Review of Frederick Goss' "Never Never Telegraphist"

This description of service as a Telegraph Operator on the Northern Section of the Overland Telegraph, and covering the years 1878 to 1903, was published in serial form (10 parts) by TELECOM in 1978.

It is by far, the most accurate and detailed description of work and living conditions in the "Top end" of the Northern Territory that I have read. As such it is a most interesting and historically valuable document.

I have spent some time checking the memoirs with various other sources and find very little about them to criticise. If, as has been stated the memoirs were written from memory in 1956, when Mr Goss was 94 years old, then it was a remarkable effort and the errors of one or two years in the timing of events understandable.

C Leonard
AUGUST 1980

LIFE IN THE NEVER NEVER COUNTRY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA IN THE 70s to 90s

By a Telegraph Operator

This little booklet is a record, from memory, of twenty-four years (1978-1903) residence and experiences in the Overland Telegraph Line.

The incidents recorded were everyday happenings, pertaining to a life of little dramatic importance. Detailed dates have not been given. For the few historic events recorded, correct dates have been secured from official records. The sequence of years is correct.

The generation of today knows little of the life in that country at that time. Its rough hard living, its trying climate, its malaria, its lack of social and domestic amenities, and its temptations, summed up a life that was not for moral weaklings, but a job for men who were prepared to do pioneering that must always precede successful opening of new country.

FG
1956, aged 94 years

CONTENTS

Part I; 1878 – 1887

ADELAIDE TO PALMERSTON

Early January 1887, I left Adelaide for Port Darwin. I was learning the trades of goldsmith and jeweller at Henry Steiner's of Rundle Street, Adelaide, where GJ Coles Store is now located.

Being in delicate health in early life, I was medically advised, at the age of 16 years, to go to a warmer climate. I obtained permission to leave my trade after serving two years at it. With my mother and two-step brothers, I sailed to join my stepfather, who partly owned a lighter in Port Darwin. To avoid confusion in names, let me explain at once that Port Darwin now was Port Darwin then, but the Darwin of today was Palmerston and remained so for several years.

We sailed from Port Adelaide in a Dutch steamer of about 1,800 tons, named the "Aejeh" (Captain Van der Gevel) with Dutch officers and a Malay crew. We were just a month on the trip, less two days spent in Sydney and another two on Thursday Island, the only breaks in our journey. Sydney not, of course, the Sydney of today. Circular Quay was ankle deep, or over, in mud. The ferry to North Sydney, then called the North Shore, was a double-ended barge, square toed at each end. I went aboard. The only other passenger was a cow, and the cargo a bale of hay. After a long wait and no other passenger appearing, we crossed over to a muddy landing.

In the market, then located at the opposite corner of Park Street, and separated from that street by the Town Hall, I saw bananas for the first time. I asked the girl attendant what they were. She told me, and obligingly ate one at my expense as an object lesson.

There was no Central Railway Station, the nearest station being Redfern.

It was an uneventful voyage, but interesting, especially inside the Great Barrier Reef. The calm sea, the numerous islands of assorted sizes dotted around, with many signals showing passages for ships to take. Even then it seemed incredible that anyone could keep the correct course with such a network of islands and signal marks to confuse him. A number of wrecks were seen inside the Barrier, with the hulls mostly submerged and the masts pointing at all angles.

These had a depressing effect on the beholder and suggested that there was room there for a lot more wrecks. Ultimately we got to Torres Straits, and around to Thursday Island, generally known as TI Here for the first time was the smell, the feel and the atmosphere of the Pacific and the Tropics. Everything tended to add to this effect, the humid heat, and the diverse nationality of its people. Chinese, Japanese, Kanakas, Cingalese, Natives, Indians and Malays; a mixture that was puzzling at first. Many of these came to the steamer with their wares to sell; pearl shell, pearl ornaments, native weapons and many other things.

There was no jetty at TI the ship had to lay off about a mile from the shore.

The island is flat, not at all interesting, about six miles long and two miles wide. Most of the buildings were of galvanised iron without any attempt at decoration or finish, mere barns. The Hotel was a stone building, kept by Mrs McNully.

Billiard Saloons, conducted by Malays, seemed more numerous than any other class of public buildings. Thursday Island must have been a fairly busy shipping port; at times it was a gravitating centre for ships from India, from the Eastern Coast of Australia, for New Guinea and the surrounding Islands.

We now started on the last stages of our voyage across the Gulf of Carpentaria and arrived at Port Darwin Heads nearly three days later.

The entrance to the bay is narrow, it is between two heads; something like Sydney Heads, but they are only about a quarter of the Sydney Heads distance apart. The entrance opens out into the bay, which is a kind of irregular circle, and said to be eight miles across. On our left as we passed in, we had a good view of the South side of Palmerston, situated on the cliff, showing the Hospital, the Club Hotel, the OT and BAT offices and buildings and the Government Residence.

The steamer fired a gun on entering the Heads, to notify the populace. There were no regular mail steamers in those days. The day of our arrival became a gala day for everybody. It was said that there was one interval of nine months without a visiting ship. Several months between was common, if not usual. I landed with others at the Gulnare Jetty. My first impression was an unpleasant feeling of stifling heat. This became more pronounced as we toiled up to the town. Had I been at liberty to do so I would have gone on by the same steamer. The time of the year was the hottest part of the season. The wet season was so cloudy and humid that thermometers did not register the temperature experienced in the more Southern parts.

The layout of the town was somewhat scattered, or the scattered buildings made it appear so. There were many vacant allotments. In addition to the buildings already mentioned there were two European general stores, four hotels, of which one, the Palmerston Club, was considered the chief, two banks, English and Scottish and the Commercial, a Methodist and a Catholic Church, Government Offices and Police Station.

In the Chinese quarters of the town, there were twenty or thirty Chinese stores. Some time later the law permitted Chinese to land, and soon thereafter, a whole street became lined on both sides with Chinese shops.

Until that time vegetables, fish and meat were short. The influx of Chinese altered all that when fish and vegetable markets were regularly held. Meat was the chief difficulty. There was soup and bonilli in four-pound tins, a tasteless product, I believe of French preserving, and there was butter in 1lb tins, whose second name, both by appearance and taste, was cart grease.

There was no proper jetty in Palmerston in those days. There was a substitute for one called the Gulnare Jetty, made up of a part of a hull of a ship that had been wrecked on

the beach near the Point. All of the superstructure had gone and the lower part of the hull, full of rubble and stones served the purpose for boats and such small craft. Larger ships had to anchor about a quarter of a mile off the Point. My stepfather and his partner owned a ten-ton lighter. The partner was called Spanish Charlie. The name of the lighter, the "Lepanto", seemed to account for one another.

Charlie was a dandy when on shore; always wore a white suit, a silk shirt and tie, a red cummerbund and a panama hat. His appearance was somewhat marred by the loss of his nose, which gave to his face a somewhat skully look. He was a very good and respectable citizen.

I worked on the lighter for a time, bringing cargo from the ships to the shore, then from there to Southport, and enjoyed myself, and would, I think have settled down to the life, but my stepfather thought different, saying that I was not up to that life, and the life was not fit for me.

The population of Palmerston consisted of a large proportion of Government Officials. Customs, Lands, and other officials connected with different Government Departments, Police and Harbour Officers, but in addition there was the B.A.T. staff (British Australian Telegraph Co) and the OT staff (Overland Telegraph). These were always known by their initials, and the Government Resident (GR) and his staff.

The Overland Telegraph Line was commenced in September 1870, and completed on 22nd August 1872, covering a distance of 2,140 miles from Adelaide to Port Darwin. Business was transferred to the B.A.T., both offices being in the same building with a dividing wall broken by a small opening about 18 inches square, with two glass doors, one on each side of the wall, through which the business was passed from one to the other.

The cable was connected directly with Singapore, via Banjiewangie-Java.

The Overland Telegraph Line was divided by a departmental arrangement into three sections; the Southern Section from Adelaide to Charlotte Waters, the Central Section from charlotte Waters to Powell's Creek and the Northern Section from Powell's Creek to Darwin. The stations being approximately 150 to 200 miles apart, each section being independent of the other.

The dividing line being as the permanent water would permit, halfway between any two stations. These inland stations were not post offices, but telegraph repairing stations, fully equipped for the work. Palmerston, Southport and Pine Creek were Post Offices.

The Katherine, Daly Waters and Powell's Creek were not, because there were no mails and nobody to make use of them. The station staff consisted, at the time of which I write, was a stationmaster, an assistant, a cook, a shepherd, and three or four linesmen, teamsters etc. The telegraph poles were all of local timber. Faults were fairly frequent, owing to fires, floods, lightning, hornets' nests, cobwebs and other pests, including white ants. When a fault occurred which interrupted the traffic or even slowed it down, there was one collective aim, and that was to get communications restored. Long distances without water, or flooded creeks, or boggy country, would not be accepted as excusing any

avoidable delay. The Senior Officer of the Palmerston Section told me that South Australian Government was under a penalty of five hundred pounds to the Cable Company for every twenty-four hours the OT line was interrupted.

The Cable Company was under a different set of obligations. When their cable became interrupted through a submarine upheaval, which was not frequent (I remember three such occasions), our Department would interview the captain of any steamer entering the port and would inquire if he was open for charter to Banjiewangie, or Singapore. If he answered, “Yes”, good, “How much for the single or preferably the round trip?” “So much”, “Right, when can you be ready?” That was all and the Cable Company had to foot the bill. The one in charge of the delayed business and his staff would have a nice little holiday, though it didn’t come my way. A company repair steamer, (there were three) probably at New Zealand, would proceed direct to the trouble, the mileage to which could be accurately measured. It might take a fortnight or even more to restore communication, and I understood that this chartering procedure would be repeated with any other ship or ships that might turn up.

Once a year there was a Government Ball in Palmerston. All those whose names were in the visitor’s book at the Residency received an invitation on these occasions. A man with an accordion, from Southport, a store-man named Spurgeon, was sent for to furnish the music for the entertainment.

As Spurgeon only played by ear and only knew a limited number of tunes, it was not very helpful, but everybody made the best of it and probably enjoyed themselves as much as if they were dancing to a Broadwood.

There was one story in connection with a ball before my time. I do not vouch for it but considering the place and the people, however, it is quite feasible. It was early morning following the evening’s festivities. All of the guests except two had left; one of these was a B.A.T. man and the other the local magistrate.

The latter certainly needed assistance to get home. Both had looked on the wine when it was red. The B.A.T. man looked around and found a wheelbarrow. Seating Dickie, the magistrate, on the barrow with his legs hanging over the front, one on each side of the wheel, away they went. There was only three or four hundred yards to go. When they arrived at Dickie’s door, the B.A.T. man said, “Now Dickie, hop out. I’m tired and sleepy and want to go to bed – are you alright? Good. So long,” and picking up the barrow he returned it to where he had got it, and went home to bed, not knowing that when he had arrived at the magistrate’s place, Dickie was not in the barrow. He had perhaps fallen out or had possibly met with disaster.

An early pedestrian found Dickie reposing happily on a heap of hard mud sods left by the Councilmen, and helped him home.

SOUTHPORT

The River Blackmore, 25 miles from Palmerston, running South East, was about half a mile wide at its mouth in the harbour, but gradually narrowed, reach by reach, until at Southport it was only forty yards wide.

The trip was an interesting one. I applied for a position in the Post Office and in the meantime made several trips in the lighter to Southport. The scenery was good when the tide was high and covered the mud and snaky appearance of the mangrove roots. But at low tide it was not a very lovely sight, nor did the river produce a pleasant smell.

Plenty of crocodiles were to be seen sunning themselves on the mud banks, apparently dead, judging from their immovability. Some of them would slither down into the water at the sight of the lighter, but others took no notice. Any of them, however, would have become awake and active enough if a man had fallen overboard anywhere in their neighbourhood.

Southport was 45 miles from Palmerston by land, which route was seldom used. Southport was the starting place for all teams, horse or bullock, engaged in carting or loading inland to the gold diggings or to the telegraph stations further south.

It was quite a busy little town in its way. There were two stores, two pubs, blacksmith shop, and saddler's shop, Police Station and the Post and Telegraph Office and a very good jetty with a useful crane. The latter being a necessity on account of the excessive rise and fall of the tides, about twenty five feet.

There was a Mr Lindsay Crawford at Southport, who had been in the Telegraph Service as Stationmaster at Powell's Creek. Thinking he could better himself at storekeeping, he opened a store, the second in the town, and gave me a job as assistant. With him I put in a couple of months before he closed down. One day he asked me if I could ride. "Yes," I said promptly. "Oh," said he, "Where did you learn to ride?" "I never learned," I said, "But I can." He looked at me with an amused smile and said, "Right, a few of us are going to ride to Tumbling Waters tomorrow – Sunday – and if you like you can ride Gypsy, and come with us." Of course I accepted the offer. Gypsy was a grey mare, and equine factotum not over young, but useful in saddle or harness.

The next day we assembled for our ride and somehow I found myself on Gypsy, but not quite clear how I got there. We started off at a walking pace, and I was confirmed in my opinion of my riding ability, until, whether prearranged or not, I don't know, but without a word they started off at a canter. Gypsy started with them but not to stay. Startled by the unknown load on her back, she left the party and galloped through the bush towards Tumbling Waters. I had lost my reins and stirrups and was hanging on to the pommel of the saddle, scared to death, until Gypsy, reaching the bank of the river, had perforce to stop, unless she broke her neck, by tumbling down on the rocks of Tumbling Waters. The party then came up and reorganized matters and shed a lot of mock sympathy on me. On the return trip they were more considerate about me and we got back O.K. I was nervous with horses for a long time after that.

One day a lighter came from Palmerston with loading, of which rice composed the greater part. She was alongside the jetty. The bank of the river declined sharply from under the jetty, down to the riverbed. Whether the boat was not properly secured or not, I don't know, but as the tide receded during the night, the boat canted over until she lay on her side with her masts stretched out towards the opposite bank. Fortunately it was discovered, but only just in time. The alarm went out, every man in town turned out, all worked like beavers at the crane, getting the cargo out; it was done and the lighter brought to an even keel again. Had the incoming tide caught her canted over it would have been an end to the boat and her cargo.

My boss and the goldfield's mail contractor had a small wooden cottage near the river and I joined them. The living was not bad, meat rather short, but there was plenty of game and fish. I ate sweet potatoes for the first time and liked them. The Blackmore, like most rivers in the NT was full of crocodiles. The chief store (Adcock's) was built partly on piles over the edge of the water with double doors, opening over the water for the convenience of lighters discharging their cargo directly into the store. From this doorway, I had frequently stood firing shots at a croc that regularly paraded up and down in front of the store. Probably got scraps out of refuse thrown in the river from the store.

There was only about an inch or two of his back showing above the water. Every time I hit the only part visible, the croc would sink quietly out of sight and few seconds later would reappear 20 or 30 yards further on. It would then turn around and come back and the performance would be repeated, but I never got him. One man was drowned in the river before my time, his body was recovered but without a hand that had been taken off by a croc.

The store proved a failure and Crawford again joined the Telegraph Department, and went inland, and about the same time I was appointed Junior Assistant at Southport Post and Telegraph Office, pro tem at 3/- salary with 4/- per day subsistence allowance. This last went, of course, to the Postmaster, with whom I had to board. So I entered on a job that lasted for fifty years.

I started at once to learn telegraphy, and I soon was as expert as was possible at that particular Post Office. The Postmaster, who could not read by sound, looked with disfavour on one who was ignorant enough to think that sound was faster and more sure than tape. He would not allow me to practice it. In the meantime an interruption to the line occurred between Southport and the next station, The Shackle. I was sent out with a linesman t get a lesson on work of which I should have much to do in the future. As I could not read by sound, it was arranged, that when I 'spoke' from a shackle and single dots were sent to me, I was to go on, but if double dots were sent, it meant that the party from the other station had cleared the fault, and that I could return to my station.

When operators wish to 'speak' on the line they can choose where there is a shackle. This contrivance is made of specially shaped insulators, fixed about twelve inches apart by iron straps. The telegraph line is cut, and each end is fastened around one of the insulators. This is a permanent arrangement, but of course no current can pass. To overcome this a piece of line wire, about eighteen inches long is fixed to the telegraph line, one end on

each side of the shackle, thus forming a bridge by which the electric current passes over the gap. Now when the operator wishes to ‘speak’, he unfastens one end of the bridge and leaves it clear of the telegraph line - then he attaches his instrument, by its two wires, one each side of the shackle and the instrument and its wires take the place of the bridge and he can do his speaking. When finished, he closes the bridge, disconnects his wires and instrument; the whole only occupies two or three minutes.

In outback places, these shackles are placed in the lowest part of the sag in the line between two telegraph poles. This would be nine or ten feet from the ground. By throwing a cord or bridle rein over the wire, he can pull the shackle gently down to within his reach and when finished he can let it go easily back again. These shackles are placed at all permanent water holes or camping places, but in any case not more than ten miles apart.

