had about their non-European neighbours. But about the Japanese he felt only disquiet and "always had," Harry said; and, because he knew them, the disquiet could not be assuaged as it was for other Australians, remote from the Japanese, by simplistic feelings of superiority.

This is not to suggest that the people of Townsville were preoccupied in the years before Pearl Harbor with anxiety about Japan. Certainly, during much of the 1930s their energies, mental and physical, had been devoted mostly to dealing with a dislocating economic depression. The bitter results of this dislocation in the loss of idealism and in doubts about self and society lingered, for many, throughout the early years of the war. (Harry never forgot what he had felt when he was forced to leave the family to find work in the west.) Some of the more thoughtful people in Townsville had become concerned about the possibility that the Japanese would take advantage of the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1939 to move closer to the Australian mainland. They were reassured, however, by the accompanying thought of the protection afforded by the mother country

Britain, of her control of India in the west and of Malaya in the north and of the assumption that the Royal Navy “ruled the waves.”

But the people counted not only on British might but also on British judgment. They believed that Japan, being involved in China, would adhere to its early assurance to remain neutral about, and not to exploit, the situation in Europe. The Japanese propaganda broadcasts in the middle of 1940, heard clearly in Townsville, became sympathetic¹ to Germany and increasingly strident about Japan’s “new order” in East Asia and about the European war’s impact in the South Seas. But even then few people in Townsville felt any strong sense of threat.

For many people in fact, the war seemed unreal through much of 1940, even after the fall of Dunkirk in June. Harry didn’t feel this way nor did most of his mates, all old Diggers like himself. Nor apparently, did the relatively large number of Townsville volunteers; the war obviously seemed real to them, especially when tinged with feelings for the mother country and with the anticipation of adventure. Yet if the war seemed real to the volunteers, they must have seen it as remote from and no threat to Townsville and Australia. Accompanied by the cheers of their compatriots, the men from Townsville had no compunction about leaving their homes and families and travelling endless oceans to fight in battles thousands of miles away. And they continued to do so through 1940 and during the early desert victories of 1941,² so confident were they of Australia’s security and British strength. Their confidence persisted even when items began to appear in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* referring to a Japanese movement southward into Indo-China and headed toward Thailand.

(The actions of the Japanese had certainly been of concern to the Australian leadership. Discouraged by Whitehall from rearranging their priorities, however, the Australians had continued to send men and supplies to the other side of the world. But in the months preceding Pearl Harbor, the Australian leadership managed to negotiate the diversion of some of their troops to posts closer to their own homeland. One such diversion saw a large contingent of AIF volunteers, including men from Townsville, men originally scheduled to become part of still another division (the 8th) for the fighting in the Middle East, being sent instead to Singapore, Britain’s island fortress at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula. [Even secondary school students at the time, Harry said, knew of Singapore’s importance to Australia’s well-being. In Singapore the volunteers underwent a period of rigorous jungle training. They then took up positions at the southern end

of the peninsula, at Malacca and Johore and at Johore Bahru, near the causeway linking Singapore to the mainland. There, thousands of miles from the fighting and excitement in the Western Desert for which they had enlisted, they waited impatiently for *their* war. That it was to come with a vengeance of heroics and humiliation unique in Australia's military history they could not yet know.)³

If the attack on Pearl Harbor came as a shock to the people of Townsville, it also brought to some a sense of relief that they, in effect, were now at war with Japan, that what they had feared, even if not consciously, or thought inevitable, had come to pass. Others, of course, also felt relieved because the United States was to be their ally in that war. This had not seemed at all certain to them in the months before Pearl Harbor, as the Japanese continued to move southward and Australian radio and items in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* referred to Australian and British efforts to gain the assurance of American military support if war came to the Pacific. (Non-intervention opinion in the United States restricted Roosevelt's action even in the Atlantic community.) Now, finally, the war had come to the Pacific, though Harry had said it had been there a long time, and in his mind's eye he could still see Harry's kitchen map with the yellow pins tracking the Japanese advance since 1940. But the people of Townsville, if shocked into new awareness by the daring of the Japanese attack, were not panicked by it. Nor did they panic in the terrible days thereafter, when news came of the Japanese sinking of Britain's mighty new battleships, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* in the Gulf of Thailand off Malaya, along whose peninsula the *Bulletin* reported the Japanese were already advancing toward Singapore. (Years later he was to read that Churchill, who had "slept the sleep of the saved" after having received with "pure joy" news of the Pearl Harbor attack — England was no longer alone — "twisted and writhed in bed" when he received news of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*.) Of course Townsvilleans could not know at the time how alone and isolated they already were; that realisation was yet to come. But by sinking the British ships, and by the destruction wrought on the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese, within a week of the outbreak of hostilities, indubitably ruled the waves from the Indian Ocean to the eastern Pacific. For the people of Townsville, and of an Australia unable to defend itself unaided by British and American naval strength, it was merciful not to know that in the middle of December 1941 there was not a single British

or American capital ship afloat in the ten thousand miles of ocean between California, toward which the survivors of Pearl Harbor were running to regroup, and East Africa where the old-fashioned British "R" class battleships had sought safety from their base in Ceylon.

(Certainly, while still in college before enlistment he had not known this, nor apparently had the Japanese. But they did know it a few months later, as he did also, when they prepared to move toward Townsville, alone in the deep north of the continent, where he had recently arrived, ultimately to be touched by the life of its people and especially by the love of Dorrie.)

So friends they had been, two young people, different in beginnings but coming together in growing up, who liked only to be with each other. (And his 60 year old heart beat for their youth and their having been together.) When they were free to see each other — and often he would trade for the midnight shift to salvage part of a day or early evening to be with her — they might go to the flicks, sometimes taking Dorrie's youngest brother, Bri, to the white walled Winter Garden with its stately palms and tightly stretched canvas chairs. Or they might simply walk along the Strand beyond the ANZAC monument, away from the circle of khakied "two-up" players beneath the massive Moreton Bay fig trees, to wander down the beach, and skim flat stones into the sparkling sea. (Last year he saw the huge palm, just up from the beach, "their tree," Dorrie had later called it, where once, surprised by a downpour, they had sought shelter — and in his mind's eye, he saw them huddled together, laughing, drenched to the skin by the warm rain — but he could not hear the laughter.)

Increasingly, as troops moved into the city, there were not many places to go except for parts of the beach and of the splendid sea that were not crowded and noisy and dirty. So often, especially on bright-mooned nights when Harry had to be late at the station, they stayed home with Mum and the boys, he playing cards with them and Dorrie helping Mum with the ironing. Later, after Harry had come home and eaten, and he and Harry had had their three-cups-of-tea discussions about the war, he and Dorrie would slip out to the wide latticed verandah surrounding the house.

Pulling together the scattered cane chairs, they would sit quietly and talk, he sometimes reaching out to hold her hand and she sometimes brushing the back of her hand against his cheek as they told each other things they had never told another. And afterwards, when he left to hike back over the hill to town to find a ride back to camp, he felt happy and more able to deal with the pain that would come to him that night in the tatters of Morse code from the island.

CHAPTER IV

Bombs on Australia

Kenneth Slessor was born in 1901 at Orange, New South Wales, the first settled of the six Australian states. The year is important because on New Year's Day of that year Australia was proclaimed a nation.¹ The place is important because nearby was the birthplace of A.B. "Banjo" Paterson, the greatest of the Australian bush balladists. All three — Slessor, the imaginative poet; Australia, finally a nation; and the bush balladists — are interrelated.

The link between the bush balladist and the unfurling of the new Australian flag on the first day of the new century was a close one. For the flag, which balanced the Southern Cross against the British Union Jack and the six-pointed white star of the new unified six Australian states, symbolised a "marriage" between old British values and new indigenous ones that had emerged from a century of struggle with a strange and harsh continent. The bush balladists had been a very important part of that struggle. No people could become a nation nor "could live a full life ... or indeed live in any real sense at all until it began to seek imaginative expression for its thoughts and feelings." In the 1880s and more dramatically in the nineties in the verses of "Banjo" Paterson, the bush balladists provided this expression.

Helped by a vigorous oral literature that had grown out of the folk songs and English-Scotch ballads of the earlier settlers, the balladists embraced the heartland of the country, the bush or outback, and the people who lived and worked there. They wrote ballads about sheep shearers and stockmen and station hands and squatters. And they wrote of "mateship born in barren lands, /Of toil and thirst and danger." They discovered "the law of the Overland that all in the West obey — A man must cover with travelling sheep a six-mile stage a day." And they found also "a jolly swagman camped by a billabong, /Under the shade of a coolibah tree, [who] sang, as he watched ... while his billy boiled, 'Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?'"

Although news that the war had spread to the Pacific was received by radio in Townsville on Monday morning, December 8, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* reported “no appreciable difference” that day in the number of young men offering their services to the AIF. On Tuesday, however, “the position was reversed” and over 20 men enlisted, setting the AIF staff “working at top pressure throughout the morning until late in the afternoon.” Perhaps the war had not been “official” until the old ‘Bully’, almost as old as Townsville itself, had made it so, as it did that Tuesday. A few evenings later, in fact, there were actually 30 volunteers present when the “usual farewells” of the city, officiated over by the Deputy Mayor, Alderman Tom Aikens, took place at the Town Hall. The young men were honoured with a High Tea at the Australian Comforts Fund Rest Rooms on Sturt Street. After this they met briefly with the “Old Diggers” at Memorial Hall before marching off to the railroad station, “led by the Salvation Army Band and accompanied by the Home Guard.”

The use of a banner head about the Pacific war, an unusual practice for the *Bulletin*, and appreciated as such by its readers, expressed the newspaper’s estimate of the seriousness of the situation. Yet the *Bulletin* was never to think the Japanese a cause for hysteria, not even in the months ahead when invasion was feared and warnings and instructions for evacuation were issued from “official” sources in the south. The *Bulletin*’s evenness of tone in its editorials and in its balanced presentation of the news contributed to, and also reflected, the relative calm of most of the people of Townsville.

The *Bulletin* reported the national news from Melbourne, especially as it referred to decisions by the Government to begin “the changes which [as a result of the Japanese strike] might be necessary in Australia’s commitment to overseas [European] war theatres.” But it gave no less attention to the local response to the Pacific war. It reported on the accelerated activities of the AIF Recruiting Drive Committee, the Townsville Red Cross, the War Savings Certificate Committee, and the Townsville Harbour Board which, in cooperation with the Fire Brigade, were “giving all hoses, water mains, and hydrants a thorough overhaul” to prepare them for any emergency. And if space was accorded a Government plan to call up “substantial additional forces,” including women, to buttress the militia and the home defence garrisons because “the future of the country [was] at stake” — so also did the *Bulletin* lend its columns to personal “messages” by Townsville citizens. A certain W.T. Blake,

proprietor of the Kodak shop on Flinders Street, and commander of the 61st Battalion of the Volunteer Defence Corps, called upon Townsville men not eligible for active service to join the Home Guard because “the war is at our gates.”

(And as he read the old newspapers at the new *Bulletin* office on Ogden Street, the past intruded and he felt a sense of dislocation and aching sadness; and thoughts about the following day’s lecture at James Cook University seemed unreal.)

The war, emotionally, for most of the people, was not yet at Townsville’s “gates.” Nor was it to be there in a more literal sense until July when Townsville was bombed. But for some, as early as March, when Japanese forces began occupying Lae and Salamaua in New Guinea; and, more acutely for others, in May, when reports circulated about the thwarted invasion fleet in the Coral Sea, the Japanese presence had become almost palpable. Yet this was a familiar feeling for Harry and others who kept maps and read everything; they had experienced it in February when Singapore fell with 15,000 Australians and especially when the Japanese first attacked the Australian mainland, at Darwin, north-west of Townsville, across the Gulf of Carpentaria and Arnhem Land.

The Darwin attack, inflicting Australian casualties on Australian soil, had shocked many. Though the first official casualty figures served to diminish its impact, the more informed citizens thought the figures incomplete or even deliberately falsified. They were right; the original casualty figures, by design or mistake, were to prove woefully low. In April, before Dorrie, but soon after the colour and sounds and movement of Flinders Street had already become part of his life, he saw a story in the *Daily Bulletin* that reported the findings of an independent Commission of Inquiry. The Commission established that instead of 17 killed and 24 wounded as initially reported, the bombing and strafing at Darwin had taken 243 lives, including those of 50 civilians, and wounded another 350. It wasn’t until late July, however, when the *Bulletin* was able to publish photographs of the Darwin attack, then just released by the Department of Information, that Townsville was able to gain a visual sense of what a horror it had been. For those in the city who had relatives or friends or former neighbours among the large number of civilian wharf workers who had died, the photograph of the harbour and its docks under attack and in flames was especially poignant.² But it was no less so for him. He didn’t know any of the men on the burning *U.S. Peary* in the foreground of the

photograph (a terrible picture that recalled the dying ships at Pearl), but he remembered again that when he first strode along Flinders Street, cocky and untouched, he had not known that Americans had already died in Australia, had died even while he still had been learning the key and code in his training camp in Missouri.

Townsville itself was attacked from the air just before and again a day after the publication of the Darwin photograph in July. And here again, the *Bulletin* served. By recalling Darwin at the very time that their own city was being bombed, the *Bulletin* helped to minimise the experience and allowed Townsvilleans to shrug it off as a “nuisance” compared to what had happened at Darwin.

The Japanese made much of their late night raids on Townsville, calling them “the largest raids ... since the fall of Singapore.” They were not; and picking up their short wave broadcast afterwards, he felt an exhilarating sense of satisfaction. The Nips, who had so vocally threatened the city for months, even addressing inhabitants and businesses by name, had been forced to exaggerate grossly when they finally penetrated Townsville’s anti-aircraft cover.

There was never any “large formation of Japanese bombers” over Townsville, as the broadcast claimed. At most three fat four-engined Kawanisi flying boats (whose silhouettes he knew by heart) and their bombs, which supposedly had been dropped during the first raid “on docks, airfields, and oil dumps,” causing “large fires,” had missed their targets completely and fallen harmlessly into the bay off the town jetty. During the other raids (also on magnificent moon-bright nights with which memory still flashes), one or two Kawanisi managed to destroy a line of palm trees and to gouge the earth with craters in sparsely settled areas. More seriously, they narrowly missed the railroad bridge over the Ross River which, if hit, would have disrupted the flow of supplies from the south and west. All the raids combined caused only one casualty, a little girl who was wounded by a bomb fragment, and very little property damage. The little girl, whom the *Bulletin* in later weeks was to report as having recovered, was the daughter of a cane farmer outside Mossman to the north.

During the raids he had worried about Dorrie and her family in their wide, open-verandahed house on Mitchell Street. It stood just a short stretch up from the Strand, and was too close to a clustering of searchlights and guns in their neighbourhood. He knew the Dinsmore drill, Townsville

having lived with alerts for months, so he knew where they all were — in shelters under the house where they had gone at the first whine of the “red” signal — though larrikin Ron again might have sneaked off to the dunny for a read with the flashlight. But the shelters were too shallow, and the wooden house itself, though sturdily raised up on solid posts, and covered with a roof of corrugated iron, provided little protection against any direct impact.

(And he saw again the single Kawanisi, breaking off from the others, flying high, dodging the lights and the snapping bursts of flak falling behind it as it sped along the sea front before suddenly turning inland toward the centre of the city. And he remembered once more how he had tried to “will” the plane away from North Ward and Dorrie’s house and then how surprised he had been, and with the surprise, a rush of relief and gratefulness — and he actually felt it again — when the Kawanisi suddenly changed again and fled back out to sea.)

Throughout the long threatening days of 1942 (for the sirens sending the people of Townsville to their shelters would sound again and again through the balance of the year and into the beginning of January), the *Daily Bulletin* remained unflappable. Its editorials muted other premature “war at our gates” messages and kept the war news, increasingly distressing, in perspective. Almost scholarly in contrast to the sharpness of the news, the editorials carefully described for the people of Townsville the nature of the Japanese offensive (“... their naval forces appear to have spread out fanwise in a great sweep, covering thousands of square miles of ocean.”) and the relationship of the offensive to their city (“... bombs have ... also been dropped on Nauru and Ocean Island, 1200 miles from Townsville.”). Preoccupied though it was with the war in the Pacific, the *Bulletin* never neglected the news from the other war fronts. Even when Townsville was being bombed, and when in New Guinea the crucial seven-month battle for Buna had begun, the paper made sure that Townsville knew that “[German] Reserves Were Massing Against Stalingrad” and that there was an “Allied Landing in France.” And if, red-eyed and weary, the people learned that the “Bombs at Townsville” represented the “First Japanese Raid on the Australian East Coast” and that “low level and dive bombings” were already blasting the Nips in the “Operation off Buna,” they were also informed of a “Sinking by U-Boats” of American merchant ships off the Atlantic coast of the United States and of the daring of “Two Norwegian pilots who flew inland from Fonnes Canal.” So, too, when

they were advised, to their sorrow, that two more of their neighbours, "Hodel, Sgt. (Infantryman)" and "Drury, D. (Artilleryman), West End" were on the Queensland casualty list of men "Missing in Malaya and Adjacent Areas," they were also asked to sympathise with those who sorrowed over "The Death of Wing Commander Paddy Finnucane," the British Ace with "32 official kills," who had died over Germany.