Although I was now settled in a job, I was not quite satisfied and didn’t like office work. I had heard so many tales about life in the Never-Never that I was anxious to go there, my desire being accentuated in 1879 on the arrival of Mr Alexander Forrest and his party, overland from Western Australia. These people looking so like what I imagined hardy pioneers and such like people ought, and who did things.

There was a weekly mail service from Southport to Pine Creek, the limit them of the auriferous country. In the dry season by coach, and in the wet by pack horse, these mails on reaching Southport, were sent on to Palmerston two or three times a week in a launch. I might mention here that there were a good many perks for the postmaster in those days that were promptly nipped off when the Commonwealth took over the Department. For instance the PM received a commission on the sale of stamps. He received half the commission charged on money orders, and the fees for private mail bags, at two guineas a year, went into the PM’s pocket, and within the limit of the NT we did not use postage stamps on our correspondence. These and other little inducements to men, including the subsistence allowance of 4/- per day north of the Katherine, were dropped and the Department supplied the inland stations with food and stores.

The goldfields were in the vicinity of Pine Creek, about 150 miles from the coast, and were both alluvial and reef. Heavy consignments of gold were sometimes received by the weekly mail. In this connection I may relate the circumstances attending the only gold robbery I ever knew in the NT July 1880.

It was as follows – our Southport policeman had been transferred inland and a new unknown police constable, named Stone, was sent from Palmerston. He was an immediate success, popular with everybody, and particularly with the fair sex. Among other privileges that were not normally extended to police, he gained a friendly footing with the PM’s family circle. Well, one weekend brought the usual package of gold in the mail, and one, the largest, was from a Police Constable on the goldfields, named Fopp, and these were, of course, locked in the PO safe until the morning. That night the PM and the Constable sat up rather late card playing. In the morning the safe door was found open and all the gold parcels gone. Of course a great stir and Stone made it pretty clear that he suspected a certain Chinese storekeeper. One night, a little later on, he dug up the wrappers of the gold packages in the garden of the Chinese storekeeper.

He was instructed to bring his man to Palmerston and a man would be sent to Southport to relieve him during his absence. This man and Stone passed each other on the Blackmore. It transpired later that the relief man was not at all satisfied that Stone was on the right track regarding the robbery, and he must have had his suspicions, because on entering the Police Station, one of his first proceedings was to search Stone's cottage, where he found the gold at the bottom of a clothes chest. Mr Stone, receiving an invitation from His or Her Majesty, was retired from private life for some time.

Now occurred an incident, which helped in my desire to go inland. Mr Todd (he was not yet Sir Charles) invented a new insulator, or perhaps I should say an improvement to the old. The improvement was designed to lessen the number of faults caused by the breakage of the ordinary insulator by lightning, faults which were very frequent in the tropics, but were negligible in more temperate localities. A supply of these was sent from Adelaide for our Palmerston Senior to test.

As there was no one else available, I was deputed to undertake the job. I was given two men, a dray and horses and a load of new insulators. I had to install 10 miles of them and see what happened. I was strictly enjoined to carefully test each insulator before using it, and for this purpose I was supplied with a battery and a galvanometer.

It seemed a peculiar thing that not one of those insulators showed a sign of leakage when tested singly, but showed an alarming leakage when 200 of them were tested on the line circuit. Of course to the official mind, anxious to make them a success, the cause of the trouble was apparent. They had not been carefully tested according to the instructions given to me. I was therefore ordered to take them off and put on another lot and to make sure of them being properly tested. This was done, with the same result as before.

A change was indicated and a Mr Johnson, who was the Stationmaster at Yam Creek (commonly known as The Shackle), was instructed to take on the job and I was sent to The Shackle to relieve him for this purpose. This officer was a particularly careful man in all he did. If he could not make a success of the new insulators, nobody else could – that could be taken for granted. Well, the result was a foregone conclusion to me. I proved to be right. His work turned out precisely as mine. That was the death knell of the new insulators. Mr Johnston then being appointed to some other work, I remained at The Shackle nearly two years before being relieved.

Tumbling Waters, five miles south of Southport, was the terminus of the Blackmore River, but there appeared to be a stream coming from further south, and tumbling over some rocks, emptied itself into the tidal river. Hence the name. There was bush pub there kept by an old man and his wife, named McDonald. All teams leaving Southport always tried to make that five-mile stage in the evening, so they could get an early start the next morning. Teamsters were not as a rule drinkers, consequently the Macs gained a precarious existence. Well, Mrs Mac died and was buried in the backyard by her husband. It was not reported.

It was several days before the police got wind of the affair. The constable inquired if I would care to go with him to look into the matter. He took a coffin out in a cart, and I rode horseback. The old lady was exhumed. She was wrapped in a blanket which her husband

asserted would not be needed if she were to have a coffin. He was over-ruled by the police.

She was placed in the casket and lifted into the dray. Mac jumped up into the dray, sat on the coffin, struck a match on the side of it, lit the pipe, and said, “Right-oh!” I could not help thinking that this poor old soul, unloved, unwanted, and thrown into a hole as one would bury a dog, was once a young woman, full of life, hope and bright dreams which were never realised.

There was little or no traffic between Palmerston and Southport by land. When I did get the chance to make the trip, I did so and lost the track several times and might easily have been bushed altogether.

The Methodist minister stationed in Palmerston, Mr Hanton, I think was his name, had made one of his periodical visits to the goldfields and other localities. When returning, he had a bad attack of malaria. On reaching Southport, he was strongly urged to leave his horse and goods at the launch. He could not do this because he needed the horse in Palmerston, and as there was little chance of getting it taken there, he decided to risk the 45-mile journey. He started off and travelled 18 miles to a creek named Elizabeth.

After a rest, a pot of tea and perhaps a sleep, he saddled up and rode straight back to Southport. He did not discover his mistake before he saw the Police Station and Post Office, the first buildings he would see. That finished him, so he decided to take the launch back to Palmerston, but was troubled about the horse. The PM asked me if I would like the trip and take the horse through for him. Of course I agreed, and so I made the journey. I had a day or two in Palmerston and then returned by launch.

There was another bush pub 18 miles south, called Collett’s Creek, kept by a man named Ted Holmes, who lived there, alone. Its trade and usefulness was about on par with that of Tumbling Waters. One day, just before I left for The Shackle, he was found dead with his skull smashed. It must have been the work of natives because there was no one else to do it. Still it seemed that nothing could be done about it, but to bury the body.

Southport, Tumbling Waters and Collett’s Creek were blotted out by the building of the railway. Probably long before this, the tropical vegetation had claimed its own. It might even be difficult to find any trace of the town of Southport, unless it is in the decaying remains of the old jetty.

In the game season, geese would fly honk honking over the town. They were coming from the North East and going South West, too high for a gun. I used to fire rifle shots at them. I got one. One morning, after the night before, a man came to the office from the town and said to me, “was it you firing shots last night?” I said he, “One of your bullets came down and killed one of Brown’s pigs.” That seemed strange to me, because I always fired towards the bush, where pigs could not be. Besides that I did not think that Brown or anybody else in Southport had pigs.

My informant added, “Brown is coming along directly to see you about it.” Brown, I should observe, was the Hotel keeper. Sure enough, a little later, I saw him coming so I prepared

my defence. Brown arrived. Asked for me. Now for it, I said as I came out. His attitude was not that of a man after my blood or the price of a pig.

“Look here, Fred,” he said (I was Fred to one and all in those days), “But it will be rather expensive. I have no means of melting gold and would have to make it out of a sovereign. It would cost you 30/-.” “That’s all right. When can I have it?” “Give me the size and you can have it the next day.”

Brown had been to Adelaide and brought back a barmaid with him. This apparently was the outcome. I got my thirty shillings and the pig. We remained in peace.

THE SHACKLE

The Yam Creek Post Office (generally know as The Shackle) was a small wooden slab building about 115 miles from Palmerston (which is now Darwin). Its staff was made up of the Postmaster, a linesman plus half a dozen horses.

The road, what there was of it, ran along a valley, and the township occupied the rising ground on either side. It consisted of a Police Station (Corporal Masters and two constables), a goldfield Warden with his quarters and Office, and the Doctor, when there was one, who shared the Warden's house.

On the North Bank, on the opposite side of the valley, were the Post Office and the Hotel, the latter being kept by an Italian called Bernardi. One of his claims for consideration was that he was the owner of two Timor ponies, and was very generous in lending them to anyone wishing to pop over to Port Darwin Camp or to the Margaret Gold Rush. These ponies are truly wonderful little beasts. They are diminutive horses, altogether different from the more popularly known apple dumpling Shetland ponies. These, although smaller, would carry a man all day over any country and were as sure-footed as a goat.

About a quarter of a mile away lived an old prospector, who got a precarious living at his job. He spent his money in drink, and had no thought for the future. He was a German, named Heiser, who had a beautiful tenor voice, which brought him a good many drinks. Unfortunately after one such spree, whether from remorse or from a touch of the DTs he committed suicide, by chopping off his left hand with a tomahawk.

This was the whole population, the reason being that The Shackle had been a goldfield. As the Overland Telegraph Line ran through the field, the official building was erected on a scale to last.

The gold became exhausted, and a new field was found five miles away, which was called Port Darwin Camp. The unofficial residents and the business places pulled up stakes and went there, where there was both alluvial and reef working. The telegraph line could not be shifted. To do so would have been too costly with the possibility of a railway and the uncertainty of the route it would take. The railway was ultimately built.

The first thing I did after taking over was to banish the telegraph tape recording mechanism. It did not take me long to qualify as a reader by sound.

The Margaret Gold Rush was a find four or five miles NE from The Shackle. This was only a small field, all alluvial, and, what seemed strange to me, mostly nuggets. The proportion of fine gold was small. I saw one nugget, which was bought by a representative of the Commercial Bank in Palmerston, Mr William Chester, about, I think, as large as my fist. The find was soon exhausted, after a few months it was never heard of again.

On the stony ridge on which the buildings were situated at The Shackle, pineapples and bananas grew well. I had been told that the pines prefer stony ridges to good gully soil.

There was a weekly mail from Southport, which served both Port Darwin Camp and The Shackle. Telegrams could only be sent from The Shackle. At Port Darwin Camp there was one mine in full work, two stores, a hotel and a number of diggers' tents. Spirits was the chief drink – especially "Square", two brands from Holland, AVH and JUKZ, and limited supply of bottled beer. Draught beer would not keep in that climate.

There were two constables usually stationed at The Shackle; however one, named Wood, had died there and had not been replaced. One day, the other man, named Lucanus, a German, came to the Post Office and said to me, "Look here, I have got reliable information that so-and-so, the Chinese murderer, who we have been hunting so long is in the big Chinese store at Port Darwin Camp. I am going over tonight to get him, but I want some help. Will you come?" Of course I would come. "Good – it's a job for two. I have had a look at the store – a big place, but there is only one entrance. It is an iron building, with a double door stone end and no windows. It couldn't be better if it was built for the occasion. You can have Wood's uniform."

About 10.30 that night we set off. The uniform fitted me well enough for the purpose. We tied up our horses about a half-mile from the store. As we walked on to it I said, "Now just give me the lot of this business – where do I come in?" "Quite simple," he said. "I am out to arrest a murderer. I call on you formally in the Queen's name to assist me and this will be the procedure. I have a small piece of candle, which will allow me to have a clear look at the doors. Then, if needs must, I burst in the doors. You will stand in front of the doorway, revolver in each hand, and don't let a soul out. If they rush the door you must shoot. By all means that's what you're there for, and if you wound or even kill one, that would be just too bad for the Chow. But don't worry your head about that. The responsibility is mine."

I decided that I would do my best not to kill. All was quiet, and Luke, having examined the doors, motioned to me to stand aside. Taking a short run, he threw himself against the doors; they were not strongly fastened and went in with a great clatter – nothing happened. Luke then walked around and found a kerosene lantern on the small counter, and having lighted it, took a good look about.

There were plenty of Chinese there; apparently there had been an orgy of opium smoking. The place reeked with it. Of the 25 or 30 Chinese there, not one stirred. They were all over the place, on the floor, the counter, anywhere. Luke went to work systematically, and turned over every man carefully, scrutinized his face. He knew the look of the man he wanted, but alas the man was not there. He spent about an hour there, turning over everything that could hide a man. He had to go home without the murderer. I do not know if he was ever caught.

Whilst on this cheerful subject, there was another case, which was more successful in this same town, just a little later. There was a man named Lawless, a blacksmith whose shop was near the hotel. One evening after he had left, he fancied he heard something moving in the shop. He unfastened the door and went in. Seeing a Chinaman making for the door to escape, at once closed with him. The Chinaman, apparently prepared for all events, slipped a knife down Lawless' neck and neatly severed his jugular. In a few minutes the man was dead.

The struggle had already attracted some notice, when several men ran in and caught the Chink red handed. It was a clear case of murder. The man was taken to Palmerston and tried and acquitted. Owing, so it was said, to some defect in the indictment, he was acquitted and sent back to China at the Government expense. There must have been some justification for such an apparent miscarriage of justice. The verdict seemed almost incredible.

We began getting better supplies of fresh meat. The drovers were bringing cattle over from Queensland. There was a pleasant surprise at Christmas time in 1881, when a man named Goatee Blair, came over with a small flock of sheep. Although he had passed through both The Katherine and Pine Creek in coming down, he still had a few sheep left, of which I managed to secure one and kept it tethered until it was time to kill.

One day a fault occurred between The Shackle and Pine Creek, which meant I had to close the Office for two days at the most and start out to locate the fault.

As it happened, the telegraph line, which I had to follow, was close to the road track. I met a man coming towards me and had a few minutes chat. There was something about him that seemed foreign to the circumstances. It was clear to me that he and his horse had been working. He wore an open necked cotton shirt with sleeves rolled up, and a slouched felt hat. I noticed a quart pot in his saddle, yet it seemed that he did not belong to that life.

After a minute or two he said, as if divining my thoughts, “I suppose you re wondering who I am. I am the Duke of Manchester.” It was on the tip of my tongue to reply, “Oh, how do you do; I’m the Prince of Wales.” But something restrained me from doing so. I introduced myself, and after answering a question as to how far he was from the Hotel, we parted.

The next evening, when I returned I found that he was the Duke of Manchester – the next issue of the weekly paper from Palmerston settled that beyond a doubt. He was looking around for an investment and apparently believed in doing the job himself.

I had by this time (1884) been at The Shackle for two years, when a man from Alice Springs was appointed to the station. I became his assistant, but not for long. It happened there was a vacancy at Powell’s Creek for an assistant and young man named King, who was a nephew of Charles Todd, was sent from Adelaide to fill the position.

In due course he reached The Shackle and while he was resting there for a day or two, news came along that a man had been killed by the blacks at Barrows Creek, roughly 700 or 800 miles away. That was enough for Mr King. He definitely refused to go on, and being the nephew of the Head, I knew our Chief at Palmerston would not insist on his doing so. I could sense the order coming for me to go in his place. To forestall the others, I volunteered to go in his place. There was no difficulty raised about that, and as the OM (Old Man) would be starting his inspection trip, I was instructed to go to The Katherine and wait for him there.

JOURNEY TO POWELL'S CREEK

Perhaps I had better describe the Chief. His name was Little, his weight eighteen stone. He was secretive man who would not let his left hand know what the other did. A most observant man, with a wonderful memory. He would notice scores of things that would not appear to be of interest to anyone, store them away in his mind and perhaps never use them. He had many good points. Being human, he had what we considered many bad ones, not the least of which was having a favorite, a white headed boy, for whom, whilst he was in favour, nothing was too good. But the day would inevitably come and then great would be the fall thereof.

I had never seen much of the OM, as he was generally referred to in the office. I was curious to see what he would be like under other conditions. In due course he arrived at The Katherine.

An assistant named Marsh, whose destination was Daly Waters travelled with the Chief from Darwin. The Chief Officer of the Northern Section, Mr Little, used to inspect his section annually, from Palmerston (which from now on we can call Darwin) to Attack Creek, which is roughly 600 miles away, in between seasons, from May to August, when travelling could be done in comparatively comfortable conditions.

The Northern Section included the following stations: Darwin, Southport, Yam Creek (The Shackle), Pine Creek, The Katherine, Daly Waters, Powell's Creek and about 80 miles South of the latter station, the section ended at Attack Creek.

His usual staff on these travelling joints was an operator, who would accompany the OM over a subsection, or halfway from the preceding station towards the next station, a linesman, who would also be cook and general helper, and a black boy. He needed a hefty horse to carry him – the two outstanding qualities of which must be strength and quietness. Pace did not matter, the horse could choose his own.

When travelling, the linesman and the black boy would have the best of it. They would get along without interruptions to the next camp. The Chief's intention, when starting on one of these trips, was to inspect every foot of the line from start to finish. Is should observe that by this time the greater part of the wooden telegraph poles had been replaced with iron poles. On the journey horses and food would be supplied by the station; but the food only if the stations were provisioned by the Department. There were many things to attend to, including the state of the line clearing, which was a chain wide, and whether the new undergrowth required cutting. The debris from the original cutting, which was still there, was of little consequence.