The *Bulletin's* sense of perspective and balance in reporting the Pacific war was matched by that of the civilian population in responding to it. Hardly ever did he remember an instance of extreme behaviour in Townsville or evidence of communal fear because of the Japanese advance. Some families, it is true, had been separated during the early months of the Pacific war because men sent their women and children to inland areas or to cities in the south; there were also instances of entire families leaving Townsville. But this movement away from the city, which seemed to have occurred largely before he arrived in April, could be viewed as precautionary and not as one of panic. It was certainly a reaction to the suddenness of the first Japanese air raids in February on Port Moresby, the point in New Guinea closest to the Australian mainland, and to the shock engendered by the fall of Singapore and the attack on Darwin. Especially with respect to Darwin, people were uneasy; they were not unmindful that there would have been an even greater tragedy in that city if most of its women and children had not been evacuated, as they had been under War Department orders, a few weeks before. Townsville at the time had not as yet been given any "official" instructions on evacuation, but talk of evacuation was everywhere, and it was to persist through to the end of 1942. The talk was often coupled with rumours of Townsville being abandoned by the military in case of invasion; the country would then be defended only in its industrialised section in the south below Brisbane. A strong likelihood of invasion, in fact, was the note sounded by many of Australia's national leaders, and a "rush to safety" (noted without comment by the *Bulletin*) was the response by thousands of people from parts of the country much less vulnerable to Japanese attack than northern coastal areas such as Townsville.³

It was in these circumstances, together with an emotional atmosphere in the city suddenly being charged by a flow of refugees who began to flood Flinders Street — it was in these circumstances that some people began to leave Townsville.

CHAPTER V

Servicemen and Civilians

The going away from Townsville and the returning — and most people who had gone away did return, many in time to experience Townsville's own baptism of bombs — had little to do with the large majority of families in the city. Like the Harry Dinsmores, they stayed where they were and attempted to go about their lives much as they had before, while obeying or trying to obey the various instructions, sometimes conflicting, relating to defence that were issued by the government and/or the military. They black-papered their house windows, barbed-wired their beaches and dug "L"-shaped slit trenches under their homes. But they did not stop cricketing or bowling on the green or going to the greyhound races at Garbutt to cheer "Open Blue," a Townsville-bred dog who had been on the sick list for a long time; nor did they stop shopping, crowding into the sandbagged entrances of the main stores on Flinders Street, McKimmins and Heatleys, to buy not only the requisite blackout paint, paper and shades, but also the *Bulletin*-advertised "British and Australian made [porch] linoleum," "Henderson's De-Luxe Fur Felt Hats," and "New Frocks Recently Arrived." ("New frocks," simply designed to official specifications, were frequently available, though there was stringent rationing of clothing at the time and shortages of most merchandise.)

Perceptive, in part, of what was real about their peril, though confused, unintentionally, by their leaders to imagine more, the people of Townsville responded to their sense of threat by seeking, as much as possible, to pursue the normal and the routine, all the while doing what was asked of them by the authorities. The normal and the routine were their talisman, and if it was to be whittled away in the months ahead as restrictions on civilian life mounted, it was to be yielded reluctantly, for they trusted it and it strengthened them against the unknown. They were not without fear of the Japanese, but they dealt with their fear by maintaining a sense of themselves, and remembering how they had lived in the past.

But there was never anything wrong with their courage and there were few if any in the city who would not fight if invaded — and at first this was while they were quite alone, before their own troops or the Americans began to arrive in force. It was also while they and other Australians were being exhorted, and simultaneously frightened and calmed, by the pronouncements of officialdom in the south.

Nor was there ever anything wrong with their "morale," a subject with which various Ministers seemed preoccupied. And many resented, too, as humiliating, the stilted appeals to their patriotism, and the attempts to alarm them into actions relating to the war effort which they had already taken or were prepared to take. Like all people along the isolated coast of North Queensland, they were anything but inspired by the "fear-inspiring" Department of Information posters coming up from the south. One of these, under the slogan, "He's Coming South," depicted a horrid-looking Japanese soldier conquering all before him as he moved relentlessly toward Australia. Those who saw the poster felt "put upon," and did not disagree with their Premier when he proposed that its display be banned throughout Queensland, and that its slogan be made more challenging for those in the safe south by being changed from "He's Coming South" to "Go North and [help us] throw Him into the Sea."

Yet if many of the people of Townsville were aware of and pleased at the fact that the Premier's slogan was aimed at those who proposed the military plan that would abandon North Queensland to the Japanese and begin the battle for Australia far to the south at Brisbane, they were less certain that they felt the cockiness and confidence that the new slogan implied. For there was little of a "gung-ho" attitude in Townsville at the time, and little "spoiling-for-a-fight" feeling except among some of the young militiamen stationed out near the coursing track at Garbutt or among the older veterans and middle-aged merchants of the Volunteer Defence Corps, who patrolled the beaches and docks and trained every Sunday in preparation for an invasion. In general, the people felt rather apprehensive about the Japanese and certainly were not looking forward to a personal encounter with them. About fighting them, though, if they came, there was never a doubt.

So they went about their lives, these people in this little port city inside the Great Barrier Reef. They were truly a people at war, with felt fears and shared sorrows, but with a consciousness of personal and communal courage to deal with them. They disfigured Flinders Street, as authorised by the Works and Buildings Committee of their City Council, by occupying it with monstrous bomb shelters of concrete along its flowered median, and they dismantled the elegant tower and turret clock of their lovely Victorian post office building off Denham Street. But also, almost without fail on Saturday afternoons, they queued up in high spirits at the railroad station to go out to Cluden, the colours of their holiday

dress contrasting with the drab of the military among them, and brightening up the stark whiteness of the station, whose walls had been stripped bare of directional signs and schedules and advertisements to thwart any invading Japanese. Nothing, it seemed, but a familiar name on the Queensland casualty list in the *Bulletin* — and they were appearing with increasing frequency — would deter people from heading out to the Townsville Turf Club races and from participating in what was advertised as “North Queensland’s Biggest Betting Ring.” Mingling with the crowds he came to understand that “going out to Cluden,” which Townsvilleans had been doing since the earliest times, had a meaning for people in 1942 beyond that of simple pleasure. And if on a Saturday evening they showed up in force for “A Monster Red Cross Carnival” at the Strand Park “To Aid [their] Prisoners of War” (The Tobruk Memorial Olympic Pool now stands on the site), on another they attended a subscription dance at Heatleys and a free ice cream supper at the Flying Squadron Hall or went to the Winter Garden to watch Sydney Toler as “Charlie Chan in Honolulu,” a Honolulu of the past still unblemished by Pearl Harbor.

The people took in their stride the austerity measures established by the authorities, and if they sometimes balked at a restriction like one limiting the number of greyhound coursing meetings per month (the restriction did seem unnecessary and perverse at the time), they accepted without complaint the many shortages, not only in the amenities, but in basic things such as food, the shortage of which was made especially severe by the requirements of the Americans, increasing in number, in the city. (The troops ate a lot and wasted a lot, and seeing the result at the Dinsmore table he often felt guilty about accepting an invitation to tea; when he did, he tried to bring with him some delicacy from the PX that the Dinsmores hadn’t seen for months.) There were some gripes, it is true, even some official bristling from the City Council about the manner in which business and personal property, including people’s homes, were commandeered by the Americans when they first began to build up their presence in the city. But arising in part out of the confusion and urgency of the time, these complaints were soon dispelled as the military, at first new to the situation, not only became accustomed to preparing itself for war while living among a civilian population under threat of invasion, but also came to appreciate the responsiveness of that population to its needs when treated with respect and courtesy.

Townsvilleans also did the conventional things, typical of people at war. They purchased thousands of pounds worth of war savings certificates, rolled miles of Red Cross bandages, collected tons of scrap rubber (old bicycle tyres, hot water bottles, inner tubes and sand shoes); 18-months-old Colin Polar even gave up his rubber teddy bear, the *Bulletin* noted. They also worked very hard, especially if they were in "reserved" or essential occupations. Harry, for example, together with the boilermakers, fitters and turners in the Railroad Department Workshop, went on overtime the day after the Pacific war started and continued to work long hours. But being also a people who sought to maintain a balance between what was and what had been, they continued with their tennis or golf after guerilla warfare training on Sunday mornings and, if they could no longer sail in the evening on a moonlight excursion to nearby Magnetic Island, they were still able to head over to the Theatre Royal for a few hours of "First Class Boxing Entertainment" (the *Bulletin* promised) that featured their "Hard punching middle-weight," Cpl. Roy Anabelle of neighbouring Mackay, against Kid Johnson, an American sergeant from Madison, Wisconsin.

(Leo Johnson, who had been in the class ahead of him at the Signal Corps Training Center at Camp Crowder in Missouri, was later wounded along the Soputa-Sananda track in New Guinea and sent back to the United States on Christmas day, 1942.)

During this time he and Dorrie continued to grow together, he needing her, and she no less him. His feeling for her, she was to tell him, gave her a surety about herself as a woman. (And in the thinking and writing of this, he felt again his own strength because of her, and once again the surge of gratitude.) Yet throughout this time, as the business of war swirled more feverishly about Townsville, opportunities for their meetings diminished. As the fighting intensified in New Guinea, where the Japanese, outnumbering the Australians, were moving along the Kokoda Track toward the main Allied base at Moresby; and when MacArthur in September committed to the island for the first time a large force of American infantrymen (the 126th and 128th regiments of the 32nd Division that had assembled in Townsville after combat training at Camp

Cable near Brisbane), pressures on both increased, he in camp and she at USAIA. He more frequently was restricted to the camp area for double shifts or standby duty, and she often had to work overtime or lost part or all of her one day off a week.

But if their regular pattern of meeting was often broken, they still managed to see each other, if only fleetingly during some weeks, or only for an hour or two during others. Yet, as if in recompense for their separation, there were also occasional days of magic when they both, simultaneously, through some inexplicable beneficent intervention, suddenly found themselves free; then they were together for almost a full day. On one of these magic days they kissed for the first time and learned that they loved one another.

(What a day that had been, their “lucky long day” they were to call it thereafter! — and last year after a session at James Cook University, jogging by the familiar cliffs past the Catholic school facing the Strand, he felt himself beginning to smile thinking of it and then, with filling eyes, almost laughed out loud in the bitter-sweet joy of its memory.)

They had gone swimming, their first and only time (the snarl of wire discouraged), staying dutifully within the safe stretch of public beach fronting the shark nets. Afterwards they had walked their picnic lunch farther down the beach toward a more secluded area not far from Kissing Point, where two emptied LSTs slumbered ponderously in the surf. Kissing Point had been a place for lovers in peace time, the beach there bulging easily into the bay and hiding itself from the Strand as it curved out toward Pallarenda; and for them, that day, it was felicitously named. For soon after lunch, dozing and finding Dorrie, as if it were a miracle, lying beside him, he lifted a monstrous straw hat from her face and, hesitating momentarily to look down at her, he gently kissed her lips. Nothing in his life had ever seemed more right when she told him that she had wanted him to kiss her. Then in the sweet salt smell of the spray and bright rush of sunlight they kissed again and again, exultingly, finding each other’s lips and eyes and ears and cheeks, kissing and laughing as they kissed, laughing with relief and happiness as they discovered their love. And soon afterwards, walking back along the beach — they didn’t linger long, being content and grateful for their discovery — his happiness became almost unbearable. He had told Dorrie that he loved her and loved her more when she told him that she loved him. And as they continued up from the beach and along the Strand near the cliffs past the closed Catholic

school, the future beyond the war stretched out before him, multiplying infinitely the feelings he then knew — and he could barely walk with happiness.

CHAPTER VI

General MacArthur

By the time of Kenneth Slessor's birth in 1901, the third of the population that had concentrated itself in the continent's few large cities had an increasing need to identify with an image that was distinctively Australian. The city, crowded and mean and "cant-ridden," seemed second-hand and European and "limped" as Sydney, in particular did, "in apish imitation after London ideas, habits, and manners." It was the outback, as depicted by "Banjo" Paterson and Henry Lawson, that offered the city dweller "the most distinctly and most idealistic Australian type of life and scene to be found on the continent." The outback and its people, revealed in ballads sometimes crude in form but usually lyrical in voice, provided the unifying image for most Australians as they moved toward nationhood and beyond.

Between World War I and World War II Slessor spoke to his countrymen of their discoverer, Cook, the "captain with the sad/And fine white face, who never lost a man/Or flinched a peril." And he recalled for them their history and revived for them their myth. And to a people mostly huddled in teeming cities he spoke with affection, for their "red globes of light, the liquor-green,/The pulsing arrows and the running fire/Spilt on the stone" and for the "Smells rich and rasping, smoke and fat .../And puffs of paraffin that crimp the nose." But he spoke to them also of the beauty and horror of the heart of their land, where "nothing ... moves" and "the sky lies empty" and "the sun is as white as moonlight." And for some of his countrymen he returned to them an image of themselves they had lost related to a land they had loved.

Being the main street of a port city, Flinders Street had never been especially quiet. Nor was Townsville itself quite the torpid tropical town talked of before the war by people in the south, people who yearned to escape to it from the winter cold of July and August. Townsville had always been a busy little place, a hub of transport almost from its beginning in the 1860s, though its pace was sensibly slow to serve the enervating rigours of the Deep North. Whatever it was or had been, by the middle of 1942 it was certainly a throbbing provincial city. And Flinders Street was the creator and centre of its din, with its great crowds, increasing in variety and size as the months went by. Its tortured traffic rumbled and rattled at a snail's pace, whether bringing military equipment and supplies from the railroad yards and the harbour or moving streams of troops to and from camps in the outlying suburbs.

Responsible for much of the activity in the city was USAIA (United States Army in Australia).¹ It set up its headquarters on Denham, a wide side street off Flinders, less than a month after Pearl Harbor, on January 5, 1942. It closed on June 20, 1945, a month and a half before Hiroshima. Dorrie's tenure there, as secretary to the Personnel Officer, Major Anderson, almost paralleled this period. She had resigned her steno job at Chandler's Department Store to join the Americans in March, a week before General MacArthur landed in Australia after his flight from the Philippines. She left them in May, right after V-E Day, when orders for the headquarters' closing were received.

The work at the United States Army Headquarters was conducted in an atmosphere of feverish activity. It was much more demanding than anything Dorrie had experienced at Chandler's. Yet she liked the job, felt worthy of it, and believed she was doing something important for the war. If the pressure sometimes affected her physically, she accepted the condition as part of her responsibility. So she looked forward to her working day; her Major was "a good man," polite and considerate of her as a person, and more appreciative of her abilities than her Australian employer had ever been.

Dorrie offered much to the United States Army. This was not only in her office skills, for which, in shorthand, typing, and business principles, she had ranked among the first five in Queensland's final examination, but also in her character, maturity, and intelligence. She was self-educated and widely read in English literature and history, and was informed on most aspects of contemporary Australian life. Harry's books

and kitchen discussions affected all the Dinsmores. Dorrie was also the oldest of five children, at 20 Mum's friend as well as daughter, strictly but kindly brought up in a working man's family. Its head, black-listed for union activities, had had to leave his family to search for work during the depression years preceding the war.

In the beginning Dorrie had seemed older and, if not as sophisticated, still wiser and more serious than the girls he had known in college. But in other ways, private to him, she gradually had come to seem younger than they in her spontaneity, her gaiety, her naturalness, her response to the simplest of experiences.

No baby born in Townsville or, at least, in Townsville's General Hospital,² was christened "Douglas" during the weeks following General MacArthur's arrival in Australia in March of 1942, though male infants were so honoured elsewhere in Australia. This fact should not be construed as a lack of enthusiasm for the General. Nor should it be looked on as evidence of obtuseness on the part of a provincial people as to the significance of MacArthur's escape from the Philippines and his appointment, after taking command of all American forces in Australia, as Supreme Commander of the Southwest Pacific Area. The people of Townsville appreciated and assumed — and the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* advised them — that the assignment of so distinguished a military leader to their Cinderella war at the bottom of the world meant that the United States was finally committed to the defence of Australia. They were grateful for this and buoyed by the thought of what the General's presence might ultimately mean in terms of America's might flowing to their beleaguered continent.

Many people in town also admired MacArthur. Though generally not emotional nor particularly demonstrative, they had been touched by news of the American and Filipino resistance at Bataan and Corregidor, as the year before they had been stirred by the resistance of their own men against the Germans at Tobruk; and they admired the American who had inspired the resistance and whose forces were the first to have stopped the Japanese advance.

There was nothing of “hero worship” in this admiration, as there seemed to be in the unrestrained enthusiasm accorded MacArthur by the people in the south. In Adelaide, and especially in Melbourne, where MacArthur’s train had finally arrived on March 21 after a torturous trip from the heart of the Australian outback at Alice Springs, crowds in their thousands had greeted him. Their excitement was whipped up, in part, by a jubilant press, which seemed to look upon the General as a kind of St George who would deliver Australia from the threatening dragon of Japan.

There was none of this excitement in Townsville. And he, coming up from Darley near Melbourne in April, was struck by the difference. The people simply but quietly admired MacArthur.

The fact that MacArthur had been spirited out of Mindanao in the southern Philippines and flown to Australia by Flying Fortresses from Townsville heightened interest in him. The rescuing B-17s were not remnants of MacArthur’s old 19th Bomb Group, however, as some seekers after poetic justice would have it. These antiquated planes, based in and around Townsville since fleeing from the Philippines in December and from Java in February, were too worn-out by their Moresby runs to make the trip to Mindanao. Instead, two of the newer Fortresses that had been shipped to Townsville in the weeks following Pearl Harbor had been sent to pick up MacArthur and his party.

The people of Townsville, generally egalitarian and not overly respectful of rank, had been impressed with MacArthur’s appearance in the *Bulletin* photograph of his arrival at the Spencer Street station in Melbourne. There, amid all the army brass in their ribbons and their tabs — some also overfed, as did the officialdom present — MacArthur stood apart, tall and gaunt but looking strong, in drab bleached khakis, unadorned by decorations, the dress of an ordinary soldier. He was to be buried in similar faded suntans, as he had wished, on a bleak day in April of 1964. And many of the people had liked what he said, as reported in the *Bulletin* article. This was especially so when he spoke of having felt honoured to have served with the Australians in World War I (and that included Harry and a good part of the over-40 male population of Townsville) and was proud to be their comrade once more. He appeared to be a decent bloke, MacArthur did, though Harry, noting in the picture the sharpness of his nose — almost like that of an eagle — and the way he seemed to look above the crowd who had come to greet him, was not yet ready to call him

“Doug,” and wondered whether he would be comfortable in shouting him a beer.

Seen in person in Townsville for the first time in October, MacArthur seemed no less preoccupied and aloof than he had appeared in the *Bulletin* picture from Melbourne seven months before, though his face was now fuller and his nose more Roman than beak-like. Unaccompanied by the white-gloved, be-ribboned military policemen with gleaming tommy guns who supposedly watched over him in the south, the General, unadorned except for a braided cap, had come to Townsville from his new headquarters in Brisbane, 1,000 miles to the north of Melbourne. He had moved there in July, and was now on his way to Port Moresby in New Guinea. Two weeks before, the first contingent of American infantry troops, their new jungle fatigues still damp from quickly applied camouflage dyes, had arrived by air from Townsville to reinforce a battered and outnumbered band of Australian militiamen. The Japanese, thwarted by their defeat in the Coral Sea battle in May from landing at Moresby, and proceeding south to bombard Townsville, had come ashore in July near Buna on the opposite side of the island; from there, by the middle of September they had moved inland through the jungle to within twenty miles of the port, the Allies' last base, just across the straits from the northeastern tip of Australia.

MacArthur, at this time, he remembered, was still held in high regard by the people of Townsville, but new feelings of disenchantment and/or disappointment with him were also present. Part of the reason for this ambivalence had to do with the increasing proximity of the Japanese to Townsville, a proximity symbolised by the audacity of their bombing of the city's dock area in July by three Kawanisi flying boats, as well as by their frequent radio broadcasts that mocked and threatened individuals in town by name.

It wasn't that the people blamed MacArthur for the Japanese advance. Living where they did, in a little port city rapidly becoming a major military base, they were acutely sensitive to the number of soldiers and sailors in town, to the size of the convoys in the harbour, to the different types of planes droning overhead, to the constant positioning and movement of military supplies and equipment throughout the city. Knowing or sensing these things, they intuitively felt that MacArthur, in terms of the resources available to him in these past months, had done all that was possible to confront the Japanese.

No, they didn't blame MacArthur. But they were angry with him or disappointed in him for not having come to Townsville until October. And he who then shared these people's lives also shared these feelings. To them, the General had become a "southerner," living in high style in Melbourne and Brisbane, with a large retinue who went to parties, rode around in limousines, and lived in luxurious hotels. Living as they did with increasing privation and anxiety, people were angry that MacArthur, as well as some of their own leaders in Canberra, seemed to know nothing about them or Townsville or what was happening to their city; and no one seemed to care.

At the time of MacArthur's first visit in the spring of 1942, Townsville had become a dirty, battered, ill-used city at war, and much of the grim and anxious quality of the lives of its people was unknown in the large metropolises of the south between which MacArthur moved. Guns were everywhere in the city, lean grey guns, singly and in clusters, poking up in unexpected places, near the post office, in people's gardens, along quiet suburban roads, even peeking out from among the purple and orange bougainvillea covering the cliff facing the Strand looking out toward the Coral Sea; while out along a stretch of the city's lovely beach, now crisscrossed with barbed wire, ammunition for the guns was brought ashore by lumbering LSTs. It was then deposited at pyramiding depots on the flats up from where the beach curved westward toward Cape Pallarenda, less than a mile away from where the Australians had set up a massive tent hospital to care for the casualties already coming down from Buna. Close to the cape itself and sheltered by it, the hospital was a strangely poignant place with its neatly stretched tents carefully set back from the tides but close enough for the shaving mirrors of the walking wounded to reflect the luminous blue-green waters of the bay. The tents made a difference, of course, but the beach itself in this area seemed as pristine as it must have been in peace-time.

In the suburban areas away from the centre of the city, the long-snouted anti-aircraft guns, rising from nests of swollen logs, sandbags, and chains of metal webbing, became part of the immediate landscape of people's lives. Manned by the Americans with the help of units of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), who operated the range-finders as well as the searchlights on Castle Hill, the neighbourhood guns looked menacing weapons, about which the people were ambivalently grateful yet fearful. These feelings were to endure until late 1944 when the

last remaining guns were dismantled and their crews (replacements for the earlier ones) were flown to forward positions in Dutch New Guinea and the Philippines.

About the crews themselves there was hardly ever a complaint, at least, while he was in Townsville. This stood in contrast to the feeling of disenchantment about the conduct of some of the troops in town. Though a varied lot (some, rugged-looking regular army men; others, young civilian soldiers from farms and colleges and New England towns), the anti-aircraft gunners were generally liked by the people in the neighbourhood. They often received invitations to tea or were brought newspaper-wrapped packages of sandwiches, tropical fruit or cake. There were few emplacements in suburban Townsville that did not have their own cache of home made cookies. The gun emplacements were officially "off limits" to civilians, of course, but a familiar sight in Dorrie's neighbourhood during the day, when there was no "alert," was that of young boys, about Ron's age, climbing on or near the sandbags, or helping the American police in the site area and then, as a reward, being allowed to position themselves for a moment next to the ugly guns.

On those occasional evenings when Harry wasn't late at the station, Harry and Mum would go for a leisurely walk, and they would always stop for a while to talk with the men at the emplacement at the top of the road. Mum and Harry loved to walk, especially when the moon was right and they could see their way easily along the darkened road. They wouldn't walk far, for Harry was tired by the wild day at the railways. They would just stroll down to the Strand, bordering the beach, and look at the silvered water which seemed even more beautiful through the irregular latticework of barbed wire. The beach itself seemed strange, and it saddened them, Mum particularly, for just in front of a large cascade of wire, Brian and his mates had played only a few months before. Mum worried about Bri: she thought that she might have done the wrong thing by not sending him south as others had done with their youngest children when the schools had been closed. Talking with the Yanks at the gun emplacement, she said, made her feel better. One of them seemed not much older than Ron or especially Colin, her oldest boy, who was still too young to enlist. Yet the Yank had come all the way from America to Townsville. It seemed right that Bri and his brothers and the whole family should be together in Townsville at this time.

CHAPTER VII

The Winter Garden

Last year (1980) Townsville had well over 100,000 people compared to the 14,882 at the outbreak of war, and the once silent bush out beyond the camp areas of 1942 were now throbbing suburbs. A new generation of aldermen and women on the City Council, enthusiastic about the population growth, "twice the rate of Australia," call Townsville "a city on the move and a city of progress," and point with pride to the city's expansion of commercial and industrial activities.

Townsville did seem "a city on the move" last year, when its great harbour area was vibrant with the activity of giant ships and towering cranes and mammoth storage terminals — a waterfront so different from the little port that he was brought to in early 1942. And if "progress" was measured by booming building projects, Townsville certainly seemed "a city of progress". For everywhere he walked, but most vividly in the central business sections of the city, on the side streets off Flinders and on those backing up to Castle Hill, he saw modern new buildings of concrete and glass being constructed, and old-fashioned wooden ones being demolished. In front of some of the old buildings, still seeming very sturdy, he saw signs announcing that "An application has been lodged with the Townsville City Council for the development of this site."

There was one such sign in front of the Winter Garden Theatre on Sturt Street just beyond Flinders Street, the only movie house that remained standing from the war years. Though abandoned now, its once majestic entrance crudely boarded up, and the gleaming white-washed front now speckled and faded, the theatre's lovely old palms, one on each side of the entrance, had continued to grow, more luxuriant than he remembered; they towered over the debris.

The only Townsville that Dorrie and he had known together was a Townsville at war, and the Winter Garden Theatre had been part of it. They went there after they first met; and later, when they were closer, would sometimes take Brian along, especially when a ride to the theatre in an army truck could be arranged; he was their talisman, this freckled little Huck Finn aged seven. Brian last year remembered more about the truck rides than he did about the flicks. This must have been in August, after the emergency order banning children from the theatre had been amended by the Council to permit them to attend with guardians.

Standing in front of the old Winter Garden, he wondered whether any of the younger men, native to Townsville, who had posted the "Proposed Use of Land" signs, were aware of how much their parents' lives

had been touched by the old theatre. For the Winter Garden in 1942 was more than just a movie theatre and a place of fantasy; it was also sometimes a public forum, a place of discussion and debate where people came to listen to and comment on decisions taken or contemplated on their behalf by their representatives on the City Council. And the decisions were many. As a city at first left virtually defenseless against Japanese attack and invasion, and then suddenly swamped by an Allied buildup, Townsville was asked to give everything of itself — and it did — except that its people would not give up their city, to their foes or to their friends.

In the early months, their city protected only by a small number of troops, most of the people at emergency meetings convened by the Council (and open to all, including curious Yanks) refused to evacuate Townsville, disregarding the threats of the Japanese and the ambiguous advice of their own government. And later, when fear of invasion had eased as the Allied forces began to arrive in large numbers and to dominate the life of the city, the people refused to be stampeded by the forces, and demanded of them common sense and a sense of decorum. In actions directed to the Minister for the Army and Air, they protested through their Council representatives “against the manner in which houses of civilians [had] been seized by Officers of the Army”. They also asked for a full “enquiry” into the indiscriminate “commandeering of foodstuffs” which “unduly” interfered with the needs of the civilian population, urging the Minister for Defense and the Commanding Officers of the Australian-American Forces to look “to the large quantity of foodstuffs wasted in their camps.” And when these commanders, preoccupied or unknowing, neglected practices important in the tropics to the health of their troops and the population as a whole, the people called special meetings to deal with problems related to the “disposal of garbage and other waste material from military camps and establishments,” and to the critical need to conserve water, urging that “extreme care be taken by all the troops engaged in carting it so as to prevent waste.” Most important, especially when there was ignorance or outright neglect on the part of the military, the Council, acting for the people, called for a stricter program of “mosquito control” and requested that servicemen stationed in Townsville be enrolled as “Temporary Inspectors” to assist in a “Mosquito Prevention and Destruction” campaign. Thousands of troops, moving north into battle, were later to be debilitated, as he was, by the malarial mosquito. Here, too, the Winter Garden went to war, for in the weeks following this appeal, the

theatre was lent to the military forces for a series of showings of a new film on the anopheles mosquito.)

The Winter Garden was to remain important to Dorrie and him, though by late spring, before his departure for New Guinea in December, they were going there less frequently. Their evenings then were spent walking along the quiet roads near Dorrie's house on Mitchell Street or, if the moon allowed, sometimes down to the Strand to look at the sea shattering the moon into splinters of light. They would stop every so often to kiss in the shadows, but mostly they would talk as they walked, stopping occasionally to visit the Australian women of the Army Service who were operating the range-finder near the lagoon at the end of Mitchell Street. Other evenings they would share with the family, especially when he was able to pick up a hitch from camp instead of having to take a bus and then walk over the hill from town. He would get to Dorrie's early enough to sit around with the family, finishing up dinner with sweets and tea. Then afterwards Harry and he would talk, usually about the war, while Mum and the girls washed up, or if Harry was still at the railroad station, the boys and he would play cards, Brian and he playing against Colin and Ron.

Lingering too long in front of the old theatre, he had snatches of such thoughts and a welling up of a sadness long dormant. Suddenly the Winter Garden, abandoned, boarded up, with its dirty walls and gallant palms, was difficult for him and he left it, going back to Flinders Street. He had no purpose except to escape from the past, and Flinders Street encouraged that, many of its reference points of 1942 having been demolished and its centre transformed by a modern pedestrian mall. Yet once there, he wanted the years back, and for a moment, closing his eyes he imagined they were, with the old crowds milling along the street. Then he looked up in the direction where he thought the Town Hall used to be, hoping that there might be old records there that would help to fill in these thoughts of the past that he now sought.

The Town Hall was no longer on Flinders Street; in fact, there was no Town Hall anymore. Meetings of the City Council were conducted in spacious chambers of a modern new Administration building on Walker Street, a block up the hill beyond the Winter Garden; and, as he was directed back to it, he wondered how public the meetings now were, and whether the people still felt part of the actions that affected their lives.

The new Administration building was a large, low structure composed of sharp geometric shapes in white stone, with a wide open mall canopied by a long rectangular box on concrete columns. It was eons away in design and in the feelings it evoked from the old-fashioned Town Hall he had gone looking for on Flinders Street, with its two swinging doors and square brass sign. Yet the officials inside were not at all formidable, and responded with interest to his request to look at old records.

But as he read a book of minutes of long forgotten events, the faded words began to echo in his head. He felt odd and out of place in the well-appointed library where he sat. What meaning, anyway, did the words and the men who had uttered them have anymore?

For what did an Alderman Paterson's "moving of a motion" on "10th July, 1942," asking that the military authorities "take drastic action against members of the Forces who are indulging in disgusting habits on Flinders Street," have to do with the Flinders he had left earlier in the day? This was a street graced by a glittering pedestrian mall of deep green lawns and multi-flowered gardens with open air cafes and glistening fountains! Would it matter to the people sitting there beneath the candy-striped umbrellas that a few feet from them was once the site of a bomb shelter against which a drunken AIF digger or an American flyer on a fortnight's respite from the Japanese would sometimes urinate. Would today's alderman who voted to spend 1.8 million dollars to build this splendid mall¹ and pave it with 600,000 finely fashioned interlocking blocks, be curious about his predecessor who at a "Works Committee meeting ... on 27th April, 1942" authorised the outlay of \$850 "to construct slit trenches 10 feet long and 5 feet apart" that are now steps away from where the alderman's mineral-seeded paving blocks lie sparkling and cool in the winter sun?

The past, that day last year in the library of the new Administration building on Walker Street, just up from the Winter Garden, seemed only for those living who needed to remember it. So, later, in the early evening when he left, he knew he would return. And he did, more than once, filling in the time between his lectures at the University by roving about Townsville. What he was looking for he didn't know, though, in part, it had to do with the Townsville that Dorrie and he had known together. That such a place, such a past, could still exist, tangible and throbbing alongside this outward present, seemed impossible. Yet leaving the building in the evening, he felt reassured by the eternity of

Castle Hill behind it, looming up massive and pink in the twilight, its ancient curvature and colour softening the building's sharpness and the stark whiteness of its stone.