The main cause of faults to the telegraph line were from cobwebs, hornets' nests, dead tree branches, litter and broken insulators. The most important item of all to be checked were the lightning conductors on each pole. These were so fixed as to provide an easy path for the lightning, and a protection for the insulator. The lightning occurred generally right through the wet season. These conductors, or pendants, were made of an ordinary piece of telegraph wire, about four to six inches long, fixed to the telegraph wire, one on

each side of the insulator and hanging down to within one-eighth of and inch, or less, of the top of the iron pole. The idea being that lightning striking the telegraph wire ran down the pole to earth.

It was the practice as we passed along on horseback to see if we could see the sky through that one-eighth of an inch gap. If the gap was considered too narrow, the job was to shin up the pole and widen it a little. Hornets' nests gave the most trouble. The hornet would commence with mild wet clay, right on top of the pole, then extend his house until it touched the pendant and result a dead earth and so a line trip to clear it.

Frogs coming down in the rain was another pest. The little frog would apparently wander around the top of the pole until it touched one of the pendants; the shock would kill it instantly, and, although the electric current passing through its body dried it up quickly, it still remained a short cut to the earth, which had to be removed.

Daily travelling routine with the Chief would be as follows: - after breakfast, when all was packed up, two men would get the OM on his horse, one to give him a leg up, and the other hanging on to the off side stirrup to prevent the saddle turning. The chief had a riding whip, with which he would tickle the horse's shoulder all day long. The horse soon ignored that, so the pair wandered along at not over three miles an hour.

A day of twenty miles of this would be a hard day's work. On this particular journey I was taking a racehorse, named Iderway, belonging to the Stationmaster at the Katherine, to Powell's Creek to be sent on from there to Alice Springs for the race meeting. Being a high-spirited animal, this dawdling along fretted the horse greatly.

Now the Chief was a very conscientious man and would not have missed travelling over every foot of that 600 miles. The detailed inspection of it was more or less theoretical. The Old Gent would perhaps travel a mile or two lost in thought, then suddenly come to himself and say, "Mr Goss, I don't think I quite saw the sky through that last pendant clearly." "Well, I did, Sir," I would say. "Ah'm, I think we had better go back and make sure." Back we go. He would walk around the pole squinting up from the wrong side and then say, "No. I can't see it clearly. You had better have a look at it." I would have to shin up the pole, and this would happen perhaps a dozen times a day.

Marsh was fortunate and was left at Daly Waters, but I had to go on to Powell's, and then on to Attack Creek, the end of the Northern Section, and then return with him to Powell's Creek and over the half subsection to Daly Waters, where the assistant from that station took my place.

POWELL'S CREEK

The Southern boundary of the Northern Section was Attack Creek, and was also the limit of the Powell's Creek subsection. It was about 80 miles south of the latter place, and about 60 miles north of Tennant's Creek, I noticed what appeared to be a curious thing. In my 24 years in the NT, I never heard of frost north of Tennant's Creek, nor of a case of malaria occurring south of Powell's Creek. Can there be any connection between the two? I had malaria at every station on the Northern Section, except Powell's Creek.

The station itself is in hilly country. The main building consisted of two blocks, each containing three rooms in a row. The rows ran parallel to each other about fifteen feet apart. The ends carried heavy double gates, which when closed, formed with the buildings a quadrangle – with only one entrance – a doorway in the middle front of the office building.

The rooms in the office building were loop holed for firing. There were no windows, only the loopholes, which made the rooms gloomy and depressing. A separate row of rooms was built outside the quad. These were the men's quarters with two spare rooms.

The living at the station was good. There was plenty of good water and the soil was productive. Vegetables were plentiful. Fowls did well and we often had one, sometimes two, for Sunday's dinner. Butter, eggs and milk were also in abundance.

The staff consisted of a stationmaster, and assistant, cook, gardener, shepherd, two linesmen (all Europeans) and a black boy. Later the cook was replaced by Chinaman, and the shepherd by a black boy.

Bush telegraph was in operation. One morning, about 9 a.m. the station boy came in and reported that a man with two pack horses had left Tennant's Creek that morning for the Powell. To check up on this, we called up Tennant's Creek Stationmaster and found the report was correct. The man and left and hour before, 150 miles away. We questioned the boy about the report and he said he had been told by bush native. That was as far as we could get. The black will not give away their methods.

The whole life with its conditions was new to me and I was thrilled with it. A beautiful comet appeared about this time, a short, but very brilliant one with a bang tail. It appeared high in the sky, East South East from the telegraph line. We all turned out about 2am to admire it.

One evening, after tea, we were sitting by the fire. The weather during April and May was cold, at least to us, although a Southerner would not have noticed it. We were suddenly startled by the sound of a horse being ridden or driven. It was the former. It turned out to be Lindsay Crawford, my former boss in the store at Southport.

He had come from Queensland with a party, one of whom was a woman. Knowing something of outback ways in the matter of clothing, he had ridden ahead to warn us – "A woman!" – we were galvanised into life. When others of the party arrived half an hour later, all was well. Our clothing had been donned and we felt quite respectable again.

The party consisted of Messrs Crawford, Ernst Favenc, explorer and journalist, and Major and Mrs Creaghe. How they came together, especially Crawford, or why they came, we never learned.

That morning at breakfast appeared the last of their food, a half cupful of rice. Chivalrously, of course, the men found that they had no appetites and declined to partake of it. Not to be outdone in self-sacrifice, the lady declined it also. They all wanted it. They agreed to let Crawford throw it away.

Their visit seemed to imply something important. Favenc and Crawford went without delay to Darwin. The Creaghes travelled more slowly, but lost no time in leaving the Northern Territory via Darwin.

I was now transferred at least temporarily to the Katherine as assistant, and it was arranged that the Creaghes and I should travel together at least as far as Daly Waters.

From the Ashburton Ranges we had a fine view of Lake Woods, the near edge of which was about ten miles across, anyway we could only see where the water and sky met on the further side. Later we approached Sturt's Plain. This plain, which is fourteen miles across, appears to be a spur of the Great Australian Desert, reaching out Eastward and extending a few miles beyond the Overland Telegraph Line.

There is not a bush on it, nor could one find sufficient twigs on it t boil a quart pot, nothing but tufts of coarse grass. The soil, which is called Bay of Biscay is friable when dry and opens out into large deep cracks. These openings, hidden by clumps of grass would easily be sufficient to break a horse's leg, should he stumble into one. But the horses know them. In the wet season, the soil closes up like dough with no sign of cracks. The soil is then very sticky. The horses collect great pancakes of it on their hooves, until it falls off by its own weight. I have seen buggy wheels lock after a few turns and the stuff had to be dug or chopped off.

As we drew near the plain, I was explaining to Mrs Creaghe what it was like. Nothing to be seen but the telegraph line stretching across, shown up clearly by the sky. The Major was a half a mile or more ahead with the packhorses.

We emerged onto the plain, when the lady said to me, "I understand you to say there were no trees on this plain." "That is so," I replied. "Then what is that?" said she, pointing ahead abreast of Major. I looked and to my great confusion I saw a clump of about four full size trees, all close together. Now I had crossed that plain at least a dozen time, and at all seasons, and I knew that a clump of trees was impossible. Yet there it was. I felt, and indeed probably looked, very foolish. I did not know what to say. The lady I suppose noting this, tactfully spoke of something else. But only for a few minutes, when she said, "Look now at those trees." I did so and saw they were beginning to disappear from the bottom of the trunks, and by the time we reached the place where they seemed to have been, there was nothing there. Neither of us thought of a mirage, nor had either ever seen one before.

On reaching Daly Waters, it was arranged that I should stay there for a short time. The assistant from there went on with the Major and Mrs Creaghe to The Katherine. I followed a week or two later.

KATHERINE RIVER

The Katherine River is a comparatively important place. Traffic from the North, South, East and West must pass the Katherine. The river is a large one and has been known to rise silently seventy feet during the night. A Government boat was kept there, in the charge of the Telegraph Staff. A Police Station with two police was there.

The river is about 200 miles from Darwin. The country is hilly, the vegetation sub-tropical. The river was named in three sections. At its source it was the Flying Fox Creek, at the Telegraph crossing, the Katherine; and westwards towards the mouth, the Daly River. The Daly River was frequently confused with Daly Waters, which is hundreds of miles in another direction.

The house of the Telegraph Staff was built of galvanised iron over a wood framework, four rooms in a row, and on the river and right on the edge of the south bank. A good building with French casements instead of windows, and a good eight-foot verandah all round. The old building of slabs was used as an office and dining room. The Staff was comprised of a Stationmaster and assistant, a knock-about labourer, and Chinese cook. This station and others north of it were not provisioned by the Department.

Pine Creek, 150 miles from Darwin, was supposed to be the limit of the auriferous country. But later some gold and reef was discovered at The Katherine. It was only a small field – a very limited one.

There were crocodiles all along the river. About ten or twelve miles east was a deep, long, silent and sinister reach that was full of the brutes. We called it Maud Creek after one of the Stationmaster's little girls. Parties sometimes went there shooting. Should a wounded duck fall into the water, a pair of jaws would quickly and silently claim it.

Pig, game and fish were available, the latter at all times. The usual method of fishing in those inland waters was to throw in a plug of dynamite – a wasteful way. There was no sport about getting pigs – they were simply shot.

I was shown by the Stationmaster a new and more economical method of supplying the needs of the table. It was as follows:- take a rifle and cartridge and a blackboy down to the edge of the waters, watch for a school of fish, and when it approached near enough, select fish if there is one to suit you. Watch it until it is near the surface of the water, then fire a shot immediately above it. The shock or something would cause it, and perhaps many others to turn turtle for a few seconds. The boy would jump into the water and throw your stunned fish out on to the land: the others would soon recover from the shock and swim away.

The gold mine at Maud's Creek, where there was a small battery of, I think, five head of stampers, was abandoned by the owners. A caretaker was there, Seymour by name. Wages were due to him with no prospect of getting them. I had never seen a battery and knew nothing of gold digging. One day, a friend and I went out to inspect the mine. The caretaker complained, of course, about the manner in which he had been left, and said he

had enough gold bearing stone ready for crushing if he could get some help. “Could we help him?” we asked, if so we were willing to do so for the day. He jumped at the offer and suggested we go shares in the clean up, as he called it. Of course we would not accept that. He had a claim against the Proprietors and we had none.

Anyway we set to work. He showed us what we should do. He took the engine, my friend took the stamper, and I was given the riffle tables. I was working like a mere automatum without knowing what I was doing. The result was satisfactory. When the amalgam had been retorted and the gold poured into a mold, it showed about the length and width of an ordinary matchbox, but only about one quarter as thick.

I had been out line inspecting on the North side of the river. I got back at daybreak, wet, tired and dirty, and not in a patient mood. The boat was, of course, on the station side, the South side. I called out for the boat. No one showed up. I fired a couple of shots. This brought a sleepy blackboy, who, after leisurely surveying the situation, scoured around and found a bucket, then strolled down to the boat, and with an empty meat can began bailing the water from the boat. He filled the bucket taking no notice of what I was yelling at him, carried the bucket half way up the bank, emptied it, and came back for another load. I was mad. When he ultimately brought the boat over, I felt like kicking him. Knowing that would be useless, I asked him, as calmly as I could, why he did not bail the boat out into the river, and he said with a reproachful look at my ignorance, in pigeon English, what was the sense in throwing the water into the river, when it would come back into the boat.

Very few people in my time knew that there was a carbonate of lime cave close to the township. I only knew of two others who were aware of its existence. It was difficult to find, even by those who knew. There was a large rocky mound outside the station fence. Between that and the Police Station, the entrance to the cave was at the bottom of a dark crevice in the rock about five feet deep, and at the bottom of the crevice ran a narrow tunnel, just large enough for one to crawl through.

It extended downwards for several yards, and then opened out into a small chamber, roughly about 8 ft x 8 ft, with all the usual characteristics of the stalactite cave. There were suggestions of cream paper, organ pipes, hanging drapery, and with the stalactite and stalagmite points working towards each other with other fantastic and suggestive shapes, that would be very interesting to people, more so than to me. I think I must have a touch of claustrophobia in my composition, because I hate to be shut in. After a brief look around I scrambled out as quickly as I could. Once would be enough for me.

About this time occurred what became known as the tragedy of the Police Search Party. From various reports and scraps of information we got and pieced together, the story was something like this. King had a mate, and the mate having some business in Queensland, proceeded to Attack Creed, he turned off there and went Eastwards. All knowledge of him was lost.

King considered it was his duty to go after his pal, and he followed, as nearly as his scanty knowledge would permit, on his friend’s track, and he was not heard of again.

The police and other authorities now became aware to the fact that something was wrong that needed investigating. An efficient party was organised to go and investigate. The party comprised quotas from all stations in the vicinity, and numbered twenty-two men with all necessary equipment. There was Mr Allen Giles, Stationmaster of Tennant's Creek and his blackboy. Two men named George and Arthur Phillips, but not related, linesmen from Powell's Creek Telegraph Station and others, including Police Constable Shirley of Barrow's Creek, who was placed in charge.

The party started out over the same ground. From here there was only the report of Mr Giles, the sole white survivor. It was said that the party travelled 70 miles from the Overland Telegraph Line without water, it seemed that anxiety crept in, and the men took a vote as to whether they should go on or return to the Telegraph Line. The result was in favour of returning. It sounds incredible; 140 miles in that climate without water. Anyway they started back, with the result that all perished except for Giles. Giles gave up when he was within a comparatively short stage of Attack Creek. His blackboy, who went on, brought back water to his master, who then staggered into Attack Creek.

It was not, however, quite the end of the incident, for about two months later, some travellers coming through, picked up a grey horse near Attack Creek. The horse was one of my official riding horses when I was stationed at the Powell. He was rolling in fat, and contentedly grazing his way back to his own home. That was the end of the search party.

DALY WATERS

During 1884, I was transferred as assistant to Daly Waters, and further more I was taking a new Stationmaster with me, a Mr Roach, who was appointed and sent from Adelaide. He weighed about twelve or thirteen stone. He was not accustomed to horses, had never slept out of a home, was very nervous about the bush in general and of the blacks in particular.

We started off. Made our first night's camp at the King River, 28 miles from The Katherine. It was fairly hot and nearing the wet season. Anticipating a possible shower during the night, I rigged a fly. It was a bright moonlit night. I felt myself awakened by the Stationmaster, who whispered, "Fred, I see a black fellow making signals." "What?" I said sleepily. "There. See that big tree with the white trunk. He's up against that." I looked and the tree, a gum, was about a hundred yards away and there was a black patch n front of it, about the size of a man. I knew too well that if it was a nigger, he wouldn't stand out there in the bright moonlight making signals.

I explained to my companion, but he was not satisfied, so I took a Snider rifle, put in a cartridge and fired at the suggested black mark. The bullet struck the tree without disturbing the black shadow. A fire had blackened the lower part of the trunk. So off to sleep again. But my friend was a sticker, and I heard later, "Fred its daylight, and we had better be getting up." I told him to make up the fire and boil the pot while I went and got the horses. We had breakfast and packed up. Everything was ready to saddle up and start, but the daylight had not arrived. I had a look at my watch. Four o'clock! Roach had been taken in by a false dawn, which not infrequently happens. I took it for granted that it was the real dawn. As it was too late to do anything else, we saddled and started, aiming to camp that night at Bitter Springs which was 18 miles from the Elsey Cattle Station, which we reached the next day, plus another four days to the Daly Waters.

Up to this time, we had only the old original station, which was built partly of iron and partly of slabs. More room and more commodious premises were just being completed, similar to The Katherine, but with an extra room. Five rooms in a row and with an eight-foot verandah all round, built of galvanised iron on a framework of locally grown timber. It was a very fine building indeed, for that part of the world.

The new building was for the officers. The old place was reorganized to contain the office, storeroom and men's sleeping quarters. In a separate building again was a blacksmith's shop, saddler's shop, carpenter's shop and Chinese cook room, and nearby a hut for the boys. Daly Waters, which is a part of the Birdum, extends from about thirty miles South of Daly Waters Telegraph Station, north to the Elsey about 135 miles.

The staff consisted of the Stationmaster, assistant, or assistants, Chinese cook, linesman, labourer, two teamsters and two blackboys. There were about 25 horses, 70 head of cattle, 40 goats, and periodical drafts of sheep from the Eastern tablelands. The station was provisioned by the Department, which retained the 4/- subsistence allowance.

The stores came from Adelaide once a year, and were carted by horse or bullock teams from Southport, and later from Pine Creek, arriving at Daly Waters and Powell's Creek in

May or June. The stores were of the best, under the circumstances, and the supply ample; two tons of flour, half a ton of sugar, an adequate amount of tinned vegetables and all other necessities, including tobacco; also half a ton of rock salt for the livestock, which was about a lick apiece. This was needed because there was no salt vegetation in this district.

We were also provided with five gallons of 40 OP rum, for use only in medical cases. The staff, however, had the privilege of getting stores from Darwin themselves, carriage free. These stores consisted mostly of spirits. Of course there was a bit of an upheaval an the arrival of the teams, but nothing unduly startling.

Once, when we had a European cook, he continued his jamboree for several days. We could not for a long time find where he was hiding it. Eventually it was found in a saucepan on the bars of the kitchen fire. I expect he spent some time looking for it after that. It had been thrown into the creek.

Among the stores we had a very useful line of granulated potatoes in about 40lb tins. It looked like dried crumbs. It was easily prepared, just add hot water, pepper and salt, a little dripping, and it was ready to eat – a very good dish. There was also a line of compressed vegetables that looked like plugs of tobacco and tasted nearly as bad.

For meat we had mutton and beef. When we killed a beast most of it was, of course, dry salted and would last us, with an occasional sheep, a month. The mutton was good when it first arrived, but from that time the sheep deteriorated and never recovered, until they were mere lanterns, whilst goats, which ran with the sheep were fat and much better eating. Of course I mean wether goats. We never wholly got tired of the dried salted beef, and could live on it longer than on inferior mutton.

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention and this is easily recognise on these inland and isolated stations. If you want anything done, you must do it yourself, or go without, whether it was shoeing a horse or mending a clock. It is remarkable how adaptable man can be, when needs must.

Our flour would, of course, become weevilly in due course, then choosing a sunny day, tarpaulins would be spread out, the flour emptied out on them and then all hands with shovels, or any substitute, got to work turning it over to let the sun penetrate, and then rebag it. The cook, with very fine meshed sieve would remove the weevils before mixing the dough.

The framework of the new building was of what we called bloodwood, locally grown. It was white ant proof where it was not otherwise damaged. A kind of red gum veins penetrated it, to an extent that rendered a good deal of it useless.

Mulga was the absolutely ant proof timber, of which there was plenty available. Unfortunately it did not grow to the size to allow of boards being cut from it, but could be, and was, largely used for slabs, and the slot style of building.

The house was built on piles about eighteen to twenty four inches high, and the pile capped with galvanised iron against white ants. We were not troubled greatly by these pests, although there were plenty of them.

Our creek came down once a year, generally late January or early February, and would run for some weeks. Unfortunately the ground would not hold water very long, and the creek might be dry before the next wet season set in.

We had eight 1,000-gallon tanks for storing drinking water. They did not always see us through. One day we might be at dinner or engaged otherwise, when all would suddenly look up and, “Creek!” would be the cry. We would hear the roar of the water as it rushed into the big holes, mostly ironstone conglomerate, and then gradually growing silent as the holes filled up. Then on to the next hole and more roaring. It would take about two hours from the time of hearing it first, until it reached us. Then all hands for a swim. Our waterhole was about twenty yards and ten yards wide when full.

We had no garden for want of water and the unsuitability of the soil. Pumpkins grew well. The iron bark variety would keep well. Tomatoes would grow but they were not pleasant to eat. We tried growing potatoes without success.

We had a small cemetery on the opposite side of the creek. For several years there was only one occupant in it, Mr Charles Johnston, a brother of the Mr Johnston from whom I took over the Shackle Station, and who took my job with the patent insulators. There was a good deal of doubt about Mr Charles’ death. He was killed by blacks, some say at the Roper and others say the Daly River. The only certainty was that he was not killed at Daly Waters. He lived before my time and might have been the S.E.

As he was connected with the construction of the OT line, the Roper River theory seems reasonable, because all stores and material for the work was landed at the mouth of the Roper about 140 miles away, whilst the Daly River theory, over 200 miles away would be of no use, the construction work being on the wrong coast.

As regards the work of the station, the working of the OT line took priority. All other things were only accessories. There was no revenue, for there were no people, our nearest neighbour being Newcastle Waters Cattle Station, 80 miles away.

More than once, owing to water shortage, the station had to be abandoned. In my time, one year we had to remove all stock and staff, except myself and a Malay cook, to No. 2 Well, 75 miles distant. It was a big job to water them from a well 104 feet deep. We needed a mob of natives to do it, but, of course, they were glad to do it, otherwise they had nowhere to go. They were on hostile country.

I was left for a couple of months. All arrangements were made for the Malay and myself to be taken away if necessary. We came within a day or two of having to go. A tank of water was left at the Ironstone, on the Birdum, 34 miles from the station. If the worst happened, a party from the Well would go the Ironstone in one day.

We at the station watched the last tank daily. The water got down to one rim – to half a rim, and I was on the point of calling for the relief party, when we got a lucky shower, which provided us with water until we got another. The situation was saved. The well party did not return until an ample supply of water was assured.

I now had to go to Newcastle Waters' Cattle Station to take over a flock of sheep, coming from Alice Springs for Daly Waters. The only sheep I had seen so far in the NT was the one I secured for Christmas at The Shackle. That was about all I knew of them. I had ample help for the three, or four hundred sheep; whites, natives and dogs. I was anxious to take a turn at droving, if only to be able to say I had done so.

We took over the sheep. There was a legend that there was poison weed or grass on Sturt Plain, or I regarded it as legend. To be on the safe side we camped for an hour or two, just before coming to the Plain, to enable the sheep to get full stomachs before negotiating the Plain. That evening we go to Frew's Pond, over the Northern edge of the Plain.

Early in the night we could hear groaning amongst the sheep. They had got the poison in spite of our precautions. On the advice of one man, who knew something of the business, we picked out the sick groaning sheep and with pocket knives we cut the cartilage between the nostrils, also the ears. It was said that if they bled freely from the operation, they would probably recover. But if the bleeding was sluggish they were doomed. That appeared to have some foundation, because, although a dozen or so were dead in the morning, others had recovered.

A couple of days with the flock was sufficient to satisfy my curiosity of sheep. It was the most appetising job I ever tackled. We would have breakfast of good mutton, and get away with them at the first sign of daylight, taking ample food for our dinner. Alas, the dinner had been consumed by about 8 a.m. When the wagon passed about 10 a.m., going ahead to make camp and build a brush sheep yard, against our arrival in the evening, we had to bail them up for another dinner. That did not in anyway limit our appetites for the evening meal.

If there is any animal more obstinate or stupid than a sheep, I am content to take anybody's word for it. South of the Plain we had porcupine grass (spinifex) to go through. The sheep hate it, because the stiff points of the spinifex prick their legs and stomachs. It took all our united efforts to push them through it. Then again, perhaps we would travel along the side of a ridge to avoid the softer ground, below on the flat. We came to a little trickle of water, a few inches wide, running down the ridge. Could we get them to go over the trickle? No, not a bit of it. Men, niggers, dogs, stockwhips and language were not sufficient.

We went through the mob, grabbed a sheep each, and dragged them over the torrent. As soon as we released them, they immediately ran back into the mob again. Then for some unknown reason one of those condemned sheep stepped lightly over the stream. In three minutes every one of them on the other side.

Very soon after I had instructions to go once more to Newcastle to take over twenty horses to Alice Springs. They were to be distributed among the stations on the Northern Section, which had no other means of replacements. The Alice Springs bred horses were in

demand in the Territory, also a number of them were supplied to the Indian Army as remounts.

Taking a man named Budgen we proceeded to the meeting place, and took over the horses. The same day we moved to the South edge of the Plain for tea, intending to cross the Plain at night. There were no trees or scrub and no risk of losing any of the horses. I have two reasons for remembering that evening's camp for tea.

First, I had a good piece of salt beef. Cattle stations like the Newcastle always had good meat for themselves. My appetite for that meal was excellent.

The second reason was not so pleasant. When we were ready to start again, Budgen went to collect the horses, whilst I packed up. He had been away not more than ten minutes, when I heard him yelling for me. Wondering what could be the matter, I grabbed a revolver and ran towards the calling voice. I found him about 150 yards away, on his back on the ground, with a broken leg. He had caught one of the strange horses, jumped on its back, and was immediately thrown and kicked by the horse as he was falling. It was ascertained later that the horse was named Satan. The leg had both bones broken between the knee and ankle of the left leg, and a piece of bone about an inch in length was broken off.

For the moment I stunned, but soon came back to practical things. I had the horses as well as the injured man on my hands, and the night coming on. So first I tore up a tent fly for bandages, got two strips of stout bark and made the best job I could of binding up the leg. Then I made the man as comfortable as possible with blankets and grass. Then collected the horses. It was no use looking to Newcastle Cattle Station for help. They lived at the time in a very primitive way. They had no wagon or buggy, but at Frew's Ponds, 19 miles north, there was a strong line repairing party with two wagons. Obviously help must come from there. When ready to start, I gave Budgen both water bags, filled, and both revolvers. I promised to have a wagon there for him early in the morning, and so I left him.

There were fourteen miles across Sturt's Plain, then five miles of scrub to Frew's Ponds. There was no moon, but it was a clear starlight night. I had no fear of losing any of the horses. There was no clearly defined road, only a wagon track. The horses would get a spread on and kept me riding from wing to wing. I did not spare the stock whip. I got to Frew's about 11 PM The party men, hearing the horses coming, good, naturally came out to give a hand. They were considerably startled when I told my news, and as instance of the bush fellowship (which bushmen would not admit for anything) the two teamsters did not wait to hear all of my news but were soon out to find the team horses. They brought them in and gathered all the equipment they considered necessary, including a tent fly to make a tilt for the wagon.

They were gone soon after midnight on their rescue job. They reached Budgen about sunrise, fitted a tilt, made a good bed of grass on the wagon and started back. Fortunately the Plain, though dry, was not dusty. They could not have had better travelling conditions. They got back to Frew's about 4 PM, all well as far as possible.

In the meantime I had reported the accident to Darwin and got instructions to take what assistance I required from the line party, and to send Budgen on to Daly Waters. It was

anticipated that the Doctor from The Shackle, Dr Wood, 380 miles away would arrive at Daly Waters, almost as soon as Budgen.

The boss of the line party, Alf Pybus, undertook to drive Budgen in. He lent me another man to help with the horses. I went ahead with them.

The Doctor arrived the day after the wagon got in. The weather was cold for us; we expected the Doctor about midnight. Alf suggested we go to the fourteen mile to meet him with the Station buggy; a sensible and kindly thought. We could be certain he would appreciate the change from horseback to buggy. With a liberal supply of rum, to keep out the cold, we started.

Now, I knew the Doctor personally, having seen a good deal of him, whilst I was at The Shackle, before going to Powell's Creek. Somehow I gained the impression that he was a total abstainer, so I cautioned the other two not to offer him any rum.

We met the Doctor and he was very grateful for the change. We had a nip before starting back. As it was very cold, we stopped every few miles to have another. It was about our third stop, I think, when the Doctor said, "Excuse me, gentlemen," (there were three of us), "May I ask what you have in that jar?" "Rum," replied Alf. "I suppose it is no use offering you any." "Well, as a matter of fact," said the Doctor, "I could very well do with a taste." "What?" said Alf, "This lunatic here told us you did not indulge." He joined us and had one sufficient to make up for the others he had missed. It was some time before I heard the last of my blunder.

The next day the Doctor set the broken leg, and, with some instructions, I was appointed his assistant and attended the anaesthetic (chloroform). The operation took about one and a half hours. Then the limb was made rigid by a solution of glass. In the meantime a man was making a cradle for the leg, and ingenious contraption, by which the limb could be swung clear of the bed, and yet permitted the blankets or bedding to be used.

The Doctor left for The Shackle, where he was urgently wanted. The first day's journey was 75 miles. A relay of the horses, on the day of the operation, was sent out to the Ironstone, a waterhole in the Birdum, 34 miles away, to be picked up next day by us. We started about eight o'clock next morning, and arrived at No 2 Well, 75 miles further on at about three o'clock the following morning.

The man from The Katherine, who was there to meet us, made up the fire and put the pots on for tea. I wanted nothing but my bedding. In a few moments I was dead to the world. The Doctor, whose daily horseback riding would not exceed an average of five miles a day, if that, sat by the fire and yarned until daylight.

He was four and a half days in coming up. He intended going back in four days. I did a lot of horseback riding, perhaps half my time was given to it in the dry season, but the little Doctor could teach me a good deal about endurance. I made three days of the return trip to my station.

Budgen was to be taken to The Shackle by buggy and he asked if I might be the driver. I was rather looking forward to a spell for a time. It was not to be, except that in this case it was not a horseback job.

The next difficulty was what help I could have. It seemed I could not get any from the Station. Mr Little was at Daly Waters, on his annual inspection trip. He wanted two men and one of our two boys. I went to the black's camp for a native who could ride. He would be required to drive the spare horses, and get the horses in the mornings. The only one I could get was a boy of about twelve or fourteen years old, who could ride.

We fixed him up with some clothes, then I wanted a man as an attendant for Budgen and to cook. It just happened that a young chap named Solomon came along, on his way to 'Darwin. He was an Arabian Jew, or something of that kind, and had worked with Afghans and camels. He spoke rather bad English, but he would have to do. He was engaged for the trip to The Shackle.

Budgen was made as comfortable as possible. Solomon's cooking was about on a par with his English. He had a rather peculiar accomplishment. He was stuffed to the neck with Eastern stories, after the style of the Arabian Nights. In the evening, in camp, he would string these tales off without repeating himself, as long as any one would listen.

The journey from Daly Waters to the Elsey was not bad. There were no creeks to cross, but after that we got into uneven and hilly country. Budgen's troubles and our own commenced. Some of the creeks were narrow and steep. The broken leg was only now beginning to knit. The patient was in a good deal of pain. On coming to one of these creeks, we would stop near the edge, take out the horses, (I was only using a pair at a time), I would tie down the foot brake, then look around for a log or big branch, which I would attach to the back axle of the buggy.

Solomon and the boy would take the buggy pole and guide it down the bank, whilst I attended to and regulated the drag until reaching the bottom. The horses had to be put in to take the buggy up the opposite bank. There were a good many of these creeks. The job became monotonous, but it had to be done. All things came to an end. In about three weeks, when I handed the sick man over to the Doctor, I was glad to do it.

Then it was found that one of my eyes was affected by what the Doctor called Pterigium, a kind of skin growing over the eye, and it would have to come off. While I was convalescing for a fortnight or so, I used to go about with the Doctor and assist him with a few operations.

The trip back to Daly Waters was a picnic compared to the journey with the sick man. When I arrived at The Katherine, I found the wife of the Stationmaster had an organ she wished to sell, an instrument with two sets of reeds. We had no music at Daly Waters, so I decided to purchase the instrument, and trust to luck and my will to learn to get something out of it. It fitted nicely into the buggy crosswise, behind the tucker box. It gave me lot of worry crossing the creeks. I got it home eventually in good order.

We camped a night at the Elsey, and in the morning went along to the Shackle to ascertain, as usual, if the telegraph line was O.K., before starting my day's travel. "Have you met Denny Murphy?" asked Daly Waters. "No, " I replied. "Then," said I, "I expect I shall meet him today between here and the Well – Good day!"

This old identity, Denny Murphy, was a well-known character, a witty old man. He used to travel from Darwin to the Overland Telegraph Stations doing any wheelwright, or blacksmith's work that needed, going from Station to Station. I quite expected to meet him that day, but did not. On arrival at No 2 Well, which was close to the track, I felt instinctively that something was wrong. There the blankets were spread out, and the mosquito net. By the appearance of loose leaves, straw etc. on the blankets, it was clear they had not been used the previous night. Two horses, presumably Murphy's came galloping up on hearing our horses, and went straight to the iron troughs. Then seeing that the troughs were quite dry, I felt sure that the horses had not been watered that day.

My fears began to take shape. Our first job was to get all the horses watered, but before starting that, I had a good look down the well, which was 104 feet down to the water, and from the top the water looked like a white patch about the size of a five shilling piece, or a very little larger. There was nothing else that could be seen.

This well, 104 feet from the six-foot mound to the water, was timbered. The standards and windlass were good and solid. The windlass had a handle at each end. There were two-gallon buckets of extra thick iron, attached to a wire rope, so that as one bucket came up the other went down. The well had two half covers, or doors, which opened back against the standards on either side, and there were some wooden slabs underfoot, where the buckets were landed. These slabs, with the slopping water, became dangerously slippery. The doors were a wooden frame covered by wire netting to permit of the escape of foul air. At this length of time from the incident, nearly seventy years, I regret I cannot remember if I looked to see if either or both of the doors were closed or not. Although that knowledge would not afford any definite evidence, because if they were closed the wind could have blown them down, or if they were open, they might have been left so to be ready for use the next time.

It was a job needing care to land a ten-gallon bucket, and carry it down to the iron trough at the bottom of the mound. It was a job for two persons. The boy and I watered the horses and then taking a glance around the well, I saw fresh tracks which were presumably those of Murphy. Showing these to the boy, who was quite a bright little chap, I told him to make a good big circle around the well to see if these tracks went out. He quite understood and went out on the job. The presence of tracks going out would not be very informative, because they might have been made going out to get, or to look at, the horses. But the absence of footprints leaving the well looked ominous and that was what the boy reported. Anyway, anxious not to neglect any precaution, I made a big smudge fire as a smoke guide. Then we had tea and after that, as it was near dark, we collected a stock of dry wood, and as soon as it was quite dark, made a big flame fire, which might be reflected in the air.