CHAPTER VIII

Mount Elliot: Horses

Flinders Highway seemed new and clean, and gleamed in the overwhelming sun as he biked his rented Yamaha toward Mt Elliot National Park beyond the Townsville suburb of Stuart. The park, a eucalypt forest of clashing aromas and filtered light, was not really his destination. It was the past that he was looking for, and that took him well out by the great Ross River Dam toward the undulating foothills of Mt Elliot. There had been no contained national park there in 1942, just primitive beautiful country, nor had there been a dam; that was but the hope of a parched and soiled people whose rationed water was being drained by the thousands of troops occupying their city.

It was in September, Dorrie's twenty-first birthday, and for that day they would leave behind the drabness of the city with its din and dirt and guns, and the long queues of rumped soldiers and civilians in front of milkbars and food shops on Flinders Street. Of course there were still the Strand and the beach with the pure sparkle of the water, but there, too, were the guns, slumbering on the sand, and the sharp wire, and the LSTs being serviced by the young sailors, vulnerable in their naked sweat, pressing the sharp-cornered ammunition boxes against their browned skin as they lugged them up to the flat.

So out along a loose, unsealed road they had gone — no neat highway, then — to a place called Rocky Springs. There Dorrie's uncle Alf (Mum's brother), from out near Croydon in the west, had delivered a trailer-load of horses the week before. Since early July he had been helping to round up and deliver the animals from all over North Queensland to the Springs, where the U.S. Army had set up a base for the training of pack horses for use in New Guinea.

It is always hot near Townsville — and the speed of the Yamaha did nothing to cool him — but, as he rode, he remembered the unusual coolness of that spring day in September an eternity ago, and the fragrance of wild flowers in the swirling dust. Laughing all the way, they had rumbled along the narrow road to the Springs, he at the unfamiliar wheel on the right, in Alf's battered Willys with the charcoal unit attached.

Alf had invited them out to see the horses and, arriving near noon, they had been startled by the sight of them, thousands of them, unsaddled, huddled in clusters or galloping in groups, their shining hides of browns and tans flashing throughout the wide reaches of an immense paddock that seemed to extend to a horizon established by the rising hills of Mt Elliot. They weren't tall or touchy or pretty horses like those that raced at Cluden,

but they were sturdy and solid-looking animals, with alert stand-up ears and full bushy tails that flowed. As they galloped, glistening in their sweat, Dorrie and he thought them beautiful.

"They'll be good mates up on top," Alf had said, referring to their intended role on the island, and he called them "Digger" horses after the legendary Australian foot-soldier.

It had been a great day. Alf was a civilian but he had mates among the Australian soldiers, all experienced horsemen, who were attached to the American base; and after they all had lunched together (there had been a memorable pudding) in a long cool shed on the edge of the paddock, the soldiers had showed them how the horses were trained, step by step (and some were fiercely independent), to carry the heavy pack saddles that were to be their burden along the tortuous trails of New Guinea.

Last year there were only a few horses to be seen as, parking the Yamaha, he looked out to where he thought the paddock had been. Now, except for a small enclosure a short distance from the road, it was an empty expanse dotted with mulga bushes extending far into the distance toward Mt Elliot. Not having noticed on the way any markers for Rocky Springs, he wasn't even sure at first that this was the place where Dorrie and he had been. Yet the two tall tattered eucalypts in front of him seemed right, perched as they were on top of the wrinkled brown earth and framing the backdrop of the distant range. They seemed rootless and strangely positioned, as if they had been placed there — and suddenly he realised that he had had the same impression years before with Dorrie. Closing his eyes, momentarily, he heard her soft laughter again as the Australian soldiers described how the horses were treated as regular enlisted men who, arriving at the base, had to be examined, fed and bedded down. Then, in the morning, they would be assigned to an individual training program in the soldiers' own unit, the special Pack Transport Company of the Australian Imperial Forces.

Opening his eyes and looking out toward Mt Elliot through the frame of the eucalypts where he saw the few horses still standing, almost motionless, he thought about the huge paddock of the war years and the mob of horses that had been trained there. What had happened to the thousands of them that had "joined the army," as the Australians had put it? After his visit to Rocky Springs with Dorrie and Alf, he had never seen any of the horses again. Yet, he reasoned, he should have, for they must have been ready for New Guinea when he was, a few months later, when he

had been moved to Moresby and then to Buna, Dubadora and further north to Lae and Nadzab.

The horses had been important to him, as part of his life with Dorrie on her birthday, and he had looked for them everywhere when he came to the island. That they had been shipped to New Guinea before him, and were already dead, had occurred to him at the time; apart from the Japanese, the heat, the ticks, and the terrain might have been too much for them — and he had been struck by the cruelty and absurdity of sending horses to New Guinea. And later, in the hot and shivering delirium of his first malaria attack, he had raged against the army for having killed the horses. (Some of the horses had in fact been shipped to the island in November, but when it was established that conditions there were not suitable for them, the remaining horses, about 2,000, were dispersed throughout North Queensland.)

It had been a good day, that cool September day, and as they had laboured back to Townsville in the Willys with Alf now at the wheel, and Dorrie and he in the back, jostling against each other on the springless seats, he had felt a sense of contentment and then a rush of happiness. There was not only the present; there was also a future for them. There was to be a birthday party that night for Dorrie; and he, working the midnight shift, would be able to stay for most of it before hiking back to Townsville and catching a ride to camp.

All of these things he remembered as he slowly turned the Yamaha toward the city. That he was still angry about the horses seemed strange to him; philosophically, he had long forgiven the army and half forgotten their more crucial foul-ups: the dog tags they hadn't told him to tape, whose clink had nearly killed him; the camouflage dye instead of bleach that they had put into his fatigues and that had ulcerated his legs, old scars that still throbbed as he mounted the bike. Yet it was the thought of the horses that lingered longest as he rode swiftly back to the city, the lowering sun, still fierce, whitening Flinders Highway, widening before him.

That night there was to be no party, no Dorrie, just his room at the Travelodge overlooking the Strand, where after dinner he would watch the youngsters windsurfing on the bay, their yellow and blue-white sails reflecting the setting sun some yards out from where the LSTs had once berthed, resting two-by-two like sleeping elephants.

CHAPTER IX

Kokoda Trail

By the time of General MacArthur's first trip to Townsville and New Guinea in October 1942 the Japanese had already reached the Imita Range on the Kokoda Trail almost within sight of Port Moresby. Then they had suddenly stopped and begun an orderly withdrawal back over the Owen Stanleys toward Buna, whence they had come two months before. Buna, on the north coast of the Papuan peninsula, was only about 120 air miles and 40 minutes from Moresby on the south coast, but overland between them was the mist-covered Owen Stanley Range, with its towering, twisting peaks, and a clogged impassable terrain of steaming jungles and fetid swamps. It was this unbelievable country that the Japanese had mastered and would have to master again, but now with a fresh force of Australian and American infantrymen in pursuit.

He had known at the time that the Japanese supply lines near the Trail had been under constant attack and that in recent weeks Australian and American reinforcements had been moved into the area, but so accustomed had he become to the Japanese advance that he did not at first believe the reports of their pullback received in Townsville; he thought that an error in encoding had been made in the initial messages at the point of origin.

The Allied pursuit of the Japanese was two-pronged. The Australians, veterans of the 7th Division of the A.I.F., recently returned from North Africa, were following the Japanese the way they had come and gone — back over the Kokoda Trail and through a gap in the Owen Stanleys, and then down toward the coastal swamps of Buna. The Americans, untried recruits of the 32nd Division, mostly from Michigan and Wisconsin, were climbing the Kapa Kapa Trail's more direct route to Buna that cut across the spine of the Owen Stanleys at 9,000 feet — the Kokoda Gap through the mountains was at an altitude of 6,500 feet. The Americans, using the shorter route, were to come out of the mountains in front of the Japanese, while the Australians pressed them from behind. Thereafter, the Allied forces were to join for the assault on Buna and other Japanese entrenchments extending up the coast to Gona.

There was never a question that the Buna-Gona coastal area had to be recovered if the Japanese were to be defeated. As Moresby had to be held for its port, and its mushrooming airfields from which Allied fighters and light bombers harassed the Japanese and defended the Australian mainland (the heavy bombers had the cruising range to reach the island from bases in and around Townsville), so, too, it was vital for the Allies to possess this 15-mile stretch of land on the north coast if they were to take the offensive

and move forward toward the heart of Japanese strength in the southwest Pacific. Airfields had to be secured in the area if air attacks were to be mounted against the huge base at Rabaul, 400 miles to the northeast, with its 150,000 troops; and if the Japanese were to be dislodged from Lae and Salamaua, less than 200 miles up the coast from Buna (they had been occupied in March), a port to transfer supplies north had to be developed.

No less than supplying ammunition, the need to maintain some reasonable flow of food to the troops in combat was a crucial problem for both sides on the island. The outnumbered Australians (in the beginning, mostly young militiamen), gallant as they had been in exacting a price for every foot advanced by the enemy, ultimately had not stopped the Japanese in their final move toward Moresby; hunger had. By all accounts the Japanese, though sick and exhausted when they struggled into and beyond the Imita Range to glimpse their prize shimmering in the distance below, could have mustered strength to continue if they had not been starving to death. Pursuing them back over the Trail in late October the Australians found not only signs that the Japanese had been eating grass, roots, dirt and wood, but also that corpses of Australian soldiers had been cannibalised. Their life-line of supplies, ruptured by Allied strafing and by the desertion of their Papuan carriers, whom they treated poorly, the Japanese had had to stop and withdraw.

The Allies in pursuit — the Australians on the Kokoda Trail, the Americans on Kapa Kapa — were no less dependent on the native carriers. "Biscuit" bombers from Port Moresby could drop with reasonable accuracy (almost 70 per cent) thousands of pounds of supplies from the air to specific "dump" areas behind the lines and later, toward the end of the pursuit, could even manage to land some planes with food supplies at newly won air-strips (Dobodura, his post in December, was to be one.) But all supplies, air-dropped or landed, had to be carried up to camps near the front and along the trail to serve the troops as they struggled forward to engage the Japanese. The Papuans were engaged to carry the supplies.

Their villages were generally not far from where the fighting was taking place, though the Japanese also brought with them natives from more distant areas. The Papuans were smallish men, very dark-skinned, with white tattooed bodies, betel-stained teeth, and wild bushy hair dyed orange red. He was to remember them years afterwards not for their strangeness, but for the shy sadness of their smiles and the gentleness and care with which they handled litters as they carried the terribly wounded

down from the fighting line. Most seemed quite strong, being able, individually, to carry a 40-50 pound load of supplies on their backs or, if working with a mate, more than twice that amount on long poles, the end of which each partner held on his shoulder. With their loads vine-tied to the poles, and a sleeping-mat of palm leaves wrapped around their waists or hanging from the top of their loin cloths, the Papuans were able to walk days at a time, with little rest, through dense saturated jungles and over precipitous mountain trails. They were intensely loyal when treated well, and they revelled in the Australians' advance back over the Kokoda track from Imita Ridge. And when the Australians finally struggled down the north side of the Owen Stanleys to envelop the Japanese rearguard at Eora Creek before occupying Kokoda, with Buna directly on the coast to the east, the Papuan carriers coming up behind them painted their bodies, garlanded their bushy hair with bright coloured flowers, and shouted in song.

The exhausted Australians, their ragged uniforms stained with mud and blood, were more quietly joyous in their victory; the pursuit had cost them too many mates. But the retaking of the tiny village of Kokoda with the level grass area about it gave the Australians their first airstrip of the Kokoda campaign. Planes from Port Moresby could now bring in their supplies and fly out their sick and wounded.

About the Papuans with their flowers, and the joy in men's hearts at Kokoda, he in Townsville knew very little at the time. Working the set and doubling on the code books, he knew only that the Australians had taken Kokoda and that their casualties had been high: the last count from Templeton's Crossing and Eora Creek had listed 50 dead and 130 wounded; the sick (malaria, dysentery, scrub typhus) weren't even counted.

About the Americans on the Kapa Kapa Trail he knew much more. An important part of General MacArthur's plan was to have three Allied columns converge on Buna (the third, other units of the American 32nd Division, were to move from Wanigela Mission on the north coast, 80 miles southeast of Buna). The progress of the United States' first commitment of foot soldiers to New Guinea was carefully monitored.

Climbing the Kapa Kapa, steeper and wider than the Kokoda Trail and to the east of it, the Americans in early October were not expected to make the first contact with the retreating Japanese; the Australians were to do that, and they did. But the Americans actually made no contact whatsoever until the middle of November when the Allied columns

assembled in the coastal swamps to begin the final assault on Buna. Forced to chop their way along a narrow, thickly overgrown track, walking single file through knee-deep mud or crawling on hands and knees around monstrous piles of jungle debris, and then having to climb for miles up dizzying heights and along cliff walls dripping with torrential rain, the young infantrymen did not reach Jaure at the headwaters of the Kumusi River on the Buna side of the mountains until the last days of October. There they rested for a week, receiving air-dropped supplies of food, medicine, ammunition, and replacements for their rotting uniforms and sodden leather shoes (later troops were to have light, rubber-soled jungle boots), and then moved on down the Kumusi to finally come together with the Australians at Wairope, the Japanese lifeline between Kokoda and their supply dumps at Buna. The Americans had not been able to outflank the Japanese, but they had at least caught up with them. And if the Americans' baptism of combat, soon to occur, had been delayed, their confrontation with the horror that constituted some of the terrain of the Papuan peninsula had not.

This was during late spring in Townsville, and the air, though still cool in the evening, was already scented with wild flowers on Dorrie's road up the hill away from Flinders Street. By this time, USAIA in Townsville was operating in an emergency state of alert readiness in response to MacArthur's now repeated trips to the city, as the General began to move his command post from Brisbane to Port Moresby. The threat to the Australian mainland had diminished, and those who had been concerned with its defence looked now toward an offensive that would drive the Japanese from all of the Mandated Territory and ultimately back to defeat in their home islands.

Alone in the radio tent out at Hermit Park, grappling with the garbled Morse from New Guinea, he wanted, despite his life with Dorrie, to be part of that offensive.

Their evenings now were hardly ever late ones, for usually he would have to report in before eleven for an all-night stint on the set. Dorrie too occasionally felt under the weather (from the pressure, he assumed, of her job at Army Headquarters), and he would leave early so that she could get some sleep.

But these evenings at home, like their evening walks, were sufficient for them, even though they could hold each other only after Dorrie had led them quietly, or as quietly as she could, down the loud-sounding wooden stairs from the verandah at the front of the house. And laughing (they would shush each other's laughing at the echoing sounds of the stairs), they would move along the darkened path to the wire gate near the road where a great eucalyptus protected them. There, after they kissed — and always kissing seemed new to them — they would stand holding each other for a little while, listening to the muffled surf off the Strand, so close but seemingly distant in the darkness, slowly mix with the murmur and metallic sounds of the soldiers on duty near the lagoon. On one such night in November when the late spring sky, always dazzling, was unusually so, he reached up to the Southern Cross, almost touchable that night, and picked one of its diamonds, as he sometimes did, and gave it to Dorrie. This time, though, he did it more carefully, parting her thin fingers as he sought the appropriate one. The ring was a pearl, very tiny but very pretty, and the best one he could get at Priors at the time.

CHAPTER X

Finnerty and Rockhampton

He knew of Eric Finnerty, but had never met him, because Finnerty had been imprisoned by the Japanese in Malaya some months before he had come to Townsville. He had not heard the name Finnerty spoken in forty years. Yet so tuned in to the past had he become that he had not been startled when a small freckled man hobbled up to him after one of the lectures (the man had seen the *Bulletin* story) and told him that he was Eric Finnerty, "Mary's boy."

"Mary's boy!" "Mary Finnerty!" Dorrie, of course, if not he, had known her Christian name. But always Finnerty had been just "Finnerty" to them, though a Finnerty who was their confidante, a Finnerty who was their advocate. Mum's friend since Mum and Harry had first come to Townsville from Hughenden, where they had been married. Mary Finnerty, from the beginning, had seemed to understand the enduring quality of Dorrie and his relationship, and early and continually had reassured Mum on their behalf. Her home, close by that of the Dinsmores, up the road where Mitchell Street turned toward Eyre, had been an oasis for Dorrie and him on moonless nights when they left the family to stroll for a while in the darkened neighbourhood; and sitting in Finnerty's bright kitchen, talking over sweets and English tea, her transparent delight in and love of Dorrie had embraced them both and added a resonance to their life together. A widow since before the European war, Finnerty was a little woman, not five feet tall, with grey mottled hair and a checkered housecoat. She walked with a list to the left (the direction of her politics) and sort of snapped rather than talked, though her eyes never stopped smiling. Only when she spoke of Eric, taken by the Japanese in Malaya before he was nineteen, did anger cross her face. Then her speech slowed and became deliberate as she scorned Churchill for his "stupidity" about Singapore.