There was nothing else to do that night. I was out early the next morning, and with the boy leading the way, and myself following to keep an eye on him, we made the circle of the well again, to make sure that no tracks went out and we could find none.

We had breakfast and watered the horses, including the two, which I now felt convinced were Murphy's, then I wrote out a detailed report, went to the Shackle about half a mile away, and telegraphed it to the Police at Darwin, adding that I would speak again at 4pm. I spoke and got the police reply to the effect that, if I was satisfied, nothing more could be done, I was to take charge of the two horses, and any other effects and take then with me to Daly Waters. Further instructions would follow later.

So that was that. About six months later I got an official letter from the Curator of Interstate Estates in Darwin, to sell the horses and other property of the late Denis Murphy, and remit the proceeds to him.

A few months later news flashed along the wire that the Stationmaster at The Katherine had imported a governess from New Zealand, for his two small daughters. It caused quite a flutter amongst the young male population, although beyond wistful speculation, the event could have no interest for us. I, with others, speculated and thought she might have come a little earlier or that Budgen had postponed the breaking of his leg a little later. Governesses were scarce in that country. So much so, that this one was the first. However my star, lucky or unlucky, did not desert me. I received orders to report to The Katherine on official business, and the assistant who relieved me during my absence on the Budgen affair, was to remain at D.W. until my return.

"What-oh, Governess!" I was going to see her. But I expected, or tried to convince myself that nobody but a lonely, hard up old maid, would accept such a job in such a locality. Still, I hoped for the best. In the meantime I made a new bridle for my mare with an ornamental forehead band, made a new coloured check saddle cloth, trimmed with red braid and polished up all of my equipment. This part was all O.K., but my wardrobe rather troubled me. We did not own to fashion plate goods at D.W. Having a few days before starting, I set to work to make a pair of trousers out of saddle serge, and unripped a pair of old ones for a pattern. Although I say it myself, I made a real good job and was intensely proud of my work. But alas, it never occurred to me to shrink the serge before cutting it up. When I had them washed they would not have fitted a boy of twelve. In the line of shirts, I had only one cotton one with a collar on. (We all used only singlets.) It looked dreadfully crumpled, and it wanted ironing and we had no irons.

I had heard of the fastidious bushman who ironed his linen with a bottle of hot water. That method did not commend help to me. I decided to try a method of my own. We had a teapot, a tin one with a flat bottom. It held half a gallon or more so I got the cook to fill it with boiling water, and to put a cork in the spout. It ironed my shirt as well as any ordinary iron. After I had taken it nearly 200 miles in a pack bag, I am afraid all my ironing labour was lost.

I arrived at the KN and all of my hopes were justified. The lady was highly attractive, highly educated, and a good musician (there was a piano at The Katherine.). To put it baldly, I fell in love right off. I found out that she was used to horse riding. Mrs Murray had a side-

saddle, which she never now used (ladies did not ride astride then) and I was welcome to it. I tried my pet mare with a blanket and skirt, and she took it like a lamb.

The governess was only engaged with the scholastic duties in the morning. Her afternoons were free. What would you do? I had been on the point of starting back, when I was desired to wait the arrival of a Chinese cook from Darwin for Powell's Creek. He would be there in a week. "Hoorah!" Later I was advised that the Chinese cook refused at the last minute to go. The agents had to find another. I was asked to wait for further instructions. "You bet!"

Now let me go back a little; by this time (1885) the Stationmaster at The Shackle was a very close friend of mine. He had been my predecessor at Southport. Jack Kelsey had been an assistant at Daly Waters, when I joined up. A very fine fellow in every way. There was a weekly mail from Southport to The Shackle, but from the latter place the Department had to supply its own transport. Then I got notice of another cook, who would reach The Shackle in ten days, from here another two days would bring him on to me. On the 10th day I got a note from Jack that he would be at The Katherine with the Chinaman on the following day at about 4 PM This news naturally was not calculated to cheer me up. I was surprised at the effect it had on Miss Crawford (sister of the Crawford at the Southport Store). Out on our ride that afternoon – our last – I elicited the information that she and my friend, Jack, were engaged to be married, and were only waiting for a clergyman who was expected there soon. "Ye Gods!"

I had never heard a word of it and was surprised that the Murrays had not given me a hint. They surely must have known. Well, there was a bit of a scene, but not much, only sufficient to convince me that The Katherine was not big enough for Jack and me just then, so I got everything ready to start on my trip back to Daly Waters at 4 PM the next day. Jack tried to put his foot down on the plan. However, my excuse that I had been absent from my Stationmaster so long and was needed there worked. The cook protested strongly against further travel that day, as I intended going out to the five mile that night. I threatened to drive him with the pack-horses, so he gave in and we got away. Of course I was broken hearted, but I suspect it was a heart amenable to repair. I did not notice much wrong with my appetite, or suffer from insomnia as a result. In due course we arrived back at Daly Waters. Things ran quietly for some months. The Katherine assistant had gone back to his station.

Early in 1885 the Stationmaster, Roach, was taken ill. His ailment was such as demanded constant supervision by a doctor. He was transferred to Darwin and I was placed in charge at Daly Waters. The assistant from The Katherine was sent along to help. The usual station routine continued without special incident until the latter part of 1886, when I considered that after nine years service without a break, some holiday leave was due to me. My mother and relatives were urging me to come down, my mother adding (as I presumed, as a special inducement) that she had a girl waiting for me. Accordingly I sent in an application for leave to visit Adelaide. The leave was, without undue delay, granted. I happened to be on duty in the Office at the time and heard the approval go through.

I thought, naturally, that it would be only a few weeks at the most, when I would be notified of my relief being on the way. But nothing happened. Thinking that our secretive OM would

write it instead of telegraphing, I got a native from the black's camp to go to The Katherine on foot, to bring up the letter mail from that office.

This journey of about 370 miles he undertook without demur, and started out with as much food as he cared to carry and a pipe and tobacco. His first proceeding was to go to Stuart's Swamp, the nearest water, three miles away and to camp there until he had consumed all of the provisions (a regular routine). Then he started living on or off the land as he wandered on, arriving duly at The Katherine. He would be given another supply of food, when he would repeat his former tactics, arriving back after about three weeks. He would get a further supply of food and perhaps another pipe and tobacco, and march off to camp perfectly satisfied. However there was no notification of my leave, so I wired about it and received the reply that the OM loved to grant. "You will be advised in due course."

Another wait and another reply precisely similar was received. After another appreciable delay, I wired again, this time rather tersely, with the same result. In a fume I sat down, wrote my resignation, stating the date on which I wished it to take effect. The reply this time was different, briefly telegraphing that Mr Henderson would be there to relieve me on the date mentioned, and he was. I handed over, and off I started, a bit depressed, I confess, at the lost years – lost by the obstinacy of a pigheaded old man.

On my arrival at The Katherine, I was informed that Mr Little wished to speak to me, so I went into the Office and made myself known, and this was the conversation. "Good evening, Mr Goss, would you care to return to Daly Waters. If so I will permit you to withdraw your resignation." "Good evening, Sir. Yes, I would be glad to return to Daly Waters after taking my leave, which I understand has been approved." "Good day." "Good day, Sir." Nothing more. It was clear that he wanted me to go back, but he would rather die than tell me this.

I arrived at Darwin to catch the steamer. In the launch going from Southport to Darwin I met Barney Murphy, who had been a storekeeper at Alice Springs, and had come north to open a store and public house at The Katherine. In the course of conversation, he stated that he had got my story, and if anything appeared more gratified than otherwise. A few minutes later he told me why. He said, "If you cannot get any satisfaction in Adelaide, advise me and I will immediately make you Manager of my store at The Katherine, and at a salary more than equal to that which you have been getting." I thanked him warmly and planned better for having a second string to fall back on.

I caught the E & A Steamer, 'Catterthun'. Whilst in the agent's office, booking my ticket, the Captain of the 'Catterthun' came in and the agent mentioned that I would be a passenger. "Sorry", said the Captain, "But he won't. I have nearly two hundred returning diggers from here and no room or accommodation for half of them. I won't take another one." "This man", said the agent. "Has travelled 400 miles to catch this boat. You will take him or you will hear something more about it."

It was not a comfortable trip until we got to Sydney. From there to Adelaide it was very pleasant. I think, by then, I was the only passenger. The diggers were a rough band, a lot of them sleeping on the vessel's hatches on deck. On more than one occasion it appeared as it they would have taken command of the ship. I had a bad cold and a dreadful cough,

so the purser put me in a saloon cabin, whose only other occupant was an R.C. Bishop from the East. One day several of us, in the engineer's cabin, were talking of wrecks and the engineer declared that he had no experience of that kind, but said thoughtfully, without any suggestion of boasting, that if ever he was unfortunate enough to meet such a disaster, he thought that somehow, by hook or by crook, he would manage to save himself.

On a later voyage the "Catterthun', going from Sydney to Hong Kong, struck a submerged rock off Newcastle and began to sink. They tried to beach her, as the mainland was not far, but she went down before they could do so, and that young engineer was, with others, drowned.

I arrived in Adelaide in due course in 1887. (Before I left Adelaide in 1878, we were living at Sydenham Road, Norwood. Our next door neighbour was a widow named Mrs Simons, and she had a daughter about nine years of age. We were rather close friends, the Simons and ourselves. I do not know what the little girl thought of me, but to me, over sixteen, and going to be a goldsmith – the arrogance of youth – she was just an object of contempt, not worth consideration.)

When I returned after nine years away, I found this was the girl my mother had waiting for me. I could scarcely believe my eyes. The staring eyed kid had grown into an attractive young woman. The two families were still living side by side, but now at Hindmarsh. My intentions were soon evident, as I made them clear, and in less than three months we were married. Everything was well except from the financial angle. I had £150 when I started down, but that was beginning to dwindle, and when that was gone; we realized that we could not exist on hope.

After considerable thought I decided to go to Western Australia, and spy out the land. Things were bad in South Australia; they might be better in the Western State. So with a brother-in-law, who was looking for employment, we booked our passages in the 'Franklin', a seven hundred tonne steamer. Oh, what a voyage it was! I am a good sailor. I had come from England in a sailing ship, around the Cape of Good Hope. The ship ended her career on the rocks at Brighton, South Australia.

This and my two Australian voyages had well hardened me to ship travel. That trip in the 'Franklin' was altogether too bad. The Great Australian Bight was in the very worst temper. We were nine days travelling from Port Adelaide to Fremantle, with only a few hours at Albany. I really thought we were going to meet with disaster. One man of the crew, in a full set of oilskins, was taken clean off the deck. Although every possible lookout was kept, there was no hope in that raging mountainous sea of doing anything, even if we could have seen him. We had horses aboard, several of which were killed by the knocking about they received. It was said that the ship was top heavy with a quantity of material and timber, which was being carried on deck. Then we arrived at Albany at last and had a breathing spell. From there on it was not so bad.

I was provided with two letters of introduction, one for Mr Alex Forrest, who lived at Bunbury. The steamer did not call there so the letter was of no use to me. I had met Mr Forrest at Southport in 1879. The other letter was to the Superintendent of Telegraphs at

Perth; but as that gentleman was ill and not likely to recover for some time, and as I had to leave Western Australia before he did recover, the second letter was of no use to me either. Albany was very picturesque, the houses built up the side of a hill from the water's edge. We only stayed there for an hour or two and had not sufficient time to explore.

We went on to Fremantle, an unattractive place, a sort of smaller Port Adelaide. After we were a day or two out from Port Adelaide, a young man, whom I had noticed, came up to me and said, "Excuse me, are you a telegraph operator?" From what I could piece together he was on the run, something to do with removing a telegram from a file, but I never got the story clearly. He was penniless, and had slept at an hotel in Port Adelaide the night prior to the steamer's departure, and had slipped out early in the morning, leaving his overcoat on the bed in payment for his night's lodging.

At Fremantle, I asked him if he was taking a train for Perth. From his replies I guessed that he intended to walk the twelve miles distance, so I had a word with my brother-in-law and we arranged to take him with us by train. On arriving at Perth we found a lodging house in Murray Street, where there were about forty boarders. We interviewed the landlord ourselves, saying we two would pay in advance whilst we were there, if he would stake the other man for a time. This, the landlord agreed to do. It required little imagination to convince us that in coming west, we had jumped out of the pan into the fire. The place was dead.

Speaking to the landlord about employment, he said there was little chance, but if we came from South Australia, and it got known, we would have no chance at all. I asked why that was so. He could not say, not understanding the reason himself. We did not advertise our advent from South Australia, but it made no difference, there was nothing doing.

Our Melbourne man was more fortunate for he got a job hawking books. We stayed a week and then returned to Adelaide by the same steamer. The Great Australian Bight, which had been so tempestuous when we went over, was like a mill pond on returning. I have been told that Perth has made great progress since then. It is a place worth visiting, apart from its economic and industrial progress. There was certainly room for forward movement; it could not go backwards.

Back in Adelaide again and no better off, I decided to interview Sir Charles Todd, although not expecting much good from it. Here I was happily disappointed. Sir Charles was not available when I called, and I was shown into the office of Mr Waddy, who was next in command. Now it chanced that Mr Little and Mr Waddy were not friends, each claiming to be senior to the other. When Mr Little visited Adelaide a few years earlier he had contemptuously ignored Mr Waddy, and would do no business, except with Sir Charles, so when I turned up with my complaint, I think I was welcomed.

"Why did you resign, your leave was approved?" were almost his first words. Then I told my story and he seemed strongly impressed in my favour. After some further conversation, he said, "Stay here until I come back, I don't see why you should be driven out of the service in that way. I will go up and see the Minister of Education." The Minister of Education, I should explain, was the parliamentary head of the Post and Telegraph Department in the South Australian Parliament. He was away about half an hour, and on

his return, he said, “You can return to Port Darwin by the first steamer, and your service in the Department will be considered as continuous. Report to Mr Little, who will be officially advised.”

What-oh! And my passage was paid back. I had a week or two in Adelaide before going to Sydney to join the ‘Airlie’ of the Eastern Australian Line. I would not risk taking my wife until I saw what Mr Little had in store for me. If I were to go inland, I could not, as an assistant, think of taking her there.

The ship had unfortunately to go into dock for a week before sailing, and I think that week was one of the most miserable I ever spent, being short of money and not knowing a soul in Sydney. I have camped alone in the bush frequently, with not a soul within a hundred miles and never felt so lonely. However we got away at last, calling at Newcastle and loaded 1,200 tons of coal for the East, then on to Thursday Island and Darwin.

Part II

DARWIN

I have omitted to mention that, when in Adelaide, I found I was to return to Darwin, still in the service, and would not be available for Mr Murphy's storekeeping job. I hunted up another telegraph man who was in Adelaide at the same time as myself and told him about Murphy's offer to me. He immediately telegraphed Murphy, so did I also, and my friend secured the job.

This friend had been an operator stationed at Alice Springs. He was there when the McDonnell Range Ruby Rush broke out in, I think, 1885/6. The rumors were that rubies were being obtained by bucketsful and other absurd exaggerations. There seemed really a wonderful number were being obtained. I wrote to my friend there and jocularly said that if the stones were as plentiful as rumoured, he might send me a half hundred weight or so. He sent me a coffee tin full to the brim. They weighed two or three pounds. My friend, who got in early on the find, sent in his resignation and went to Adelaide. Then Streeter, the gem expert of London, classing the rubies as garnets, the bottom of the ruby market fell out. Streeter was owner or lessee of ruby mines in Burma, and too big an authority to be questioned or doubted.

It seemed that the Australian jewellers and research people accepted the stones as rubies. Until then, one would think some of these experts would have ascertained the specific gravity of the stone, which at least, I understood would determine the classification of the stones.

My friend, having secured Murphy's job, returned with me on the 'Airlie' to Darwin, and I am afraid to his undoing. Alice Springs was a bad school for drinking, racing and gambling, and young men let loose there needed backbone to come through unscathed. My friend had not got it sufficiently strong enough to save him. His new job managing a store and an hotel did not mend him. Briefly, he got worse and later in a fit of remorse, to which he was susceptible, he, so report said, committed suicide. He was a fine type of Australian youth and a good fellow.

About 11pm and a dark night, a stir was caused among the passengers. A light was seen ahead of us, which upon investigation by the officers, turned out to be a signal of distress from a 5,000 ton steamer, the 'Morayshire' with a cargo of meat from Sydney for overseas. She had a broken propellor shaft and was drifting helplessly. Our people signalled that we would stand by until daylight.

In the morning, the two captains had a conference and we found that we were to tow her to the nearest port, which would be, I think, Rockhampton. Then the fun began. Whilst the disabled ship's men were trying to tug a thick hawser over to us, our men rigged what they called a bridle on our ship. It was a wire rope, the middle of which had a turn around the foot of the main mast. The two ends were then passed out through the scuppers, one on each side. These were taken along the side of the ship and joined together outside the stern above the screw. It was found that the hawser was not long enough to reach us.

Then our captain, with our ship, circled around the other, intending to approach the men with the hawser in the boat. He seemed nervous about getting too close to the ‘Morayshire’ and passed along well out of reach of the boat. Then he circled again with the same result, and a third time, no nearer the boat.

Some few hours had now passed, and the chief mate was raging and cursing. Then the captain and the mate had a conference with the result that the latter took charge, circled around the other ship and I made contact with the boat. After some trouble they got the hawser coupled to the bridle. Now all seemed ready to proceed. The men in the boat had gone back to their ship. Signals were made and we started. Only a few minutes later a big smooth roller came between the ships, and the hawser parted like a sack thread. I think the hawser was three inches in diameter. It was all to be done over again.

The mate kept charge of the proceedings, and the men in the boat came out again, this time with a steel rope, which looked to me to be about one inch in diameter. The mate circled around once, picked up the wire rope and all was set. This time the tow-rope took all the strain, and at about two knots we towed her to Rockhampton, dropped her at an anchorage and then went our way.

ADELAIDE RIVER RAILWAY BANQUET

Up to the time of my departure from the Adelaide River, I had been on duty in the Post Office in Darwin. A few days before I went away, it was announced that Millar Brothers were giving a banquet to commemorate the beginning of the construction of the Port Darwin to Pine Creek Railway Line, a distance of 146 miles. I quite believe everybody but myself and a B.A.T man was there. I was not greatly attracted by the thought of the feasting and drinking, so saw Dan Kell, who was listed for duty on the night of the banquet, and offered to exchange duties if he wished to attend. He jumped at the chance and said, “Good old man, and be sure, I will bring you something from the banquet.”

The duty was 8 PM to 2 a.m. About 1 a.m. I heard footsteps, rather uneven footsteps, coming along the concrete verandah floor and a face like the spring sun was cautiously thrust around the door of the operating room, and a low whisper enquired if all was clear. On receiving an assurance it was. Dan rolled in and deposited a Magnum Pomeroy on the floor, and a fowl wrapped in paper. This was followed by the man who was to relieve me at 2am, who also carried a parcel containing a ham and other provender. The whole would have been sufficient for half a dozen people. They protested they had had enough, and I had no difficulty in agreeing with them. I proposed to the man who was to relieve me that I would take his duty also, and he could repay me later. I did not care to risk letting him relieve me then, so I went around to the quarters and saw them both safely in bed.

I returned to the Office, opened the two small glass doors fixed in the wall, which I have already mentioned, called to the BAT man and invited him to join me, which he did. Each one of us was in his own office, yet we banqueted together, and a right royal feast it was. I should add, however, that the whole of the official banquet was a great success with no unseemly incident to detract from the success.

ADELAIDE RIVER

On returning to Darwin in 1887, I had left my wife behind in Adelaide. Because of my misunderstanding with the senior officer of the Northern Section of the telegraph line, I felt quite sure he would not exert himself to make things easy for me. After nine years inland I wanted to remain in Darwin, where I could get a house and settle down.

On reporting myself, I received an exceedingly cold reception. When enquiring what was to be my fate as regards locality, I was informed that I would be advised in due course. This was not encouraging, but there it was. It was not for long, however, for a good angel appeared in the person of Mr Charles Miller, the senior ember of the firm of contractors, who were building the Darwin to Pine Creek railway line. He applied to the Overland Telegraph Department to have a telegraph operator allotted to the firm, who had sufficient business transactions to keep one constantly engaged; his business being chiefly with the head of the line and to move with it from time to time as the construction progressed, and I being for a time, at least, a blot on the official mind, was passed on to the firm.

The head of the works was at that time at the Adelaide River, some 76 miles from Darwin and roughly half way to Pine Creek. I arrived at the River by rail, there were no rail coaches as yet, so we were forced to ride in trucks. The only thing I had in connection with my duties, was a small telegraph field instrument, about three and a half inches square, used by a travelling operator, in a leather case with a strap, so that it could be carried slung over the shoulder.

I had, for the moment, to put up at the pub. I was provided with a tent, which was erected close to the telegraph line and here I set up my office, with a gin case for an instrument table, a brandy case for a seat, and an empty meat tin for a sounding board for the field instrument. The ticking needed some such assistance, which was not much louder than the ticking of a watch.

Thus was opened the first Post and Telegraph Office on the Adelaide River. I should add that I was also to act as Post and Telegraph Master. This was an easy job, with only one mail per week from the goldfields to Darwin, until more permanent arrangements could be made.

Next morning I took a seat at the breakfast table, and almost directly heard a word shot at me by the waitress, which sounded something like, “asheramoreggs?” It seemed somewhat familiar, but puzzled me for a moment and my hesitation brought another shot of the same calibre. A young man near me kindly interpreted, “Sarah wants to know which you will have – ash or am or eggs.” I decided on the latter; they could not be tampered with, but I did the QCE Hotel an injustice. If it had one value it was in the excellence of the food and the service connected therewith.

The young man who had helped looked like Dickens’ character, Jerry Cruncher, the honest tradesman, who had been fishing all night and was spotted and stained with clay, but the similarity ended there. This man had been fishing for gold, whereas Jerry had been fishing for dead bodies.

Puzzled for a long time by the name of the bush pub, the Q.C.E. Hotel, I made enquiries but could get no satisfaction; even the landlord seemed rather embarrassed by the question. But sometime later whilst talking to an old timer who mentioned the hotel, I asked him, and he knew. The letters meant, “Quiet, Comfortable, Easy.” Well, the man who named it must have been a humourist, and no wonder the present occupier was a bit shy on being asked to explain. Had the prefix ‘un’ been attached to each word, they would have gained in reality what they lost in sarcasm, and the advent of the Bridge Gang, just at this time, did nothing to lessen the sarcasm.

The Bridge Gang was a band of experts and they knew their job – the job in this case being the building of the Adelaide River Bridge. They were a tough crowd, but they were good men, and the firm cast a tolerant eye on their little lapses, which mostly occurred once a fortnight and directly after pay day, and there was, for a few days, no lack of entertainment to any who were not too fastidious in their tastes for amusement.

As the work advanced it was necessary to provide some means of getting construction material over the Adelaide River. For this purpose a temporary bridge was built. The permanent bridge, when completed would, of course, be level with the top of the earth banks. But the deviation bridge, as it was called, was low down near the winter level of the water, and looked a very shaky and primitive affair. Two rows of piles were driven down in the bed of the river, wide enough for a railway track. The opposing piles were strapped and bolted together to prevent swaying, then baulks of timber were laid along the tops of each row. The rails were fastened to these baulks and the bridge was complete. The method of the driver of the construction trains was simple. He’s not to reason why, so when within a mile or so of the river, speed was increased and the train came thundering down the bank, staggered across the quivering bridge, trusting to speed and impetus to help him up the opposite bank. Also he had the assistance of the fireman, who on the boiler platform outside the cab, was holding down the safety valve of the boiler to conserve steam; even then it was generally a touch and go job to get across.

The Police Station was a roomy building and I was soon accommodated by mutual agreement between the respective departments, that I should be provided with a room in that building, which was to serve as Post and Telegraph Office, as well as my bedroom, and as the firm’s staff increased, a mess was formed of engineers, timekeeper etc. As a temporary employee, I was entitled to join the mess and things were becoming more comfortable.

About this time it was decided to provide police protection, called the ‘Gold Escort’ for the mailman and his weekly trail from the goldfields to Southport. The escort was a uniformed constable, with a loaded carbine between his knees, sitting alongside the driver of the coach, a distance of about 140 miles, a two days trip, the night being spend at the River. Of course a lot of gold came down each week, quite a nice packet, for an enterprising bushranger. The population was scanty and scattered, and although a robber might elude the police in that country for an indefinite period, he could not live on gold, it being un-edible, he would have to show up somewhere to obtain food. There was little chance of him getting safely away to other states.

In four years, I knew of only one gold robbery in the Northern Territory and that occurred at the Post Office at Southport, as I have already described. This escort business was not a comfortable one for me. The mail with the escort would arrive towards sundown, drive up to the Post Office, throw off the mail bags, take a receipt from me for them. Then the pair of them would go off to the pub for tea, spend a comfortable evening and night, whilst I dragged those bags – I could not carry the one containing the gold – into my office cum bedroom, dumped them down on the middle of the floor, making them a part of my bed with the gold bag for a pillow.

A fully loaded revolver was kept handy. I had full responsibility until the mailman and escort turned up after breakfast next morning. They relieved me after giving a receipt for the mails.

I quite intended, should anything suspicious happen during the night or whilst the mails were in my charge, to shoot first and express regrets afterwards. No doubt, the fact of my being quartered at the Police Station would provide some measure of protection – but might not wholly so. Later, when the Darwin – Pine Creek Railway was completed, the mails were carried by rail. The road mails were cut out. Southport was by-passed and it reverted to its original jungle. Possibly no sign of it, except perhaps the old jetty, remains today.

As the work of construction of the railway line progressed, the need for housing accommodation for the railway staff became apparent. The contractor therefore had several cottages erected for the engineers and other personnel of the staff, one of which was allotted to me. These cottages, mostly two rooms, were built in sections so as to facilitate the removal and re-erection of them. They were constructed of galvanised iron on a framework of angle iron. Considering the places where they were required and other adverse circumstances, they were quite comfortable.

When necessary these buildings could be dismantled and moved either by railway trucks to the head of the line or else by wagons drawn by horse teams.

I was indeed very glad to have one, especially as it permitted me sending for my wife to join me. That, however, took some little time to arrange. In the meantime I was permitted to join the Railway Officer’s mess. This was a great convenience because the mess tent was placed near the Police Station.

As the carriage of our stores from Darwin cost us nothing, we could run a very good table for a reasonable charge. All meals were charged at ‘per meal’ rate, so that railway employees travelling to and fro, could have a meal and go on. My weekly bill amounted to about 14/-. In the evening, police, railway employees, myself and occasional guests would assemble in the Court Room of the Police Station and put on an entertainment of some sort; a very good institution, but one not appreciated by the Q.C.E. It sometimes happened, of course, that some interruption to the Telegraph Line occurred, and in that case, it was understood, that if the fault was on my section of the line, I was to drop everything else and get after the fault.

I was supplied by the department with a horse, as he was called by courtesy, named Parsons. One evening, after a heavy thunderstorm and rain, the line failed. I gathered in Parsons, who was no longer young and started out about 6pm My objective for that night was No 1 Depot, a railway camp 12 miles distant. The first five miles was fairly good going and from there on across the Adelaide Plains, it was all slush and bog. Parsons went on strike at the end of the five miles, so I put the saddle up in a tree and turned him loose, and tackled the rest of the night's journey on foot. It was not an enviable job. I lost my boots in the bog for a start, and left them there, because had I recovered them, I should have had to carry them and I had enough to carry already.

The night was clear, but dark and sultry with millions of frogs from far and near, quart-potting and hot-watering in all tones of voice. No other sound was to be heard, which made the night seem very desolate. I felt as if I were alone in the NT, and with a small sapling with which I could feel if the telegraph line was in its usual place or off the pole, I stumbled and plodded on until I reached the Shackle, five miles across the so-called plain, where I cut in and spoke to Darwin who informed me the fault was still South of me and I could go on.

I should like to have changed places for a time with the owner of the voice. However, I went on until I reached the railway camp, wet, tired and with bleeding feet and legs. I threw myself down on bags of horse feed to get what rest I could until daylight. The object of not tackling this job at night was to save time; if I passed the fault during the night, I was no worse off than if I had waited until morning, but if the fault was still ahead of me then I had gained twelve miles. In the morning the ganger lent me a horse to go on with. I found the trouble a couple of miles further on, fixed it up and returned to the railway camp, where I arranged to hire this horse to carry me back to the River.

Now having a house at my disposal, I sent for my wife from Adelaide with the baby whom I had not yet seen. I arranged to meet her in Darwin when the steamer arrived. She was shocked to see me. I had had a rather bad attack of malaria, and was just able to get about. I could not carry the baby up from the steamer to the Club Hotel, where I was staying. Of course everything was new and strange to the wife. She had no time to analyse her feelings, as we were off the next morning for the River. A coach was attached to the mixed train by this time, so we had a comfortable journey home.

For some reason, which I have forgotten, I had now to give up the room in the Police Station, so the Company built me a room about seven feet by seven feet of galvanised iron, for an Office. It was just large enough to contain a table for the instruments, some letter pigeon holes and a seat for me. One of its chief virtues, however, was that when the time came for me to go further towards the head of the line, a gang could put the office on a truck and take it where it was needed.

That need arose soon after my wife's arrival, and I and my office were shifted to Howley, a goldfield twenty miles further south. The Howley township was represented by the Hotel and nothing else. The township proper being some distance away, and there being no railway buildings there as yet, I had to leave the wife at the River, but I went down there by railway tricycle on Saturday nights and returned on Monday mornings. This arrangement did not continue long, however. The Company erected more cottages and I was given one.

The construction work had meanwhile gone fast ahead and after a few months, I was again shifted, this time to the terminus at Pine Creeks, 146 miles from Darwin. My connection with the railway contractors was here ended.

PINE CREEK

In 1888 I rejoined the OT as assistant to the Postmaster at Pine Creek. Pine Creek was a town of about thirty houses, including the Railway Station and Post office. There were two houses for the staff, of which I had one, a Police Station, Pub, Store and out scattered about was a fairly numerous population and many Chinese stores and more Chinese. But all were so spread over a large area that it would be difficult to assess the number.

The Railway Station had no platform and the train ran up on the level ground. When the railway was completed and taken over by the Government, three trains per week were put on, later reduced to two, and ultimately to one. Gold was, of course, the motive power of Pine Creek, but other minerals were found; tin, copper and silver. The goldfields were extensive and much of the precious metal, both alluvial and reef was obtained here.

The Royal Standard Mine, owned by Mr Olaf Jensen, made a fortune for him, and I have heard it said by those who would know, that alluvial and reef workings had been very haphazard and that under scientific treatment should yield much better results. But working expenses were heavy, the living hard, the climate trying and the country too far from the seat of Government, so that Pine Creek and most of the NT was facing adverse odds.

The only diamond ever found in the NT was picked up in the Cullen Creek, fifteen miles from Pine Creek. Mr Walter Griffiths, who was our Parliamentary member for the NT, had the diamond cut and mounted in a ring, which he showed me, and the stone when cut was worth £40.

The yarn about the finding of that diamond is perhaps worth repeating. An old prospector, down on his uppers, hunted about in the bed of the Cullen to see if he could find any agates or pebbles that would bring in a few shillings. He got a small bag of them. Then he went to a Chinese store at Pine Creek, saw the proprietor and showed him the stones. The Chinaman, with a pair of chopsticks, turned the stones over, separated one from the others and said, “I give you two pounds for this one, But it don’t want the others.”

This part of the story sounds a bit fishy to me. It was not indicative of the Chinese businessman. Had he offered the old prospector two shillings for the lot, he would most likely have got them.

On January 26th 1890, Ernest (the “Little Lad” of “We of the Never-Never”) was born at Burundie. Shortly after that, what I had been fearing, happened. I was to go to Daly Waters as assistant. There was nothing for it but to send the wife and two boys South, I thought, and wait and see what the future held.

DARWIN

When I returned to Darwin in 1890 with my wife and two sons, I quite expected to go at once to Daly Waters. The S & IO (Senior and Inspecting Officer – such was his title) and had his own reasons, at least I presume so, for doing something different, so I went on

duty in the Darwin Office. We were fortunate enough to secure a comfortable home, “Giles Cottage”, just out of town. It was 1893 before I got to have my own station. Quarters for married officers were not provided in Darwin.

I did not like the regular duties, and although we only worked six hours, it was often a gruelling duty, particularly if the old iron line was in a bad temper. All of the business was hand repeated at Alice Springs, a good long stretch even then, approximately 1,000 miles. In addition to that we had to make four copies of all cable business received. All pencil work and 99% it in code.

The procedure at the operating table was as follows - about ten blocks of telegraph receiving forms, each with three carbons, were placed at the operator’s right hand. On commencing to receive, he took the top block, wrote the message on it, then threw it on his left -–followed by another block from his right side for the next message, and so on. Then them messenger boy came along, stripped off the four copies from the written blocks, replaced the carbons and placed the block underneath the remainder of the pile on the operator’s right. By this arrangement the blocks were worked evenly.

The stripped off messages were handed to the entering clerk, who entered the details, then placed the top copy and a duplicate in the glass opening that divided the two offices. The BAT man kept the original, initialed the duplicate and returned it to our man for filing. The third copy went to Adelaide for filing, and the fourth, a spare, would not be of much use for any purpose.

We all wore two piece white drill suits (Java) and a singlet, but as we were not in view of the public, this was discarded when on duty.

There were billiards in the quarters, also a piano. The latter article was apparently prehistoric or predeluge. The mess had long wanted to get rid of it, but unfortunately it was too well known. Fate stepped in, however in our favour. One of our men, Fred Price, who was somewhat of a musical genius, was very anxious to get rid of this piano. There was little chance of doing so; then came notice of a sale of furniture, etc, by auction. A representative of the mess interviewed the auctioneer – Mr “Dad” Brown, and induced him to shove the piano in at the back of the sale, with doubts as to the results, but you never know.