Except for his size, there was little resemblance between Eric and his mother, his soft deferential voice definitely not that of Mary Finnerty, and his aura of vulnerability vastly different from the indomitable quality of the woman he remembered. Yet Finnerty's boy must have had strength; for verminous, sick and emaciated, he had survived the prison camps for three years when half his mates had died. Though weighing less than seven stone when deposited on the white-planked deck of the hospital ship, *Oranji*, docked in Singapore in late September, 1945, he had been able to sit up and walk about a week later when the ship arrived in Darwin. Eric didn't say these things boastfully, but with an imperceptible smile as if he were talking about someone else.

He had dinner at Eric's house the evening of the day they had met at the lecture, and they had talked about the war years. Moved savagely about during the first years of his captivity to and from prison camps and work sites along the length of the Malay Peninsula up through Bangkok, and kept barely alive thereafter in a stockade in Singapore following an abortive escape attempt, Eric had never received any of Finnerty's letters so scrupulously sent each week, care of the International Red Cross. The Townsville, then, that Dorrie and he had known, the Townsville, in fact, of the whole Pacific War, had been unknown to Eric, though in the months after his return and recovery he had learned much about it from Finnerty. Early on he had heard and was cynical about Dorrie and her American soldier who had been invalided back to the United States. The overpaid and oversexed Yank was not only a piece of Japanese propaganda but often an AIF stereotype as well.

"But mom wouldn't have it and put me down, Bud. To her you were one good bloke." And Eric remembered how Finnerty's eyes would fill when she spoke of Dorrie and him — and this was while Dorrie was still alive.

But Dorrie was long dead now, and Finnerty after her, and then Mum, and Harry soon after; so what meaning was there in all the talk? And back in the Travelodge later that evening, looking out from his terrace over the Strand fronting the moon-splintered waters of the bay coloured by the Coral Sea, he was almost sorry that he had met with Eric Finnerty.

He was not unaware, of course, that some part of himself had been searching for the past ever since he had arrived in Townsville; that, in fact, though less clearly at the time, he had been moved by the possibility of recovering something of it and Dorrie, when he had accepted the lectureship at James Cook University. Beyond his middle years now, he had also shared in and sought answers to the perplexity and sorrow of the older Slessor, the universal poet who had spoken above his land to the human condition. "If I could find an answer," the poet had cried out,

could only find
Your meaning, or could say why you were here
Who now are gone, what purpose gave you breath
Or seized it back, might I not hear your voice?¹

Eric, just by being "Finnerty's boy," had served him well, helping him to remember things that had been in some part of his consciousness during all the years since the war. And he had wanted these things back, if only momentarily, not only for the pleasure and pain of their recollection, but to understand them and finally to place them peacefully into his life. But Eric, continuing to talk of Finnerty (perhaps out of his own need though also in deference to him), and assembling on the dining-room table and asking him to look at a variety of memorabilia belonging to her, had succeeded in evoking more of the past of his life with Dorrie than he had remembered. Having it now, he wasn't sure that he wanted it — for what was he to do with more memories? It had been enough to deal with only those that he had lived with, memories that sometimes touched him more deeply than the external life he was living. Yet a green furry monkey on Eric's table would not be denied; standing erect and apart from the clutter of memorabilia, with its arms outstretched in welcome, it had shocked him into recognition and remembrance.

Actually there had been two monkeys, a furry black one in addition to Finnerty's, though both had the same kind of beady green eyes and worried look, mocked by a wide smile on a tiny wrinkled face, and both stood perkily in greeting, six inches high on bold back legs and curly tails. He had bought the black monkey first to welcome Dorrie at the railroad station in Rockhampton when she arrived from Townsville — he had flown down three days before; the green one was purchased afterwards by Dorrie and him as a souvenir for Finnerty, who had made Dorrie's trip possible.

This was just before Thanksgiving. Dorrie, who had been on a fortnight's sick leave — "a kinky kidney" — had come to spend a few days in this picturesque little town in the valley of the Fitzroy River about half way down the coast between Townsville and Brisbane. He had suddenly been ordered here for a week of detached service with the 41st Infantry Division; units of the division which had been training for months had been alerted for duty in the advanced sector of New Guinea after Buna was taken. Finnerty had persuaded Mum that the change provided by a few days away from Townsville as well as the opportunity to see Bud, would be

good for Dorrie, and that Amelia, Harry's sister who lived alone, would be more than pleased to have Dorrie stay with her. Amelia's large house, so close to the beautiful park and botanical gardens in the city, would be conducive to the kind of relaxing, casual reading, and strolling about that Dorrie needed at the time.

It had been an ideal arrangement, even more than Finnerty had envisioned. Not only did Amelia, doting on Dorrie, whom she had not seen since the Christmas before the Pacific war, succeed in making Dorrie feel that she was on holiday, but the fact that Amelia's house was less than twenty minutes from where he was posted allowed him to see Dorrie every day. Usually finished in the afternoon with his work of instructing the new signal casuals from the States, he would arrive at Amelia's early enough for the sun still to be high and holding the spring flowers in bloom throughout the gardens. There, after Amelia's refreshments, they would walk each day.

Rockhampton, in its relative quiet and cleanness, was as different from Townsville as any two wartime provincial cities could be. There was a military presence that seemed to fit into the civilian life of the city population rather than engulf it as it did in Townsville. This encouraged Dorrie and him to do things they had not done before. They went to a restaurant together for the first time, feeling themselves settled and secure like a married couple — Dorrie made a band of her engagement ring, turning it around so the pearl wouldn't show — and luxuriated in sitting at a table with a freshly whitened table cloth and in being served by a waitress in a starched apron.

He could not remember what they had eaten, but could almost see again Dorrie coughing and her eyes tearing up at the taste of the Martini he had ordered for her; and then her rushing off to the ladies' room. From there, very soon afterwards, she returned, groomed and self-possessed and remarking on the kindness of the lady there. For a penny, she had provided Dorrie with a little embroidered hand towel, a bar of soap, and a comb in cellophane from London.

At first he half smiled to himself at the memory: the Martini was to be Dorrie's first and last; the penny, though, the penny for the soap and towel, was to have a longer life, becoming "spending a penny," his humorous "code" phrase, thereafter, for her having to go to the john. But suddenly he winced, and groaned into the soft night air, for the dark side of the code as it was to relate to Dorrie's death caught up with him again; and

then he had to leave the terrace for the comfort of the present in his room. Once there he turned back to stand, staring deeply into the glittering darkness, all the while involuntarily feeling in his pocket for an old kangaroo penny that he had carried in New Guinea and during the first years of his civilian life.

Later that night, still pained, he willed forgetfulness as he lay on his bed; but there was power in Finnerty's monkey, and unable to defend himself against it he continued to think of Rockhampton.

There had been a merry little carnival. Sponsored by an ambulance brigade it had set itself up around a pretty rectangular green about a mile from Amelia's, and Dorrie and he had gone to it the evening after the restaurant. There were not many rides or booths there, and rationing had reduced the number of food vendors and made their offerings spartan, but the whole carnival area, small though it was, was gaily festooned with bright ribbons and coloured flowers, and music was everywhere. It was old-fashioned music, enthusiastically played by a middle-aged trio who encouraged people walking about the green to sing along with them. Most people did; he and Dorrie did, too, finding themselves joining in with a small cluster of civilians and soldiers. Caught up in the spirit of carnival, they walked singing along with their new friends in the slow-moving crowd, stopping only to buy their quota of meat pies and cups of coca cola, and to wait their turn to gamble away their pennies into a pair of ancient slot machines, or shoot at Tojo for a shilling in a make-shift gallery — or pick out for a pound Finnerty's green monkey from a jungle of stuffed animals.

They were to remember the carnival and the flush of happiness it had given them, and to refer to it in their letters to each other when he went away.

Of course there were other things about Rockhampton, but mostly he remembered Amelia. The next morning, riding back out to James Cook on his Yamaha, he felt again his impatience (and again regretted it) with her solicitousness for Dorrie and her protectiveness, expressed in a love that had had no place for him. Yet he had liked Amelia, he really believed so, and remembered feeling pleased and grateful that she was accompanying Dorrie back to Townsville for a week's visit with the Dinsmores. He wished that Amelia were still alive so that they might talk.

In college he had been a member of the War Resisters League, a pacifist organisation, and with his friend, Howie G., had argued against the firebrands among his classmates who had wanted the United States to intervene in the European war. He wasn't a particularly active member, and had had no reservations about contributing to the "Bundles for Britain" campaign on campus, nor had he felt obliged to sign a petition that pressured his senator to vote against "Lend Lease." It was just that he was against war as a civilised response to the world's problems. He thought that the individual caught up in one was forever brutalised even if he physically survived. Certainly on a personal level he didn't want to be a victim, but he also did not want to be a conqueror. He simply did not want to injure or kill anyone or be given the license to do so by his government.

Yet within three weeks of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he had waited for the end of the fall semester — the middle of his junior year, he had enlisted in the Army and, examined, tested and classified, was already *en route* to the new Signal Corps Training Center at Camp Crowder in Missouri.

He had never thought about why he had volunteered, nor had he tried to explain it to anyone else. Howie had not asked or faulted him but wished him well and, only mildly rallied by his classmates, had gone off with his C.O. status to die later draining malarial swamps in Louisiana. Nor, three months later, when he had completed training, had he asked himself or been able to explain to his parents, especially his mother, why he could not accept the commandant's offer to become an instructor and a member of the permanent cadre of the camp. He had told them of the offer because he thought they would be pleased. All that he finally could say to them was that though he was honoured by the offer, he had completed his training, becoming a good signalman in the process, and that it was time to move on.

And he had moved on — and standing night-watch weeks afterwards in the Pacific on the flying bridge of the still unstripped *Matsonia*, reading a blinking light that flared momentarily from the convoy, he thought that he might now be able to explain to his parents why he had not, as others had, sought deferment to finish college, or chosen to stay in Missouri. Alone in the darkness high up on the crown of the great ship, he had felt absorbed into the immensity and the live luminosity of the sky that enveloped him and reached down to the flaking

phosphorescence of the sea. And he had been unafraid of the feeling — deeply breathing in with relief the world about him — the air that was pungent and perfumed by the flying spray, the ship riding through furrows of fire, and the sky — the endless sky. The world seemed forever and he belonged to it — and everything was before him. He knew only that he wanted to move toward these vague, indefinite, but shining things, and wanted to be part of the history that men on earth were making, wanted to engrain himself into the scheme of life.

Of course he had told Dorrie about these experiences; he had told her about almost everything that had touched his life in his twenty-one years, as she had told him. But until they returned from Rockhampton, he had been unable to tell her that he wanted to leave Townsville.

For nine months in a gritty Townsville at war (long enough for a man to be born) he had had no time and little need to think of anything but his work and his life with Dorrie. He knew the worth of what he was doing as a soldier, and if he had ever doubted it, the sense of himself and the inner peace that Dorrie had given him had reassured him. But then the war had begun to move forward, away from Townsville, and monitoring its progress in the north near Buna from his safe tent at Hermit Park, he again sensed his need to be more a part of things. His trip to Rockhampton, gloriously happy though it had been when Dorrie came down, had exacerbated his feelings: he had been ordered to Rockhampton to prepare others, kids from the States, for the push in New Guinea; it was as if, after all, he had never left Crowder and Missouri.

He had wanted the past back for a little while, but not all of it, not the part about his leaving Townsville and Dorrie. Yet thinking of Rockhampton, at once savouring and resisting its memories, led to thoughts of his departure, and he could not easily prevent them from following one upon the other. He was grateful, therefore, for the weekend respite from the lecture hall.

They had returned to Townsville from Rockhampton, Dorrie and Amelia by train and he, a day later, in a Lockheed cargo plane with an elderly Air Force supply sergeant who was on his way back to Port Moresby with a load of medical supplies and several cases of Scotch whiskey. Reaching Townsville on Saturday afternoon had given Dorrie another free day before she had to report back to work. But he, landing at Garbutt on Sunday night, had been assigned to a double-shift within hours of arrival, and had therefore to wait until Wednesday before he could see Dorrie again. Even then, though, he had not been able to talk with her until late in the evening, because she was involved in a welcome home and delayed Thanksgiving dinner planned for them by Mum and Finnerty. People in a garrison town such as Townsville had become particularly aware of the holiday and celebrated it with American friends.

Caught up in the rush of things, he had come to the dinner empty-handed except for a bottle of Scotch whiskey and a token tin of pineapple that he had managed to find in a depleted PX; these had been appreciated, though only Harry had a shot of the whiskey. The dinner had been a feast. Not only had Mum and Finnerty pooled their ration coupons to obtain an assortment of beef and lamb cuts and a variety of vegetables (both then rarely seen at a Townsvillean's table) and baked a batch of their famous pies and cookies, but Amelia had also contributed a huge ham that she had brought with her from Rockhampton for her stay with the Dinsmores. Dorrie's friends, Dawn and Adrienne, also brought some things. So did one of Mum's neighbours whose daughter, a nurse in Malaya, had graduated from high school with Dorrie and had worked with her at Chandlers. Mum and Harry had also invited one of the "Yank" gunners in the neighbourhood to come by for a sandwich and sweets after his shift, and when he did, toward the end of the dinner, he too contributed, bringing some bottles of beer and a bagful of "Baby Ruths," as well as a carton of American cigarettes.

Dorrie and he managed only a few exchanges during dinner, she, at once hostess and guest, having committed herself to help everyone have a good time. She seemed everywhere but with him, helping with the serving, keeping the conversation moving at the table and, with Amelia, leading the group-singing around the upright piano in the dining room. Yet often he saw her looking at him, loving him and reassuring him in her smile.

She knew he had been troubled in Rockhampton, but hadn't pressed him for an explanation; and he, grateful, not wanting to spoil their holiday, had said nothing about New Guinea. But now they were back in Townsville, and later that evening, finally alone with Dorrie walking along darkened Mitchell Street toward their tree, he was able to tell her all that he felt about wanting to be part of what was happening on the island.

He remembered that it was a soft night, around the first of December and the beginning of summer. By then Townsville had turned away from a "Bomber's Moon," and the great shadow of Castle Hill had been taken up into the velvet blackness of the sky. There were some stars, but they flickered irregularly and not brightly in the warm air as if not to disturb the stillness.

Dorrie listened intently to everything he said, seeming to respond only by pressing his hand tightly. She said nothing as they walked, even after he finished talking. But when they reached the refuge of their tree, she stopped and looked at him, half-smiling, though her eyes glistened with tears. Then she reached up to touch his face and carefully brought it down to her lips and kissed him. Yet she would not let him take her into his arms, but gently pushed him away. In a low voice she mildly chided him for not trusting her, and telling her what had troubled him. Hadn't they agreed — and was it so long ago? — that they would share everything — the good and the bad — withholding nothing from each other. That's what made them and their love special: they were a team.

And then she wept openly and allowed him to hold her and to kiss her, his tears mixing with hers. But when he said he would not ask for a transfer, that he would not leave her, she separated herself from him almost angrily.

"Of course you will leave; you will have to, if not now then in a few months. Everyone will be moving north eventually; I see preparations for it already being made. If you want to go, go now; it's right that you should go."

Then regaining her composure and reaching out to him, she repeated some of the things he had told her about himself, about his friendship with Howie in college, his not wanting to stay behind in Missouri, and about his coming alive on the flying bridge of the *Matsonia* in the Pacific. She reminded him also of what he had once said about his having been affected when he first came to Townsville by the playing of "The Star Spangled Banner" by an elderly lady pianist in the dimly lit

Winter Garden; standing at attention alone with two of his friends among the large audience of Australians he had suddenly realised that he was no longer a student in khaki, but an American soldier in a foreign country.

“You do what you have to do, Bud,” she said. “I don’t want you to lose yourself because of me. It’ll be over soon and then we’ll be together again — you’ll see. Nothing can hurt us!”

Then she took his hand in hers and they walked without talking back to the house. It was very late; he was off duty until the following afternoon but Dorrie had to be back at USAIA at eight in the morning.