Just before the day of the sale, there came an old timer from somewhere at the back of the Never-Never, Queensland way, bring his better half with him. His better half was a native woman, whom he had discovered somewhere in the bush. He took her to the nearest clergyman and married her. She had never been away from her own locality before. It would be interesting if one could take a peep into her brain and see what she thought of everything – the rain, the town of Darwin, the sea, the ships and heaps of other things that she had no idea of previously.

Well, her worse half attended this furniture sale. At the end when it came to the piano, Dad had no need to expiate on he merits of the instrument, but just put it up and said, “Now, who will give me a bid for this beautiful and well known instrument?”

“Twenty five pounds!” Yelled the woman’s other half as if afraid some one might get in front of him. Dad goggled and gasped but had presence of mind to drop the hammer. There was jubilation in the OT mess that night. I should like to know the subsequent fate of the woman’s worse half and the piano!

There was a large scale Chinese laundry in Darwin. All business was done by contract. When I was in the mess and had a room to myself, some years earlier, the proprietor contracted to ‘do’ me for 6/0 per month. At the beginning of the week, a Chinese would come round to the quarters, go through all the occupants’ rooms, pack up everything that needed laundering, including white suits, tie them up in a sheet and away. Two or three days later he would bring them back, and take another lot if he could find anymore. They were properly laundered and ironed, if necessary.

Settled in our cottage, we engaged a Chinese boy at £1 per month and his food. He was about fourteen to sixteen years of age. He was a general helper, very clean and polite, and was preparing himself, I think, to become a waiter, or boy at a hotel or on a steamer, preferably the latter. He was honest and conscientious in his work. One day we missed our two boys, Fred and Ern. There was a great ‘to do’. The Chinese boy was the most concerned of all. He was nearly frantic, and must have travelled miles, rushing about making enquiries. The kiddies were eventually found on board a steamer at the jetty.

Dan Kell, of the banquet incident, had now been appointed to Powell’s Creek. The Darwin Dramatic and Debating Society was rehearsing ‘The Merchant of Venice’. I was roped into take the part of. Antonio, which I am quite sure I would have made a hash of, but was saved that calamity by receiving orders a couple of days before opening night, to go to Daly Waters.

Part III; DALY WATERS

THE UGLY DUCKLING

On the Northern Section of the Overland Telegraph Line, Daly Waters was known as the Ugly Duckling. From the Elsey to the North Newcastle, a distance of 185 miles, there was only one really permanent watering place. This was No 2 Well, twenty eight miles south of the Elsey. In most years, of course, waterholes would see the 'Dry' through. More than once, though, No 2 Well was the only watering place. Under these circumstances, the two stages of 75 and 80 miles, from the Well to daily Waters and from Daly Waters to the Newcastle, were only undertaken for emergency causes, such as line faults or medical cases, either of which took no account of the lives of men or horses. All other cases had to wait for the rains.

Foot travellers headed the list of men in distress, generally trying to interrupt the line to bring relief. We had many such calls for assistance, but I knew of none that succeeded.

In my own time one man, named Little Coffee, walking from Port Augusta to Darwin, attempted to cut the line, South of Daly Waters, but had apparently left it too late. It was seen where he had tried to climb a pole, and fell, striking his head on a stone, leaving blood and hair on it. He was dead when the party, who was going to The Katherine, found him.

Another man doing the same journey came to Daly Waters, and I offered, if he liked to wait a few days, to send him with a party who was going to The Katherine, but he declined, as he preferred walking. He went onto another waterhole in the Birdum, still no water, and a third with a like result, so he gave in, crawled under a bush and died. Had he gone to the next hole, he could have got water. Two others travelling in opposite directions met about midway and tried to persuade each other to turn back, neither would and both died.

Of course they could not cut the wire to get assistance, that would be almost impossible with their equipment. Their only course was to try and break an insulator, either by throwing stones, or climbing a pole and smashing it with a stone.

One man had a mania for damaging the line. I had to send a party out to travel with him to The Katherine to prevent his causing damage. I knew of one man who walked from Port Augusta to Darwin, then turned around and walked back again, and when asked why he undertook such a journeys and such risks, said he was looking for work, yet when I offered him a job, he had half a dozen reasons for refusing it.

I was on and off in charge of Daly Waters, until I left the northern Territory in 1903 for good. One of my first acts was to add another boy to the staff. Toby was a boy belonging to the tribe. He had a wife and daughter in the black's camp. I had two official boys for whom I received 1/- per day each, Billy and Tommy, to provide them with clothing etc. I wanted a boy for the house and for my own particular service and Toby was the boy. I had known him for years as a good and trustworthy lad. There is an Arab saying that the food prepared for two will suffice for three, and the portion for the birds shall be none the less'. I

applied this formula to the boys' clothing and in this case I represented the birds. Toby became my horse boy, road boy, and ultimately nurse girl, washerwoman and general factotum.

Sometimes during the 'Wet', when we could not get out among the stock or other outside work, we were hard put to it to pass the time. All books and papers had been read and re-read, games and cards tried until all were sick of them. Then, one day, something put it into my head that it would be interesting to get a skeleton and assemble, or is it articulate, the bones, and give it a coat of luminous paint, and stick it up somewhere with a spear in the hand. Even if it was of no use, it would be a novelty and above all it was something to do. I called up Toby, told him what I wanted, and he immediately became wooden, as I knew he would. He didn't know of any 'bones' that could be made available.

"Very well," I said, "You get me the bones, unless you can get another boy to get them."

He thought he might get one in camp and away he went. I was not hopeful of the result, because all natives are superstitious, particularly with regard to the dead. I was more than surprised when he turned up later and said he had got a boy who would get the bones. The boy he brought to me was a native of Alice Springs who had adopted the Daly Waters' tribe by cunning and bullying. He was a nuisance and a nightmare to them. Several times they appealed to the Station authorities to do something, but what could we do! Binghai was too cunning to fall out with the Station people, for that would have meant his banishment at least. He, being a stranger, accounted for his willingness to supply bones, especially those belonging to somebody else.

"Now Binghai," I said, "Can you get me those bones?" "Yes, Boss." "I want them all, no more lose them." "I savvy, Boss. Can I have a pipe, Boss?" "Yes Binghai, when I get the bones. This is a POD transaction." He grinned and departed, knowing he had no change of getting a pipe beforehand.

Next day he turned up with a gunny bag containing the bones. As far as I could see (I am not an anatomist) they were all there. I had to take risks, so Binghai was paid and was turning away when it occurred to me to ask him, "Binghai, did you know this man before he died?" He looked surprised at the question and said loftily, "I'm his brother." Well, I had to laugh. Of course it was not his brother. If he had brought a brother with him from Alice Springs, the other natives would have known it, and it was unthinkable that he would carry his brother's bones (if the brother was dead) 800 miles for fun.

Still that was not my concern. Binghai went off satisfied that he had made a good deal, a thought in which I agreed with him.

Now, since I had started this thing going, my enthusiasm for the business had abated and was still abating. A lagging conscience awoke and suggested that though this man had had a black skin, his spirit might be as white, or whiter, than mine. And again was it quite cricket to take advantage of his being a nigger, to stick him up as a sort of glorified Aunt Sally for any fool to take a cockshy at? I decided it wasn't.

Binghai's alleged brother also was eloquent in his own way in protesting against this tampering with his bones, so I gingerly rebagged him and at night went out and buried him with an unexpressed wish that he would now rest in peace.

It was only a few months later that the rumour reached us that Binghai had transferred his activities to Hodgson Downs Cattle Station, 120 miles NE of Daly Waters, where his notions of personal property were not appreciated, and when one day when he had been getting his hand on and was getting out with his loot, a 450 colt revolver bullet overtook him, and at the same time undertook him, and it is presumed that Binghai's spirit has now gone to what one writer described as that 'turn whence no traveller returns.'

DALY WATERS – LORD KINTORE

Information came that Lord Kintore, the recently appointed Governor of south Australia would be proceeding to Darwin, and from there travel overland to Adelaide. This, it was understood, to be at the instigation of the English Government.

Everybody became very busy. Stores from Adelaide were sent to each station from Daly Waters southwards, to replenish stores consumed on the journey and to save carrying a large supply. Horses had to be broken in to the buggy. Plenty would be needed.

During April 1891, the party arrived at Darwin. It consisted of His Excellency, Dr Stirling, and a coachman. Of course there was a great stir in Darwin. The information that the Governor was not delaying anywhere or for anything caused some disappointment. One of the reasons for the haste was that the Governor had to be in Adelaide on a certain date to hold a levee. The time allowed him to do this was exceedingly short. There were three four-in-hand buggies, and five men including three drivers. A leader in charge of the travelling arrangements, a police escort of one man, and the other whose name I have forgotten, made up eleven all told.

The coachman, brought from Adelaide, drove the Governor's buggy for one day, then admitting his inability to negotiate such roads, resigned and was sent back. A linesman from the line party took over the job, and of course there was no more trouble on that score. There were between forty and fifty horses and the two buggies, apart from that of his Excellency's, to carry the equipment. The leader, Mr Alf Pybus, the trooper and the two blackboys rode on horseback.

I received orders to meet the party at No 2 Well. I suppose it was considered as a gesture of courtesy for the head of the Station to meet him instead of an assistant, so I proceeded with a blackboy to No 2 well, 75 miles, and arrived there a few hours before the Vice Regal party. Introducing myself, I was kindly invited by His Excellency to join his mess whilst we were travelling together. The mess would consist of the Governor, Dr Stirling, the leader and myself. I did a good lot of telegraph work. The Governor wished, each day, to know what was being done and said in Parliament, and other important news.

It was clear that the Governor thought he was roughing it in the wilds of Australia – but, ye Gods, I never had travelled in such a luxurious way before. There was plenty of spirits and wine, but no one, however, had too much. Nothing much befell the party, until it arrived to about sixteen miles from Daly Waters, where there was a patch of Bay of Biscay, which was wet and sticky enough to be difficult and decidedly uncomfortable, and not sufficiently sloppy to free clay from feet or wheels.

Each step would take up a pancake of this clay, until it fell off by its own weight. The same with the horses, and with the wheels of the buggy it was worse, for in about a hundred yards the wheels would lock with the clay, then it was out with spades, tomahawks and knives to cut it free. His Excellency was as handy with a spade as anybody else and bore a full share in the job. When we reached the fourteen mile, however, that sticky trouble ended. From there to the Station was good going.

The party remained for about three days to re-organise itself, and then went on to Powell's Creek, but without me. I had managed to dodge the second part. An assistant took my place.

I had been troubled for some time with my eyes, and Dr Stirling's advent was too good an opportunity to lose. I therefore got him to examine them, with the result that he gave me a certificate for the Post Office authorities, recommending that I should visit Adelaide to have the eyes attended to and, coming from such a source, the certificate produced immediate success, and within a few weeks I was on my way. In due course I reached Adelaide and had my trouble seen to, and as I was not otherwise sick, and was not on holidays, I was taken into the operation room at the Chief Office till the next steamer was due to sail. They forgot all about me apparently, and so I remained there for about eighteen months until early 1893 when Mr Little wanted to know what had become of me, then I got instructions to be off gain. I had now been promoted to the 5th Class, and was not likely to be shifted from pillar to post as formerly, so I decided to take my wife and family with me.

We left for Sydney to join the steamer "Menmuir" for Darwin. Before leaving Adelaide, however, Sir Charles Todd asked me, "Mr Goss, have you had any experience with Duplex?" "No, Sir." "Then you should make yourself acquainted with it. The Darwin line is to be duplexed and your station will be one of the repeating stations, and you will need to be in a position to train your staff."

DALY WATERS – BUSH FUNERAL 1895

Before I went to Adelaide in 1887, I made the acquaintance of Mr James Crawford, who came over from Sydney via Queensland with a travelling party. He was the owner of Hodgson downs Cattle Station, 120 miles N.E of Daly Waters. He was on his way out there to manage it himself. He had apparently depended on his companions to see him through to Daly Waters. As they were going to Darwin, they had to leave him to shift for himself from Daly Waters.

Being in a fix, he came to me. As it happened, I was able to assist him to go out to his Station. It was a small service on my part, but one that Crawford much over-estimated. We became good friends. He was well read and a well-informed man. I was always glad to see him come over to us, which he occasionally did on telegraph business. Knowing he would be welcome, he generally arranged to stay for a few days with us before returning. In 1895, just after being made a J.P., Jimmy paid us one of his periodicals visits. Now about a fortnight or so before he came, one of the hands, named Charles Harrison, became ill. Satisfying myself that he had something more than malaria wrong – malaria and other recurrent troubles, we could deal with ourselves for we had a good medicine chest supplied by the Department – I wired the Doctor at Darwin and received a prescription. Harrison was a German, a surly sort of chap, not liked by anybody, and who never spoke unless spoken to, and then never wasting a word.

A few days later I wired the Doctor again and got another prescription. This was repeated on two occasions, the last being when I reported symptoms that had not appeared before. The prescription on this occasion was, in effect, that Harrison had only a few hours to live and his friends had better be informed.

I was on duty at the time and received the message, and I was considerably perturbed by it, because it meant I had to go and tell the sick man he was to die immediately, a most unpleasant job. For a while I did not see any way of avoiding it. At length, however, remembering that Crawford was a J.P., I thought I might shove the job on to Jimmy.

Rather a mean thing, I admit, but there you are, so whistling up a boy, I told him to go over to the house and ask Mr Crawford to come over to the Office. Jimmy came and I handed him the telegram. He looked as sorry as the occasion demanded.

Harrison was a stranger to him, and he said tentatively, “A bit unpleasant for you this, isn’t it?” “For everybody,” I said, “But more for you than anyone else.” “How so?” he asked in surprise. “Well,” I said, “If there were any police here, I should hand that wire over to them and let them deal with it, but as there are not, and you are a JP and the only representative of the Law here, it seems that it falls to you to take on the job.” “Oh!” he said, looking glum, “I don’t like it but if that is the position I suppose I must do it. I’ll tell you what Fred, you’ll have to give me a spot of rum to set me up.”

This I concluded to regard as a medical case, and got out a bottle and we had one. He took the wire and went out. That was about 3pm I was shaking hands with myself on my astuteness, but alas too soon. About 4pm he came back. Throwing the wire on the table,

he said, “It’s no good. I tried half dozen times, but could not find an opening. I can’t do it, and what’s more, I am not going to try and that’s final. I think it should be your business.” And I had to agree with him, but silently.

We had another reviver apiece. Then getting an assistant to relieve me, I went around to the bunk-houses, assuming as casual an air as possible and smoking. I entered the room, nodded to the other chap and went over to Harrison’s bed.

He was lying with his face to the wall and his back to me. I sat on the foot of his bed, and by way of an opening, said lightly, “Well Charlie, how are you now?” He turned himself half around, mumbled something, which might have been anything, and turned again to the wall. This would not do. I had to adopt a more business like tone. “Now, look here Charlie,” I said, “You have been pretty bad for a good while now. Don’t you think it would be a fair thing to let your friends know, otherwise they would have good cause to feel hurt to hear from an outsider that you had been ill. If you care to send word to any of them it won’t cost you anything, you know.”

For a time he said nothing. I was beginning to think the job was harder than ever I thought, when he suddenly turned around and looked me straight in the face.

“Is that what the doctor says?” he asked me. I took the chance he gave me and nodded. There was no need for words. We understood each other. He did not speak again, but turned to the wall. We never knew whether he had friends or not. No one knew of his ever having received or written a letter. He died that night at 11pm, without uttering another word.

We had no timber with which to make a coffin. We used two sheets of galvanised iron, one under and one over him, having first carefully wrapped him in his blankets, then lashed the iron sheets together.

Harrison was about five feet six inches in height. The iron was only five feet, so his feet protruded a little, but tidily wrapped in his blankets. I arranged for a grave to be dug and announced that the funeral would take place after breakfast. About 7.30am we assembled for the function. One man quite seriously, and without meaning any irreverence, gave a sniff or two and said, “Poor old Charlie! If we could have given him another hour or two, he would have been able to waddle over himself.”

It was rather an unusual, but impressive scene; all of the men with hats off, the coffin support on cross pieces on top of the grave, the two Chinese with their arms around each other, a short distance away, and a small group of natives a little further off.

I read the Church of England service and hoped for the best. Now we had two occupants, instead of one, in our little cemetery, both named Charles.

DALY WATERS – THE HORSE KILLERS

Soon after I took charge, the natives came in one day, and reported that the Roper River natives had killed one of our station horses. I went out five or six miles to identify the horse and took the boys with me. Sure enough, the report was correct. The animal was a draught horse that had cost £40 not long before.

The natives had killed it for meat, and of course could not eat one tenth of it on the spot or convey it to their own camp.

I reported the matter to the police in Darwin, and forgot all about it. I was the more surprised two or three months later to receive official notification that two killers had been arrested at the Roper by the Police stationed there. They were being taken to Darwin for the Circuit Court Sessions. I was instructed to join the party at the King Crossing, 28 miles south of The Katherine and to proceed with them, to arrive in Darwin not later than a certain date, as the case was listed for that session.

There were two constables, their boy, myself and my boy, two prisoners and three witnesses; ten in all and in the middle of the 'Wet', so it was not an enviable trip. Still we got along pretty well until we reached the "Ferguson', twenty two miles south of Pine Creek, which was running a banker and about sixty yards wide. That was wider than it usually was, even in flood time. The trouble was our equipment, the food, saddlery and bedding.

Everybody was requested to use their brains and suggest what could be done. There was trouble for the constables if, through arriving late, the case would have to be held over for the following sessions – three months later. They did not under-estimate the trouble. However, the senior man, Stott, said he thought it could be done.

This was his suggested plan: - Two ground sheets spread end to end, with a generous overlap where they joined, then three pack saddles, upside down, placed end to end on the ground sheets, then three light strong saplings, one on each side of the pack saddles at the top, and one along the bottoms of the irons. Now the ground sheets were brought up to the edge of the upturned pack saddles and securely fastened to the saplings. The ground sheets were gathered at the two ends, so as to form a bow at each end of the 'boat'. The thing looked alright, but now to test it. it was placed in the water with the overlap of the groundsheets running the same way as the current. Then we loaded her with gear that would best stand wetting. We fixed on and made up tow line, and sent a boy in with the tow line in his teeth to make for the nearest clump of trees or bushes that would hold him. Then he hauled the boat over to him with the help of another boy to guide or steady her. Then on from there to the next clump and so on. It got over dry and they returned for more. In about two hours everything was on the other side without mishap.

The men and horses went over, of course, in a few minutes. All our troubles were over. It was only twenty two miles to the train with only one creek, the Cullen, to cross, which was not likely to be difficult.

As we were leaving the Ferguson, a party from Alice Springs arrived on the other side. Ten days later as I was returning on the way back to Daly Waters, they were still there.

The killers got a couple of years, if I remember correctly. That would be a very severe punishment for them, for they, and I believe all natives, suffer acutely from nostalgia. They would certainly watch every opportunity to run away. As for our own Daly Waters boys, who gave me the information about the killing, I saw that they were adequately rewarded.

DALY WATERS – CAMELS

We always kept horses in the home paddock, which was a mile square, in case of an emergency trip on the line. One morning, seeing that the grass about the station seemed pretty fresh, I told the boys to take these horses out of the paddock and hobble them on the station side of the creek. They had been feeding there quietly for sometime, when suddenly the four of them, as if by a pre-arranged signal, seemed galvanised into a fit of terror, heads up, nostrils expanded, and snorting. Something from the south side of the station had startled them. What it was, no sign that we could see or hear, but there was certainly something.

The horses after one terrified look, galloped, in hobbles, off in the opposite direction for twenty or thirty yards, then as if brought up by a flash, they turned around, had another snort and glare in the direction from which the horror was manifesting itself. This action they kept repeating until they were out of sight. I sent two boys with head stalls to bring them back. We then waited for a solution. The solution took half an hour to solve itself. The answer was a half dozen camels, the first incursion of camels into the Never-Never. I had never seen animals as terrified as those horses were. What seemed no less strange, was that the horses, brought back and placed among the camels, had in an hour or two, apparently been used to the company of camels all their lives.

The scent of those ungainly animals seemed to affect the horses from a couple of miles distant. I asked Ahmed, the leader of the party, if it was intended to bring camels into the Northern Territory. He said, “No. The country was no good for them. The mud and slippery ground after rain rendered them useless. They seemed to lose control of their legs, which would spread eagle out in different directions.” They wanted drier and sandy country.

Ahmend, I don’t know if he was an Afghan or Arab, was in a difficulty. The party had had no meat for sometime. He knew from experience that the Telegraph Stations could not sell him a beast. His religion would not permit him to eat any meat, except that killed by one of themselves.

He was a most intelligent chap. He had been years about Alice Springs and Oodnadatta. I had some very informative talks with him, and won his gratitude forever by presenting him with a live sheep.

DALY WATERS - 1896 TO 1903

SNAKE STORY

Most people have heard snake stories. There was one in particular, about a man pulling a snake out of its hole by the tail, and cracking it like a whiplash, thus breaking its back. This year I have heard in every state in the Commonwealth (except Tasmania). The narrator generally knew the bloke ‘wot done it’. I ha’ my doubts about it myself.

I have a snake incident to relate, which has one merit at least, that it is one that happened to myself and the snake. I have described the main building as being built of a wooden framework, covered by galvanised iron. This building was nearly new and stood on wood piles (iron capped against white ants) about eighteen inches high. The verandah all round the home was latticed in by split bamboo and the lattice was broken in only one place, where four steps led up to the verandah.

I had an organ. I know nothing of written music, but I used to play a little by ear. The organ in my room was up against the wall. One night I sat practising at it with both hands. There was a heavy dining table behind me, with a kerosene lamp on it giving me light on the keyboard. I was not sufficiently expert yet to play without looking at my fingers and the keys. After looking down for some time, I looked up suddenly, and to my amazement, if nothing worse, I saw a snake’s head about fifteen inches from my face. The eyes were closed, the head with about eight or nine inches of the body upright, was swaying gently and rhythmically to the sound of the music

I was staggered for a moment, but had sufficient presence of mind to keep on playing. I could not get out; the heavy table would have scraped the floor and probably wakened the snake. I had to keep on playing. The snake was between the wood framework and the iron, in the corrugation. It had bent over and rested itself on the top of the organ with its head and neck raised. I thought quickly. Three rooms away was my assistant, named Waldemar, who I knew would be reading in bed, but how to call out to him at the risk of waking my friend, the snake. So I began to hum softly to the music, gradually increasing the humming until I thought it was loud enough to carry. Then I added words to the hum thus, for some time there was no response to this. Then it seemed to strike him. “Oh, what’s that?” he said. I repeated, “Waldemar, snake.” “Oh! Alright, hang on. I’ll be there.” A few minutes later I heard him come pattering along the verandah. He looked cautiously in the door, saw what was doing and came into the room behind the table and me.

Then he decided what to do, and saying, “Keep going,” to, me ran over to the kitchen and got the cook’s hair broom, or nearly bald broom, which in this case, was better than a full-haired one. He now put down the broom, and very gently and softly shifted one end of the table until he could get behind me. Then he rested the handle of the broom on my shoulder with the hair part towards the snake, and with a good aim and a sudden thrust pushed the snake in the corrugations that it had come up in.

“Now what?” said he. Then I came in. “Hang on, I’ll be back,” and went over to the kitchen, got the cook’s tomahawk, and with the top edge of the blade, managed to saw off the snake’s head.

ROUGH JOURNEY – 1897

I was taking my family to Pine Creek en route to Adelaide on account of the younger boy's illness. Dan Kell, Stationmaster at Powell's Creek, asked if I would bring Mrs Kell back with me. This request placed me in a rather difficult position. I would gladly do anything for Dan and his wife, but they did not know what they were asking. Dan had only just come inland from Darwin and knew nothing of the bush and its difficulties. Mrs Kell had been matron of the Palmerston Hospital, and hadn't the slightest notion of what she was likely to undergo on the journey of six hundred miles in that country and in that season.

I knew I could get my family to the train at Pine Creek, because I had made spread preparations in case of such an emergency. On the return trip I knew I could get back, even if I had to park the buggy and ride the horses, but to take two females on such a journey, with its uncertainties, was another matter. I explained this to Dan, but he and his wife were sure it would be alright and were willing to take the risk. I count not well do otherwise than agree.

The return party would consist of Mrs Kell, her half caste maid, my other boy, who was to remain at Daly Waters with me, a Chinese cook for Powell's Creek, my black boy and myself. By this time there was a weekly mail from pine Creek to The Katherine. It was arranged that Mrs Kell and the others would join me at The Katherine.

In due course they arrived there. Then the trouble began. For a start I jettisoned about half their luggage. That could come on by the teams later. It was no use trying to explain the reasons for leaving it. Still, we got a fairly good start from The Katherine, about 8 a.m., making for the King River that night, about twenty eight miles, breaking our journey at Easter's Well, twenty miles, for lunch. So far everything went according to plan. Now, Mrs Kell was used, of course, to white tablecloths and other fitting accessories for the dining table, but was somewhat out of place under our circumstances, but never-the-less we did very well. After lunch I started to pack up, the two horses in the buggy standing ready, when the Chinese cook took up the white tablecloth, and shook it out right in front of the horses. They showed their disapproval at once by bolting off through the trees and undergrowth, scattering various articles of utensils and luggage as they went. I listened for the final crash. It came. Then stillness. Well, what could I say? Nothing ! The cook didn't mean any harm. He just didn't know.

Mrs Kell was in tears and abandoned all hope of ever seeing Dan again. The maid sat down and grinned. Everybody waited to see what was to happen next. There was nothing but to make the best we could of the business. I set the cook and the maid collecting the debris, whilst the boy and I went to estimate the damage. I was afraid of a damaged axle or wheel, and though bad enough, the damage was not as bad as that; the front carriage crumpled up completely, the pole swingle bars broken and the goose neck twisted.

The horses were alright and the harness. Getting all hands to help, we got the buggy back to the camp. I had a tomahawk, a spanner, a pair of pliers and a 3/8-auger bit, but there was plenty of line wire lying about. So I got to work, new pole and swingle bar and straighten the goose necks. I had my work cut out, but by about 4 PM I told Mrs Kell that

we might still camp at the King that night. The sun shone again. We did get to the King and the next day to Bitter Springs, eighteen miles from the Elsey Station (the Front Gate).

A day there, where there was a forge to make better repairs, then we were ready for the road once more. We started off the next morning for No 2 Well, twenty eight miles. The following day we had to go forty one miles to the Ironstone (Birdum) without water. The Ironstone water was in a 400 gallon malt tank, which had been carted there, to enable me to get through on my outward trip, thirty four miles from Daly Waters.

As we approached the tank, the trouble rose up to meet us. The lid of the tank was open. No need to inspect it. Blacks had managed to get the lid off, taken what water they wanted, to which they were welcome, then went away leaving the cover off. The tank was half full of dead birds and live worms, a struggling sickening mass, the thirty fours miles to go to the Station. Of course the horses would not go near it. I tried boiling some of it, but the smell could not be lessened. There was nothing now, but to face the inevitable and prepare for an all night travel.

I left starting as late as I could to give the horses a chance to get a roll and a mouthful of grass, and to get near the cool of the evening. We had enough water to have a pot of tea. Then we started. It would be an all night drive. Well, just about dark, almost without warning, a shower of rain came. It just tumbled down for a few moments then cleared off as suddenly as it came.

There was not time to do anything except to drive the buggy off the track and let the horses get what water they could among the tussocks of grass. It was not much, but it was enough to freshen them up a bit. I decided then to go on to the fourteen mile and then turn them out for an hour or two and get a sleep. We all needed that and got it.

At daylight I got out and listened for the horses. No sound. I should have known better and have tied them up. I roused the cook and the boy to go after them. They would make for Stuart's Swamp, fourteen miles away. Not knowing when they would get back, I advised Mrs Kell and Clara to take the water bag and walk towards the Station.

It was all good going now, and they could not miss the track, so they started – Mrs Kell in tears. It was about 11 a.m. when the horses got back, and I lost no time in getting a start, being a bit anxious, not knowing what Mrs Kell might do. The little lad and I got away quickly and found Mrs Kell and the maid about a quarter of a mile away. The former had given up. After all she could hardly be blamed. It had been a trying time for a new chum.

However, all's well that ends well. We got in at last without further mishap. Mrs Kell, however, had to wait several weeks before going on to Powell's Creek. There was an eighty mile dry stage from Daly Waters to Newcastle Waters, so she must perforce wait for the first showers.

DUPLEX.

Early in 1898, the Duplex System of sending or receiving two messages at the same time was introduced. For this purpose, a second wire – copper, the resistance of which was less than half of the old original iron line - facilitated the transmission of the business by at least 100% for two reasons. One, on account of the lower resistance, and, two, having now two wires, we could, when a fault occurred in a section of the copper, cut out that section and cut in a section of the other in its place.

Acting on the advice of Sir Charles, I obtained a copy of the latest Duplex working in the United States, by Haver and Davis. On my way back to Darwin both by sea and land travelling, I had the opportunity to study the system to such good effect, that I had the instruments installed ready for work, before the two experts, who were sent from Adelaide for this job at respective stations. Had still one station – Powell's Creek – to connect up. I received a message from Sir Charles, thanking me for the assistance I had given in getting the work going.

Of the two experts, Mr E Johns went to Darwin by sea and took charge of the Section for the time being, while the other, Mr G Field, went overland to fix up the repeaters at Charlotte Waters, Alice Springs, Powell's Creek and Daly Waters. Some little hitch occurred at Powell's Creek. I took a long shot, got mine in first. Fortunately for me there was no hitch in the installing of my set, or I should have been in hot water.

The four automatic repeaters, Charlotte Waters, Alice Springs, Powell's Creek and Daly Waters were in circuit for the full twenty four hours, one and three together, and two and four together. This arrangement was observed until 1903 when I left the Northern Territory for good. Until the coming of the Duplex, the Office in the old building was also the Officers' dining room. I now turned one of the rooms into a dining room and built a kitchen adjoining; then I altered the old office so that it contained the batteries as well as the instruments. I built racks for the batteries, which aggregated 350 meidinger cells. A section of these batteries was renewed each week in such a manner that at the end of four months, the whole had been renewed, thus maintaining them at a level strength

MRS GUNN

The first time I met Mr and Mrs Gunn was at their home at the Elsey Cattle Station in 1902. I was returning from The Katherine and had put in a night at the Elsey. Before starting on my journey the next morning, having to speak on the line to see that all was well before setting out, a rule not to be ignored, I said to Mrs Gunn, that if she wished to send a telegram, I could do so from the Shackle. Mrs Gunn became highly excited and called out to Mr Gunn.

“Mr Goss says he can send a telegram out from the Shackle. Come and help me to write it.” “We’ll go to the Shackle and see that he sends it properly.”

The Shackle was about two miles away. Horses were sent for and we all went over to the line. I attached my instrument and with an empty meat tin as a sound board, sent the message, which Mrs Gunn held up before me. I saw Mrs Gunn’s eyes looking along the long stretch of clearing and the line itself to where it faded away in the distance, with her heart in her eyes- she would have like to have gone with the telegram.

“How long before they will get it?” she asked. It has to go to Victoria. “I can’t say,” I told her, “I can only send it to Daly Waters, where it must wait its turn with the traffic from other stations. It might take a couple of hours – certainly not longer.”

The first of Sept 1903 I was transferred to Adelaide. During the succeeding years, I was appointed to the following Post Offices: - Caltowie, Millicent, Renmark, Port Pirie and finally Port Augusta.

I Retired from the Postmaster General’s Department on 31st December 1927.

F Goss

“WE OF THE NEVER NEVER.”

References to the writer in Mrs Gunn’s book are as follows:-

Chapter Seven “Two hundred and fifty guests…… changing colour met our eyes.” “But the operator, being unpoetical,……in one great brotherhood.”

Chapter Fourteen. “Dan went in to the homestead…….. just pleasant memories.

Chapter Sixteen. “Then the chief of the telegraph coming in……Dandy’s promise to wake him at dawn.”

For a few days the man rested……ever we had dared hope for.”

The Staff Register also records for F.Goss:-

25 May	1878 – 30 June 1878	Lineman Southport	3/- per day
1 July	1878 – 31 Aug 1878	Operator Southport	3/- per day
1 Sep	1878 – 31 Dec 1880	Operator Southport	4/- per day
1 Jan	1881 – 28 Feb 1881	Operator Yam Creek	4/- per day
1 Mar	1881 – 30 Apr 1882	Operator Yam Creek	5/- per day
1 May	1882 – 31 July 1882	Operator Yam Creek	6/- per day
1 Aug	1882 – 30 June 1883	Assist Powell Creek	6/- per day
1 July	1883 – 19 April 1884	Assist Katherine	6/- per day
20 April	1884 – 16 Nov 1886	Assist Daly Waters	6/- per day
16 May	1887 – 30 Sep 1887	Operator Pt Darwin	6/- per day
1 Oct	1888 – 30 Sep 1888	Operator Adelaide River	8/- per day
1 Oct	1888 – 18 Dec 1888	Operator Howley Creek	8/- per day
19 Dec	1888 – 30 Sep 1889	Operator Adelaide River	8/- per day
1 Oct	1889 – 30 Apr 1890	Assistant Katherine	8/- per day
1 May	1890 – 30 Apr 1895	Operator Pt Darwin Line	
1 May	1896 – 30 June 1900	PM/SM Daly Waters	150
1 July	1900 – 30 June 1901	PM/SM Daly Waters	160
1 July	1901 – 30 June 1902	PM/SM Daly Waters	170
1 July	1902 – 30 June 1903	PM/SM Daly Waters	180
1 July	1903 – 31 Aug 1903	PM/SM Daly Waters	190
1 Sep	1903 – 30 June 1904	PM Caltowie	190
1 July	1904 – 24 June 1908	PM Caltowie	200 less 15 rent
25 June	1908	PM Caltowie	210 less 21 rent