They were never to mention the conversation again, but later in their letters to each other when he was in New Guinea, they were to refer to their welcome home post-Thanksgiving dinner as their “Last Supper,” she, always humorously, he less so as the months passed, coming to believe that by leaving Dorrie he had betrayed her and their love for each other.

CHAPTER XI

New Guinea

Allied strategy in New Guinea always had as its aim the securing and advancing of airfields so that ultimately the home islands of Japan would become vulnerable to the full strength of Allied fire power. Unbeknown to him he was part of that strategy when his request for transfer was approved and he was assigned to a communication section at an airfield near Dobodura, six miles inland from Buna. In the initial stages of the strategy small airstrips were secured and built up to receive transports and fighter planes while the ground troops who had won the strip were still fighting in the area. This was the situation at Dobodura when he arrived a few days before Christmas. The planes that came in from Moresby were still being used to support and supply the troops as they moved in slow motion, as if in a nightmare, through mangrove swamps and then, in sudden spurts, through plantation fields and rank smelling kunai grass, fighting rearguard resistance at every yard all the way to the coast. There, against a backdrop of sea and sky of incredible radiance and colour, along a shallow arc of twelve miles extending from Gona in the north through Buna to Cape Endaiadere in the south, the Japanese, retreating through the mountains along the Kokoda Trail, had entrenched themselves in foot-thick coconut logs and corrugated iron bunkers. The extent to which the bunkers also held thousands of fresh reinforcements from Rabaul and other Japanese bases was not then fully appreciated by Allied intelligence.

By the time of his arrival at Dobodura a platoon of Americans had reached the sea, capturing a narrow spit of land between Buna village and Buna Mission, while two battalions of Australians had fought their way through and around the Japanese bunkers to occupy a wide stretch of beach east of Gona; also, forward units of a combined force of Americans and Australians had already penetrated Japanese lines to Cape Endaiadere. The Americans in these actions were from the 126th and 128th regiments of the 32nd Division; the Australians, from the 16th and 25th brigades of the 7th Division and the 2/6th Australian Independent Company.

These were significant breakthroughs, pointing as they did to the eventual encirclement and defeat of the Japanese in that area in the weeks ahead. But the cost of these advances in casualties was, and was to continue to be, exceedingly high; many hands were needed to deal with them, and he found his first duty at Dobodura not at the wireless but up the trail at a recently bombed field hospital helping the medics, themselves wounded and sick, to bring the more seriously wounded back to the airfield and to load

them aboard transports (Red Crossed C 47s) for their trip south to Moresby and the mainland. He had known about casualties, reporting them, envisioning them, even suffering with them in his radio tent at Hermit Park in Townsville. But to actually see the men in their mutilated flesh and bloody gauze, their eyes shocked and straining from sunken faces, was startlingly different and he momentarily recoiled from them; yet quickly he recovered and moved toward them to help as they lay inert and exhausted on their litters in their filthy tattered uniforms, seeming at once so old and so young.

At Dobodura, though, one mostly did what one was sent there specifically to do; so, as in Townsville, he worked the island and northern Australia sitting at a fixed set powered by a battery-generator. But now, armed with a carbine, he was at the beginning of the signal line, not the end of it, and worked in a sandbagged hut, half underground, secured by a password and the soundings of empty gasoline cans hanging loosely from a bolted screen door. He was sometimes assigned signal duties outside the hut, accompanying headquarters brass with a field radio to positions closer to the lines. He also filled in for incapacitated telephone linemen, laying and repairing wire in creek beds and swamp mud; there were miles of such wire in the Gona-Buna area and upon it depended the communication from field headquarters to unit commanders on all fronts. Handling knives and pliers and splicing wires reminded him of his first weeks of basic signal training at Camp Crowder. In Missouri in early February the sky was pale blue with white fluffs, and the air was cold and clean and wonderful to breathe; in the jungle only pieces of the sky could be seen, and he had to hold his breath because of the jungle stench.

Off duty but listening late on Christmas night he learned from an Allied communiqué that activities in the Buna-Dobodura area had been "routine" most of the day and that "Divine Services" had been held. Yet the fighting around the bunkers near Buna had been particularly intense and costly throughout the day, and at Dobodura, where they had had a "Divine Service" with makeshift tinsel and coloured paper decorations, they also had had a damaging air raid; new to it, he had been shaken by the ferocity and snapping clatter of the strafing, and the shock waves of the bombs moving the earth to reverberate against his body in the shelter. Such raids and lengthy red alerts were frequent, especially when bad weather over the Owen Stanleys kept the Allied fighters on the ground at Moresby. Did the communiqué's use of the term "routine" mean to represent these

circumstances as well as the fact that men fought and suffered every day at Buna, even on Christmas?

In the months ahead much that he had once thought worthy of note would also become commonplace. Thus in late January when he had gone up to the beach after the battle for Buna was over and organised Japanese resistance had ceased along the entire Gona-Buna coast, he had written in his diary about having seen his first dead Japanese soldiers; hanging grotesquely from their bunkers or lying embedded deep in the sand, they seemed more formidable and dignified than the Japanese prisoners of war he had seen collected in Townsville in their neat but oversized American fatigue uniforms. He was to see the Japanese dead with some regularity thereafter, but he never referred to them again until the following September — and then for the last time — when he was in the Markham Valley area west of Lae up the coast about 250 miles from Buna. He and his section had been sent there soon after American paratroopers and Australian artillerymen (who jumped with them) had secured an airstrip at Nadzab. By then, two weeks after the drop, the Japanese had been routed from the area by units of the Australian 7th Division that had been flown into Nadzab the day after the paratroopers and then had moved rapidly against the Japanese outposts, reaching the coast twenty miles away and capturing their stronghold at Lae. Writing in his diary in September he referred to some Japanese letters and photographs that he and his crew had found at an abandoned Japanese position not far from the clearing of kunai grass that fronted on and brought light and fresh air into their jungle radio shack. The letters and photographs had been turned over to Intelligence, but he noted that he kept remembering them for days afterwards, especially some of the photographs, those of women and children; they had troubled him and made him think again of the Japanese dead.

Of his thirteen months in New Guinea, at Dobodura, Nadzab, and finally Lae, he remembered mostly the early months; the others remained submerged, to be raised intermittently over the years and then only fleetingly by night dreams offering a kaleidoscope of images and feelings. The bewildered face of a Papuan carrier savaged by shrapnel, the wasted body of a burned pilot wrapped in cellophane, the Japanese straggler caught at the garbage dump — and the rush of pity he felt for them all — these came and went quickly. So did the rush of joy at the resurrected sight of the gracefulness of the victory rolls over the airfield by the twin-tailed Lightnings (P-38s) returning from Rabaul, and the feeling of gratitude for a

breeze at Nadzab that flooded the valley and whipped the tall kunai into dancing once more before him. These and other images of the island and the feelings associated with them bobbed up into and out of his life for years, but they bothered him no more; not even that one of the low-flying lone Jap with goggles and flowing scarf who sneaked out of the sky to strafe the camp in front of his while laughing down at him straddling a latrine ditch, nor that of himself running up the trail at night from the shack to his tent, brandishing a machete before him, warding off, for the most part, the furies of his imagination.

Dorrie and Townsville were no less a part of his memories of New Guinea, especially of those long months after his life on the island had been defined and the days followed one on the other, telescoping. There seemed nothing then beyond the present, and there was no way to return to the past except through thought that was already feverish. All that there was was the Japanese and the heat and the mud and the shimmering haze of the day and the live darkness of the night. More than ever then he sought Dorrie.

She wrote to him every day from the time of his leaving, her letters starting to come in intermittently, singly or in batches of three and five, some weeks after his arrival in Dobodura. And he wrote to her, at first whenever he could, but soon almost daily, instinctively out of need, as part of the ritual of his life. Gradually the writing of their letters as well as the receiving of them became a necessity for both; for in them, despite the censor's presence, they struggled to share their lives as they had when they were together in Townsville.

What he remembered most of all of Dorrie during his months in New Guinea was what he needed most from her, his assurance of her love and need of him. And this she gave him without restraint. She expressed herself with intensity and tenderness, writing about falling off to sleep with him in her arms each night, dreaming of him, and awaking with tears at his absence, desperately missing him at different times of the day and evening yet always sensing his presence, and picturing endlessly to herself how it would be when he came home.

She recalled their lives together, how they had first met at Heatley's and what she had first said to Mum and Dad about him; she remembered their walks, the things they first said to each other, their being good friends and their coming to love each other. She celebrated as anniversaries almost every event of their past life together — their meeting, their first date, their night under the dripping tree, their engagement; polishing their ring for the occasion, she had made him see in his mind's eye how she had held it up to the light, searching for the source of its beauty. But she also provided him with an abundance of feelings and images for the future which his being rushed to embrace. It was to be a future of their getting married and of their life after the war. In everything she said, of their past, their present, their future, she made their relationship precious. And always, in her response to his cyclic feelings of vulnerability and guilt for having left her, she emphasised his part in the relationship, describing the strength of the man she knew and loved and her gratitude to him for his love of her.

That his letters to Dorrie, short, long, scratched out in a hurry or laboured over, were as necessary to her as hers were to him, she never let him doubt. She felt lost, was uneasy, sometimes ill (though she tried to hide this from him) during the long stretches of weeks when none of his letters arrived. But when they did, often in large batches — ten, twelve at a time — she revelled in them as she fanned them out on her desk, reading them in the order in which they were written. This she told him. She told him also that though she could never get used to his being away, his letters, beautiful to her, made her feel that he was with her. And she needed him to be with her, and always she needed his words, his wise, reassuring words that helped her deal with some of her fears — not being able to have children — or with her grief when her school friend Bessie was dying.

Dorrie also gave him something from the routine of her day in each letter, and he was grateful for it, whether it had to do with her work at headquarters (her account of which the censor occasionally scissored), her lunches of crabmeat salad and cold malted milk at Athol's (he lived on the tepid water from a Lister Bag), or her going to the movies in the evening or staying at home for a good read instead. She also allowed him to imagine and enjoy a picture of her washing her hair and putting it up, or of helping Mum with the ironing; he saw her reading to Bri and later crouching down with him in front of the loud speaker in the living room

trying to listen to the Bob Dyer Show as Harry loudly discussed politics with one of his mates from the railway.

It wasn't until a month or so after he had left for New Guinea that Dorrie began to go to the movies again at the Winter Garden. She went fairly regularly then each week, occasionally with Mum and Dad and Bri or her sister Connie, but usually with friends, especially close friends like Dawn. Dawn's Len, a Wirraway pilot, was also at Dobodura, though Len had been in the area many weeks before he arrived. He and Len had met briefly in Townsville and managed a few hellos at Dobodura and some coffee at an Australian mess at nearby Popondetta. He always told Dorrie about seeing Len, as Len told Dawn about seeing him. It was Dorrie, though, who later told him that Len had been killed, shot down while flying low to spot Japanese positions for American artillery fire.

Standing outside the old Winter Garden theatre last year, he could remember none of the names of the movies he and Dorrie had seen together. Yet he could remember, viscerally, being there in the Winter Garden with Dorrie for the first time, being inside the theatre and sitting down in the darkness and later walking home together over the hill in the tropical softness of a Townsville winter.

CHAPTER XII

Hospitals

It was the jungle, not the Japanese, that was responsible for his being invalided home. He had been sick a long time, as had others, suffering at various periods from dengue, dysentery and a form of malaria which was to linger for years. He also had ulcers on his legs, and a patch of jungle rot under his arm. Yet he had never gone on sick call; no one in his section did. They all worked through their illnesses and doctored themselves; they had to, for there were few replacements for them in the area at the time.

But shortly after his arrival at Lae from Nadzab, almost 13 months after he had first come to New Guinea, he finally had to report himself sick: he was weak and disoriented from fever and in pain from the drawing soreness of his legs. Within hours he was sent to a small field hospital in the area where the doctors were sufficiently impressed by his temperature and general appearance and the sight of his legs to order him removed from active duty and to arrange for his transfer back to Australia as soon as possible.

So he was sent south by plane to the mainland, though they broke up his trip by first having him held for five or six days at a general field hospital at Port Moresby, where his fever was reduced, his ulcers sanitised and stabilised, and his body nourished; he had lost 12 stone since coming to New Guinea.

The hospital, with its acres of neat, tautly stretched tents, was set up in spick and span order in what must have been a stadium of some sort, and when he was able he was encouraged to walk about the grounds or along the bottom tiers of concrete that surrounded the field. But when he first arrived he was too sick, and hence was content to yield to an overwhelming feeling of gratefulness for the security and cool cleanliness and comfort of the hospital, and was willing to allow himself to relax and flow into the routine of being cared for each day.

Eventually, when he felt stronger and had recovered a sense of himself, he began to have pangs of guilt about having left his unit. If he was to remember anything good, other than Dorrie, from his life on the dragon island, it was the feeling of loyalty he and his mates had for each other. Yet he had left them at Lae, though in doing so he had been certain he could have done nothing else. Feeling better, he was less sure. This was especially so as he walked aimlessly about the grounds in his loose pyjamas and robe, listening to the distant drone of planes from the Seven Mile Strip to the north of the hospital. Some planes were heading back

over the Owen Stanleys to where he had come from. At Lae, he remembered, there already had been scuttlebutt about their unit's next move, perhaps to Hansa Bay, 300 miles up the coast, and after that possibly to the top of the island at Hollandia, or even to the Philippines with MacArthur. He, though, was headed in the opposite direction.

But if these thoughts and feelings distressed him, more dominant in his consciousness at the time was the simultaneous onrushing thought that he would soon see Dorrie again; and more often than not the welling up of joy would engulf him as well as the pangs of guilt and feelings of regret that he had about no longer being with his unit. It was at the end of this period at Moresby, as preparations were completed for his transfer to the Brisbane General Hospital in Australia, that the American Red Cross reached him with a cable from Harry Dinsmore that Dorrie was seriously ill and had been operated on. The cable had been sent five days before.

That Dorrie had sometimes been ill he knew or had suspected. She had implied as much in her letters, though always minimising the fact; she wasn't feeling up to par, or was a bit under the weather, or had had to "spend a penny" twice at lunch because the "old inner man was working overtime." She had attributed these discomforts, as she called them, to the pressure of her work or to her monthly "visitor," who had become increasingly bothersome; and as to her headaches, they were nothing, having to do probably with her eyeglasses — as soon as she could she was going to Dr Stacey for an eye examination. She had assured him that whatever was distressing her disappeared completely when she received his letters. She had said this to comfort him, and it did, but it also reminded him that if he had not left her when he did, she possibly would not have felt ill and been dependent on his letters to make her feel better. A kaleidoscope of such thoughts racked him on the day of the cable, together with frantic feelings of helplessness and loss and the need to get to Dorrie at once.

He was never to forget that day or the endless night that followed when he climbed with smarting legs into the darkness far up to the top of the hospital stadium and embraced the glittering sky and Cross and prayed to God for Dorrie's life. And God was merciful. For when, as if in a feverish dream, he later found himself outside Dorrie's room in the Townsville General Hospital, a few minutes up the hill from her home on Mitchell Street, she was still alive, and so his prayers to see her again had

been granted. The military had delayed his direct transit to Brisbane and found him a hospital bed for two days just outside Townsville.

He stood alone for a while outside Dorrie's room, looking at the closed door and then down the empty and silent hall. And when he recalled the hospital visit, as he was to do for years thereafter, that closed door in front of him and the silent emptiness of the hall became a kind of omen for him upon which his life had turned.

An elderly sister in a starched white habit came out of Dorrie's room and asked whether he was Dorrie's American. The Dinsmores had hoped that he would come. Dorrie had been sleeping, but she was awake now and he could go in.

"She is going to be all right, Sergeant," she said kindly, looking directly at him, and as his eyes filled she turned and went to tell Dorrie that he was there.

He saw nothing of the room as he entered except the sterile whiteness of the bed and Dorrie's head on the pillow. There was a small table in front of the bed with a tall vase full of bright yellow flowers, and Dorrie's face seen through them startled him with its pallor.

She looked up at him, smiling wanly as he moved toward her, and slowly lifted her hand to touch his face when he bent to kiss her. Then as he rested his head on the pillow she gently stroked his hair and cried quietly with him. Neither spoke for a while, but as he raised himself and turned to kiss her again, Dorrie, almost imperceptibly, moved her head to avoid his lips and whispered, "Bud, please listen, please try to understand". Then came the words, slowly and strangely: "I don't think I love you anymore." She closed her eyes as her voice faded; "I can't ..."

He heard her words, but as an echo repeated from a distance. He thought at first that they might be part of the dream in which he had seemed to be living the last few days. He was feverish and exhausted, not having slept since the cable at Moresby.

But then he heard Dorrie again, speaking more distinctly now in a low emotionless voice: "Please understand, Bud — I can't love you," and, more firmly, "I don't love you!" She had opened her eyes and stared fixedly at him, clenching her hands on the bed sheet.

He wasn't shocked by the words now, only confused as he understood their reality.

"Why, Dorrie?" he asked, suddenly frightened and feeling weak as he knelt beside her and tried to take her hand in his.

"No, Bud, please," she cried, looking at him imploringly, "I don't love you." Yet she seemed unable to pull her hand away and it lay lifeless, unclenched on the bed.

It was a strange though half-remembered look that reached out toward something strong in him. Dorrie had asked for that strength in the past and he had given it, grateful to her for calling on it; in doing so she had added depth to their understanding of each other.

"Please, Bud," she said again, "please."

He got slowly to his feet, heavy with weariness. "Do you want me to go?" he asked as he looked longingly at her. "You want me to go now? Nothing else?" And he would have given his life to have been able to take her in his arms.

Dorrie said nothing, but still looking at him, nodded her head, and then closed her eyes.

The long empty hall was crowded now, and there was a subdued murmur of voices, and even a little laughter. It was apparently a regular visiting hour, and some patients had come out of their rooms to stand about with their visitors or to mingle with the sisters at the far end of the reception area. A little boy about Brian's age, holding the hand of a young woman patient, smiled at him as he passed and cupped his fingers to his head in salute. The gesture stopped him, and with eyes still wet he turned to smile back at the boy and return his salute. Then he continued down the hall toward the exit, though now more hurriedly. He wanted nothing more than to get back to the base hospital and sleep away the dream.

But then he heard his name. It was Harry. He came rushing up to him with Mum Dinsmore and the elderly sister who had taken him in to see Dorrie. They had been in a waiting room at the other end of the hall and the sister had seen him leave Dorrie's room.

"Good on you, Bud," Harry said, grasping his arm tightly, "I knew you'd make it to see Dot." Mum then hugged him and said he looked crook. She had never hugged him before, and he was comforted. He kissed her cheek, remembering that the last time he had kissed Mum was that long year ago when Dorrie and he had told the family that they were engaged.

They talked for a while. Harry looked tired but seemed almost the same as he had remembered him: tough, confident, upbeat. Mum seemed completely drained, but she too assured him that Dorrie would be all right.

She had had a kidney operation, but the doctors were satisfied with the results. She would need only a period of recuperation to be well again.

The sister accompanied him to the exit while the Dinsmores went back to Dorrie's room. Al was waiting for him outside with the jeep. Allen was the last of his friends remaining from the old unit in Townsville, and had been with him that first night at Heatley's when he met Dorrie.

He was to be loaded on a Qantas Flying Boat and sent to Brisbane two days later, so he never returned to the Townsville General Hospital. But Al kept him informed about Dorrie, checking with the sister throughout the following fortnight while he was still in Brisbane. Dorrie was doing well, Al wrote, and he and Sister Kathleen had built up a mutually satisfactory relationship: she gave him information about Dorrie's condition and he provided the hospital with cans of orange juice; the hospital's supply was dwindling and that of his mess increasing. This was February 1944, and all kinds of supplies were flooding into Townsville in anticipation of the big jump forward in New Guinea.

The two weeks in the hospital in Brisbane were difficult for him. His fever had been brought under control again within days of his arrival, and his legs, though still ulcerated, had been much relieved of their sharp soreness and sting by a new salve. For the first time in many months he was relatively clear-minded and without pain. Yet this very improvement early on in his physical well-being at Brisbane General — for which he had to be grateful — worked, in part, against his peace of mind during the remainder of his stay there. For now thoughts of Dorrie and of her recent declaration and response to him in Townsville rushed in on him unimpeded, and in their new stark clarity demanded endless review of their meaning.

He thought constantly of her and of his visit. Of course she was sick and had been operated on, and was probably still full of drugs; he understood these things and had wanted only to tell her so. He had wanted also to tell her that she did not have to love him then; his love for her was enough for him and she could have that love whenever she wanted it. Yet saying that would have made him sound as if he were taking her words seriously, and he hadn't wanted to do that, could not, in fact, allow himself to do that. Dorrie was still exceedingly sensitive and vulnerable, apparently liable to be agitated by any expression of his feelings for her. Her response

to him had left him feeling helpless, and he had become fearful of hurting her by his love.

But what if Dorrie, despite her illness, had known and meant what she said? She had seemed so fragile and yet so firm and determined to say to him what he could never imagine himself saying to her. No, that was not possible. Mum and Harry would have said something. Al had written that Sister Kathleen told him that Dorrie was already sitting up and even walking about a little with Mum in the hall. Would Dorrie still say what she had said the week before? For a few moments he started working in his mind on a pass back to Townsville. She was better now, and if he saw her again it would be different. She hadn't let him talk the last time and ask the questions he had wanted to, and thinking of it, he became angry with her.

"Damn it, Dorrie, you didn't give me a chance," he cried to himself. She had, in fact, stopped him by silently appealing to his love for her and to the strength which, through her love, she had given him.

They had once said that because of their love each of them could do anything, handle any problem, and never be defeated. Did Dorrie still want him to feel that, despite her declaration?

Such thoughts were an insistent part of his day as he fled the ward to wander restlessly about the corridor and the hospital grounds. He didn't quite know what to do with them; attached to a letter they might distress Dorrie and aggravate her illness. Al had suggested she was getting better, but was she yet ready to accept a quiet profession of his love and the gentlest inquiry as to why she could no longer love him? He didn't know, and could not chance hurting her. Seeing Dorrie again would, of course, be safer; he would be able to judge what he might or might not say. He would never hurt her; he wanted only to serve her and their love for each other. And he could now see himself coming into Dorrie's room — they were both in better shape now and they could talk together sensibly, even kid each other — "You old apple head ..." — as they used to do.

These thoughts, that soared from the heart and travelled imaginatively northward, had little to do with the reality of his situation: he was already tagged and almost packaged, awaiting shipment back to the United States. That had been the decision of the Medical Review Board at the end of his first week at the hospital.

Yet despite the sense of frustration that sometimes overwhelmed him when the reality intruded, he could not help but continue to play with

thoughts of seeing Dorrie again: they comforted him, bringing back the possibilities of the past that he had counted on for the future. So it went on each day, though gradually he was not without thoughts of returning home. He had never been home as a soldier, having been inducted, trained, and shipped overseas without receiving leave. And though he had written home regularly, he had not thought very often of his family during the past two years. Now he thought more about them and about friends and people in the old neighbourhood he would like to see again. He wondered whether Lenny, who had lost an eye in the Aleutians, was home now, and how Willie's folks were managing: what a rotten thing to have happened to him in a training camp.

It was the Dorrie thoughts, however, that preoccupied him, though the anticipation of returning home was increasingly heightened by his impatience with waiting around for the departure orders to be issued. Often he was confused in his feelings, being at once on edge because of the delay yet also not wanting to leave. He still wanted to remain in Brisbane long enough to learn how to deal with Dorrie, but now part of him wanted to free himself, and go home, and flee from the endless thinking about her. Always he knew, though, he was powerless to act, or act the way he wanted to.

He wrote but did not send a love letter to Dorrie on the day before he left for the States aboard a Red-Crossed Kaiser cargo ship. Writing the letter had relieved him, and he accepted willingly the pain it also brought. He did, however, send her a short note saying he was happy to hear that she was feeling better; he, too, was well, though being returned to the United States for further treatment on his legs. He hoped that when she felt up to it, she would write; he gave her his home address.

He left Brisbane the following afternoon. It was very bright and hot, like the day he remembered, almost twenty-two months before, when he had been deposited on the docks at the Port of Melbourne. Then life had stretched out for him with its infinite possibilities. Now he was much less sure of it.

The trip to the Presidio in San Francisco took 23 days.

CHAPTER XIII

Townsville Revisited

The recollection of lost friends and the memories of times long past are part of Slessor's present, filling him with a sense of loss. "There are still fields to meet the morning on," he cries in "The Country Ride," "but those who made them beautiful have gone." "Have gone" — the phrase haunts, as the very present reveals what is precious and missing from the past.

Kenneth Slessor remembers: this is his function as a poet. His is no exalted sense of mission, no role of high priest of the Muse. Slessor does what he has to do, what emotionally he seems compelled to do: he remembers; and in the remembering, he keeps alive people and events which time would move along into death and disappearance.

The Tuesday lecture had been the last one, so he had a full day left in Townsville to wind up his affairs before leaving for Brisbane. He was to visit there for a few hours with Connie, Dorrie's sister, and then continue on to Sydney for a weekend with friends from the University before boarding Qantas for the 15-hour flight to San Francisco.

He was glad, for the most part, that the Townsville lectures were over, and was almost eager now to leave the city; yet he was also grateful that he had another day to wander about. He had not really looked at the Townsville he had returned to. Rather he had used it to project himself into the past and to serve his memory of the time that Dorrie and he had known there together so many years before.

Townsville was a lovely city last year, gleaming white in the summer-spring sun, new, fresh-looking and modern, whose occasional towers and buildings of glass reflected the beauty and blueness of the sky and gently surprised the landscape. It was also a city that seemed to have little to do with him, or with the battered provincial garrison town he remembered; at least he thought so at first. Castle Hill was there, of course, defying time, looming over all, commanding as ever. And so, too, were the sturdy old Post Office, now turreted, and Harry's own Railway Station, more stately now but still bustling. And on a previous stroll from the Travelodge he had seen that the venerable Queen's Hotel still graced the Strand, shining new now and red-bricked and topped with television antennae. Yet the city's very ambience, particularly near its heart along Flinders Street, seemed strange to him at first, and much of what he saw seemed out of focus with the images he had carried so long in his memory.

But as he continued to walk about, re-discovering reference points to his past, and later, in the high sun, to climb slowly up the ancient hill to visit Dorrie's neighbourhood once more, he began to feel that he did belong to the Townsville he had returned to, and that his past was part of the city's present and had made it possible. And feeling this as he moved through the old streets, occasionally closing his eyes and breathing in the soft-scented air, suddenly so familiar to him again, the years came together: the old Townsville with the new; and he thought he could see the beginning of the gleaming white city about which Dorrie had later written.

Even before the Japanese surrender was signed in Tokyo Bay in September 1945, plans had been developed by the Townsville City Council to demolish the air raid shelters and to restore the flower beds on Flinders Street; and within days of the cessation of hostilities they were

put into effect. But weeks before that, merchants along the street, in an orgy of painting and rebuilding, had started to transform their shops and parts of the street at its centre into a sight sparkling and clean. And no less, even earlier, did the possibility of peace begin to show itself in the suburban residential areas radiating around and away from Flinders Street. There the dark grey peeling paint on the pretty wooden houses was sanded away and replaced by bright whites and soft greys and even almond greens; and suddenly light muslin appeared in shining windows that had been stripped of their blackout tape. Everywhere there were freshly washed and painted screens on the open verandahs of houses, and the roofs now gleamed in the tropical sun with new corrugated iron. Even the sturdy stumps on which the houses stood were repainted or whitewashed, and some people had festooned their dunnies with flowers from their gardens.

But the most vivid changes in Townsville had been the disappearance of the long-snouted anti-aircraft guns among which the people had lived so long. Not far from the newly painted houses and freshly planted gardens in Dorrie's neighbourhood in North Ward, the marks of the gun sites remained for a while after the war ended, though the guns themselves had been dismantled and their crews sent north several months before the Japanese surrender. The great tidal wave, the *tsunami*, of Japanese victories that had rushed toward and threatened to engulf Townsville and northeastern Australia in 1942 had long since receded and the Allied wave, of which he and his mates had been a part, had gradually built up to move relentlessly in the opposite direction. Soon, too, even the marks of the guns faded and disappeared as the December rains came, and many of the sites were greened over by patches of minute parks approved by the City Council after the cracked roads of downtown Flinders Street had been repaired and bituminised.

He had known the sites of every gun emplacement and range predictor in Dorrie's neighbourhood. Wandering through its streets on the day before his departure last year, he had looked toward where they had been, still seeing in his mind the nests of webbing and logs and spilling sandbags, and the nasty gleaming metal of the guns. And simultaneously he saw the cluster of kids from the neighbourhood climbing all over and pummelling the bags or positioning themselves behind the guns with the help of the anti-aircraftmen. He had known some of the gunners and hoped that they had made it home, and had gone on to have as good a life as he, with a wife, children and grandchildren. He hoped, too, that the youngsters

had grown up to become men with as fond a memory of the American soldiers as he and other Americans had of them.

He looked for the last time at the neat, empty, paved space where Dorrie's house on Mitchell Street had stood, and started to walk briskly back to town, pausing only on the corner at Eyre Street to stare up the hill at the newly modernised Townsville General Hospital, whose wide glass windows reflected the gold of the late afternoon sun. Had he realised when he came down the hill forty years before that he would never see Dorrie again?

CHAPTER XIV

And Later

Dorrie died in her sleep in a Sydney hospital in 1955, five months short of her 34th birthday in September, and of the anniversary of the Japanese surrender ten years before. She had undergone an emergency operation in February to improve the functioning of her kidney. Responding well to it she had seemed to be progressing toward a period of convalescence in Townsville when her condition suddenly worsened. She rallied especially with the arrival of Harry and Mum, but then gradually declined and died early in the morning of April 15, Easter Sunday. Ron Prior, Connie's husband, writing the same day, notified him.

Sitting on the terrace of his room in the Travelodge, looking out over Cleveland Bay and watching the flickering on of distant lights in the seaside suburb of Pallarenda — there had been mostly bush back there in 1942 — he tried to remember what he felt when he first learned of Dorrie's death. Momentarily, though, his thoughts refused to focus, being content to follow his eyes along the darkening beach to pick out the place halfway between Pallarenda and Kissing Point where Dorrie and he had once picnicked on a bright day, much like the one that was passing now.

He must have received Ron Prior's letter in early May. When Dorrie died it would have been the middle of autumn in Australia, a time still of lushness and warmth in Townsville, but much less so in Sydney, where already the evening winds were sweeping in from the vast Pacific Ocean. Whether this thought was present when he first heard of Dorrie's death, or came afterwards, he no longer knew; but for years thereafter it seemed always to be associated with the first feelings of sadness, and the disbelief that he had been doing other things while Dorrie lay dying or was already dead.

But if Dorrie's death had been a shock to him, he had not been wholly unprepared for the possibility that she might die prematurely. She had indicated as much the year before in response to a question he had asked about that first serious illness in Townsville in 1944. Writing matter-of-factly, she had told him that she had one kidney, which wasn't bad in itself, but because the kidney was nephritic it puffed up a bit on "steep runs" and sometimes had to be "revved up" to keep going. Her condition had prevented her from having children, and that required some adjustment, but other than that, she assured him, she wasn't affected too much — only a few headaches and now and again some swelling of the face, hands and feet. Yes, the condition did mean, according to the doctors, the possibility of a somewhat shorter life expectancy. However, she meant to "show 'em,"

so he shouldn't get any idea that she would be "shuffling off this mortal coil" overnight.

They had kept in touch with each other after the war, writing once or twice a year and hardly ever missing a birthday or holiday greeting. They sometimes even exchanged photographs, his of his children and hers of the Dinsmore clan, and also occasionally sent gifts; one of hers to his youngest daughter, a stuffed koala, now belongs to his granddaughter. During these years Dorrie always seemed high spirited in her letters, complaining only of not having sufficient time to do the many things she wanted to do. She had married after he did and gone to Sydney to work. There she became active in the Clerks' Union, rising eventually to a position of leadership as Vice-President. She also became politically involved as a strong supporter of the Australian Labour Party.

Dorrie had told him little about her husband except that he had been her sister Connie's commanding officer in Townsville at the end of the war, and that he held a managerial position with Qantas. But from her letters he had gained an image of an intelligent and very decent man, somewhat older than Dorrie, who seemed to support her many interests. Her last letter had indicated how important that support had been in helping her to live a full life and to adjust to the fact that she was unable to have children.

It took him a while to answer that letter from Dorrie. Though affected by the letter, written so openly for the first time about her personal life, he put off answering it, largely because it raised questions he no longer wanted or needed to ask. He had stopped thinking many years before about why Dorrie had sent him away. He had, in fact, while still in the service, rationalised an answer: the shock of Dorrie's illness had made her realise that she could never leave her parents, and she had professed a change of feelings toward him because she thought he wouldn't be happy in Australia; he would return, she knew, if she asked him. Nothing in Dorrie's letters had ever encouraged such a rationalisation. Yet he allowed himself to be satisfied with it; it was necessary for him: he had to come to terms with what had happened in the hospital in Townsville. It was not because of pride or a feeling of rejection, but out of a need to recover his bearings as well as his trust in his intuitive self that had turned him toward Dorrie from the moment he had seen her at the Heatley dance. Thus, though he had considered the possibility that Dorrie had meant what she said, he had had to discard it. Hardly ever, though, during this period of

preoccupation with thoughts of Dorrie — and it extended into the beginning of his civilian life — was he certain that he understood the meaning of what had happened.

All these thoughts belonged to a different time and had lost significance for him, but touched by Dorrie's letter about her condition, he suddenly found them returning with new implications he had no will to explore.

He continued to put off answering the letter because his feelings for Dorrie, though enduring, fitted comfortably into his past. And when he finally wrote he referred only briefly to her illness, responding mostly to her mention in a previous letter of a visit to Townsville to care for Mum, who was ill; and telling her that some day he would write about the Townsville they had known together during the war years. Only later did he understand that this promise had been made in place of what he had been unable to ask or say at the time.

Dorrie's reply, just a note and unusually prompt, expressed pleasure with his plan to write about Townsville, but hoped he wouldn't glamorise the city. This was their last correspondence.

He might have written differently, of course, had he known that Dorrie was seriously ill, but what would he have said? What could he have said then? And looking out from the terrace on a lovely Townsville night with a last glittering Cross for his memory high in the heavens, he kept reaching across the years.

That Dorrie had been an important part of his life, and that he would never forget her — that he could have said. It was her feelings for him that had released the flow of his emotional life and engendered in him a deep capacity for love. But could he have said then, as he could now, more than thirty years later, that he loved her? He didn't think so. It was not that he would have ever denied his love for Dorrie; it was just that this love had had no place in his life at that time. He was young then, still able to feel the war years, and anxious to move away from them and to get on with his life, and that revolved around his love for his family and the demands of his work at the University.

Sitting there in the darkness, he marvelled how the years seemed to have turned back on themselves as if to satisfy some predetermined plan. For what he had thought he could put behind him at the beginning of his career, Australia and Dorrie, had conspired to shape the career and ultimately, as he neared its end, to bring him back to Townsville.

He wasn't sure any more of the order of events, but sometime in the early 1960s he began studying the literature of Australia that was then available to him in the collection of Australiana in the University library. He knew little about the literature at the time, having read in Australia years before only the ballads of "Banjo" Paterson, and in New Guinea some short stories by Henry Lawson that Dorrie had sent him. But he had been reading and had become impressed with the quality of a few Australian novels and books of poetry then being published in New York, and he had recently discovered the poetry of Kenneth Slessor in an American paperback anthology of modern poems. The poetry had touched him with its poignant beauty, but the fact that the poet was Kenneth Slessor was also meaningful, pushing him back a bit into the past. Slessor had been a war correspondent with the Australian forces at Finschhafen in New Guinea, not far from where he had once been in the Nadzab-Markham Valley area, and though he had never met Slessor, he knew about him, as did many of the troops, as a "soldier's" reporter who wrote the truth.

Whatever the chronology or reason, sometime toward the middle of his career he started to read widely and deeply in Australian literature, and within a few years was lecturing and writing on the subject. He was to do this for the next two decades, continuing to grow in appreciation of the strength of the literature, while becoming known as one of the literature's informed and sympathetic critics and scholars.

And that's the way his life had finally arranged itself, and had eventually provided the opportunity that would send him back to Townsville. He had known when he accepted the lectureship that he was being moved toward Townsville by forces other than simply academic reward and prestige. Of course he had been aware that ahead of him was not just a series of lectures at the end of a trip halfway around the world in space, but an even longer trip in time, more than halfway back into his life — and he had welcomed it, for the past, once put away, had gradually become part of his present. This had come about naturally, his work in Australian literature serving not only to advance his academic career, but also to add resonance to his life. For as the years passed and his work deepened and broadened, memories of the war years returned and he found himself moving toward them with gratitude. The past now made him feel whole and his work authentic: he had once been part of the Australian earth and had fought to save it. And as for his feelings for Dorrie, long kept at bay and assigned to his youth, these too he could now accept more easily.

It had been good to have come back to the place where, through Dorrie, Australia had first touched him, and good to have tried to look for and remember the Townsville and the life that Dorrie and he had once shared. He had prepared himself only for the lectures, not for the remembering, and sometimes he had been diverted by the effect that Townsville, despite its changes, had had on him. But the days always righted themselves and all had worked out well. The lectures and the remembering had even served each other.

What he had wanted from his memories he wasn't sure: perhaps only a confirmation of the feelings for Dorrie that he had allowed back into his life; this he had found within days of his arrival. And that was all that really counted — his feelings for her, which he had always trusted from the first time he had seen her at the Heatley dance forty years before. And what had happened between them in the hospital, though it had made a difference in their lives, finally hadn't mattered with respect to his love for her. He knew that even before he walked through Dorrie's neighbourhood that afternoon. And knowing that, he didn't have to remember what Dawn, Dorrie's old friend, had told him about Dorrie having learned of her future very early. He no longer had need to remember this and, in remembering, to weep again.

It was late, and if he were to be served dinner, he would have to go downstairs. His last dinner at the Travelodge. Why not call it "The Last Supper," as they did their Thanksgiving feast before he had gone to New Guinea? And for a moment, over the gulf of memory he imagined he heard Dorrie's laughter.

Except for the sea that was always clean and bright, he had never seen the Townsville that Dorrie had remembered for him from before the war. But as the plane rose up over the city the following morning, he noticed for the first time that the hawks, whose disappearance during the war years had saddened Dorrie, had returned to fly high over Townsville, patrolling again the upper reaches of Castle Hill.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

Prologue

1. James Cook University is situated 10 kilometres from the centre of the city on a spacious campus at the foot of Mt Stuart not far from what is now, to the north, a sprawling collection of suburbs. During World War II the area was the vast open site of the 4th Air Depot of the United States Army Air Force that serviced hundreds of bombers, fighters, and transport planes operating against the Japanese.
2. The Battle of the Coral Sea (May 7-8, 1942) was fought in a wondrous stretch of tranquil and iridescent waters northeast of Townsville near the dragon's tail of New Guinea. There, aircraft from the American carriers *Lexington* and *Yorktown*, supported by Australian and American land-based planes from Townsville and neighbouring Charters Towers, intercepted a Japanese invasion force.

Chapter I Flinders Street, and Dorrie

1. Participation in overseas wars was legally and traditionally limited to those who volunteered; their military service, if it were not with the Air Force or the Navy, was with the Australian Imperial Force (the AIF). Conscription was solely for the purpose of building an army for home defence, and conscripts were assigned to the Citizens Military Force (CMF) to serve within Australia and those territories adjacent to it needed for Australia's defence. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and invaded New Guinea three months later, some of the distinction between the two forces began to blur, as did the glamour associated with the volunteer AIF and their disdain for the home guard "chocolate soldiers" of the CMF. In New Guinea, an outnumbered and inexperienced CMF fought heroically by itself until joined by units of the veteran AIF that had been reluctantly let go by the British so that they could return to defend their homeland. This was in August 1942, three months after he had arrived in Townsville and after Japanese conquests in the North had freed Japanese troops to overwhelm the Indies and move swiftly toward Australia. With the AIF and the CMF fighting side by side in New Guinea, and with men from each force serving with units of the other, appreciation of the CMF's worth increased and sharp differences between the forces, even the superior

AIF pay and privileges, began to disappear. He saw no distinction between them when he arrived in New Guinea in December.

Chapter II The War a World Away

1. Prime Minister of Australia, 1939-1941 and 1949-1966.
2. As at Bardia, so at Tobruk, the defenders included Townsville men fighting as part of the 9th Australian Division. Termed the "Rats of Tobruk" by an angered Berlin broadcaster, an epithet proudly adopted thereafter by the division, the "Rats" had withstood a series of punishing German and Italian assaults for six months, thwarting Rommel in his drive to Egypt and his ultimate prize, the British oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. Battered but unconquerable, the 9th division eventually withdrew, unsung except by their mates in the field: there had been disagreement between Australian and British commands about the division's relief, and "official" praise from the latter, though much deserved, was peevishly withheld. Rested and reorganised in Palestine, the division was returned to action in July 1942 to cover the defence of Cairo and the coastal sector at El Alamein in northern Egypt. This was while Townsville was being bombed.

The poet-journalist Kenneth Slessor covered the action at El Alamein and his experience there inspired "Beach Burial," one of World War II's most memorable poems.

Some of Townsville's first group of volunteers, from before 1940, were still part of the 6th Australian Division that had to retreat at Thermopylae. The division, the victors at Bardia a few months before and of much of the area that the 9th had to defend against the Axis's counterattack in April, had been sent to Greece as part of an expeditionary force for a Churchill-inspired campaign.

Unfortunately, the campaign had underestimated German strength, with the result that Greece was bloody, with thousands of Australian, British, Greek and New Zealand casualties. Unforeseen, though, the determined Allied effort forced Hitler to delay his Operation Barbarossa (the invasion of Russia), a delay that caused the Germans to confront the Russian winter.

3. Survey of public opinion published by Professor A.P. Elkin of Sydney University in August 1941.

4. Townsville's champion tennis player Squadron Leader Angus Smith was in one of them.
5. An editorial in the newspaper, *West Australian*.

Chapter III The War at Hand

1. Japan signed a Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy on September 27, 1940.
2. At Tobruk and Benghazi in North Africa.
3. Responding before Pearl Harbor to Australian anxiety about the Japanese threat, and to a request for the release and return to Australia of some units of the AIF fighting in the Middle East, Winston Churchill had promised the Australians that the British would do all that was necessary to secure Singapore and to protect the ocean lanes to Australia. To Australia's interim Prime Minister Arthur Fadden, Churchill vowed that "We [the British] shall never let you down if real danger comes." (A telegram, August 31, 1941, issued through the Secretary of State for Dominions.)

The battle for Singapore started on February 8, 1942, and ended a week later when, the city's water supply being already in Japanese hands, and the civilian population numbed from the constant bombardment, the British Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival, the General Officer in Command in Malaya, capitulated. The conquest of all of Malaya, of which Singapore was the last but vital part, had taken a little longer, the Japanese having landed on the peninsula's northeast coast a day after Pearl Harbor and needing but two months to advance southward down its centre and along its coasts before crossing the causeway into Singapore.

Reasons for the disaster were many, but they had to do, at least in part, with British miscalculation of Japanese air strength, with inadequate combat training for many of the garrison Indian and British troops, with some indecisive and passive leadership among the British command, and with the unbelievable vulnerability of the "impregnable" Singapore. In disbelief, Churchill later wrote [in *The Second World War*] "... there were no permanent fortifications covering the landward side of the naval base and of the city ... and no measures ... to construct field defences ... [the commanders] had not even mentioned the fact that they did not exist."

When the British capitulated at Singapore, the Japanese captured 130,000 British, Indian, and Australian troops. This was a defeat that

might be likened to that of the Germans by the Russians. More than 15,000 of those captured were Australians, of whom almost a third were to die in Japanese prison camps. Always outnumbered and frequently split up by the British command, the brigades of the 8th division of the AIF had fought with distinction to save Singapore, suffering at one time in less than a month, casualties exceeding 1700 men killed and 1300 wounded. That some of the division, hastily trained replacements, new to the AIF and to the division itself, were guilty of dereliction of duty after the capitulation when the Japanese pressured Singapore through its suburbs, could not blemish the memory of the thousands of others, including 130 army nurses, whose steadfastness won the respect even of the enemy.

In proportion to Australia's population, the 15,000 troops including Townsville men lost at Singapore (of whom nearly a third were to die of disease, starvation, and ill treatment), were equivalent to a loss of 300,000 by the United States. Prime Minister Curtin saw Singapore's loss as Australia's Dunkirk, and noted that just as Dunkirk had initiated the Battle for Britain, so the fall of Singapore had opened up the Battle for Australia.

Chapter IV Bombs on Australia

1. When it transported a wretched band of convicts to Sydney Cove in 1787, the Crown had intended no nation to emerge ultimately with flapping flags in 1901. And no sense of the high purpose or mission that had accompanied the start of Cook's voyage of discovery twenty years before was present when the First Fleet set sail with a thousand convicts and their jailers. The convicts and New Holland, as Australia was then called, were simply part of the Crown's plan "to remove the inconvenience which arose from the crowded state of the gaols." American independence in 1783 had cut off those colonies as a dumping ground for England's surplus convicts, and the Crown, until their removal, had "crammed [them] into 'temporary' accommodations in hulks moored in the Thames estuary and at Portsmouth."

Such was the beginning of Australia — a place of exile, a convict colony established for sordid and expedient reasons. Certainly this situation promised little toward the development of an independent nation; even less toward the development of an indigenous Australian poetry which would embrace the land. The Australian balladists were to contribute to making both possible.

2. The caption accompanying the Department of Information's photograph in the *Townsville Bulletin* of the bombed Darwin harbour and the burning *U.S. Peary* did not refer to American casualties. They were many, not only aboard the *Peary*, but also in the air where U.S. Army Air Corps Kittyhawks, surprised by the attack, were shot down before they could fully engage the Japanese.

In addition to the *Peary*, the cruisers *Boise* and *Houston* (later sunk off Java) were among other American warships operating in Darwin waters at the time, escorting convoys to Timor, 400 miles to Darwin's northwest in the Netherlands Indies, which the Japanese were preparing to invade.

Part of the reason for the heavy damage to allied shipping in Darwin harbour, and for the large number of casualties among the civilian wharf workers, was the congestion of ships and personnel at the waterfront, a congestion caused by labour problems which had contributed to the slow handling of cargo. Fortunately, some American merchant ships, loaded with guns and artillery ammunition scheduled for delivery at Darwin, escaped the attack because they had been held up at Townsville waiting for the congestion to clear.

3. Among the Australian leaders who talked of invasion and contributed to the idea of Australia's peril were J.A. Beasley, Minister for Supply and Development; H.V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs; F.M. Forde, Minister for the Army; and W.J. Makin, Minister for the Navy. That they sounded this note for what they thought to be legitimate reasons (to rouse the public and/or to gain support from the Allies) is not to be doubted.

The possibility of an invasion of the mainland and ways to deal with it had been discussed by Australian military leaders even before the outbreak of the Pacific war. After the Japanese attack their ideas were further developed in a plan by the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces (Sir Iven McKay). He proposed that in the event of an attempted invasion, an industrial and economic region deemed vital to the war effort (extending from Brisbane, 800 miles south of Townsville, to Melbourne, another thousand miles south) be protected by the bulk of Australia's troops even if, as a result, more isolated, less vital areas to the north (viz., Townsville) were left unprotected to the extent that they might have to submit to temporary occupation by the Japanese. Subsequently rejected ("it is the policy of the Government ... to defend the whole of the populated areas of Australia ..."), McKay's proposal, later referred to as "The Brisbane Line," became a subject of political controversy in October 1942, but people in Townsville had picked up rumours of it as early as February, and it contributed to their anxiety and confusion.

Chapter VI General MacArthur

1. Officially called "The Australian Base Section: Northern Half of Queensland — Headquarters Townsville."
2. On the hill behind Dorrie's house in the North Ward.

Chapter VII The Winter Garden

1. Won the Design Award of the Australian Institute of Architects.

Chapter X Finnerty and Rockhampton

1. In "Five Bells."

In 1942 Herbert Jaffa arrived in Townsville, a sleepy provincial city transformed by war and the threat of Japanese invasion. An American enlisted man fresh from college, he served several months in a Signals Unit in Hermit Park, and fell in love with a local girl. He was transferred to active service in New Guinea, and eventually invalided home to the United States.

Many years later, now a Professor at New York University, Herbert Jaffa was invited to Townsville to lecture on the Australian poet Kenneth Slessor. The peaceful and prosperous city awakened bittersweet memories of wartime Townsville, and of his engagement to Dorrie.

Herbert Jaffa has recaptured these memories, separated by thirty years, in a haunting account of a young man in love and a city at war.



Cover design by David Lloyd, incorporating a wartime photograph "Picnic at Pallarenda" from the Arch Fraley World War Two Collection, displayed at the Coral Sea '92 Headquarters in Townsville in 1992, and reproduced by kind permission of the photographer. The period is contemporary, but the subjects of the photograph bear no relation to the characters in the book.