

AMBLE 10

(EVERY ISSUE JUST A BIT MORE IDENTICAL THAN THE LAST)

32nd OMPA MAILING

Perpetrated by ARCHIE MERCER of 434/4 Newark Road, North Hykeham, Lincoln, England. (E&OE) Emanating from within the Caravan in the Shadow of the Malleable Ironworks. Yngvi is a Louse. A MERCATORIAL PUBLICATION

And so to THE SHAMBLES for the 31st Mailing plus.

BINARY 1 (Joe Patrizio)
CHICKEN-WAGON 1 (Calvin W. "Biff" Demmon)
DOLPHIN 1 (Elinor Busby)
ASP 1 (Bill Donaho)
OLLA PODRIDA 1 (Walter Breen)
OUTPOST 1 (Fred Hunter)
QUARTERING 1 (Don Fitch)

More first issues in one Mailing has surely been seldom if ever seen since the legendary First Mailing. Six of them new-member firsts, furthermore - and all seven highly welcome and good OMPA reading.

Joe: what do Scotlanders call Scotch mist, Scotch broth,

butterscotch, scotch eggs etc? Re "I hate war" for a name - suppose the child grew up to like war? Some people do. That would make him a liar every time he introduced himself. And come to think of it, having a name like that would be in itself a great inducement to favour war. Artist "Gus" doesn't thrill me right now, but I like Cliff Temple's effort. How old? (Cliff, not the effort).

"Biff": you have a Gimmick there, mate. Don't overdo it. As it is, I quite like it in smallish doses. Isn't it illegal to have chickens pulling wagons in America?

Elinor: your intro still tells a lot about yourself, you know. Mink coats are supposed to be suitable for hard wear in cold and/or wet climates - but are used almost entirely for snob-appeal instead. Besides, the high prices they command make the possession of one a practical liability rather than an asset. So why not leave the animals alone? I appreciate what you say about Chicago, but wouldn't (say) sheepskin serve perfectly adequately? It still strikes me as the last word in heartlessness to breed animals purely for the pelt - particularly if it's only for show anyway. When I saw your "America early acquired many non-British settlers", my immediate thought was "So did Britain". That isn't all that relevant, come to think of it, but what you say doesn't - to my mind - excuse us having to fight each other. WKSF's Hugo - it's not just poor sportsmanship, though I'll readily admit to the latter if pressed. It's more like seeing a race won by an invisible horse.

Bill: damn you, I thought this was "GASP" until I came to type it, so it's out of alphabetical order above. That tax-free income - not having to work for it would embarrass me, for a start. We can't cash stamps at post offices - no. We don't need to. So long as we use the mails fairly frequently, or know people who do. And an occasional parcel will get rid of the larger denominations if any. I'm rather under the impression that in America, children of the same age go to school together and thus tend to gang together automatically. We went to boarding school, and our circle of local contacts in any neighbourhood (we kept moving remember) was never very large. My brother, to the best of my recol-

lection, was equally capable of acquiring friends - playmates, then - older or younger than himself. The question of the Revolution helping in the long run to rid the British of GeoIII-type rule is maybe valid, but that particular "long run" is actually comparatively short as runs go I think. In a longer run still, I think we'd all have benefited. Re Heinlein and minutemen - I didn't say he said just that, I said "people like Heinlein" tended to say it. Whether he's ever said anything to that effect I don't know, but it's the sort of thing I'd expect him to say. Pity I didn't keep that "Heirs of P. Henry" broadside that GMC circulated some time back, I have a vague recollection of minutemen getting a mention therein but wouldn't swear to it. Your conscription quote is surely irrelevant anyway - minutemen weren't conscripts, they were volunteers. (A conscript takes two minutes.)

Walter: there was a report in the paper the other day about a parliamentary exchange concerning special schools for bright children. The minister of education was turning the idea down on the grounds that they weren't necessary. Then some M.P. asked how many members of the House possessed the necessary minimum IQ to qualify for the suggested school. The Speaker (unfortunately) spoilt that by wittily ruling that the matter was irrelevant to the original question on the grounds that M.P.s' ages would disqualify them anyway. Check with Roles to be sure, but I understand he listed the original members (apart from the committee) alphabetically as easier than badgering Viné for the necessary research to put them in order of application or acceptance. Another point of similarity (to change the subject) - my ideal newspaper, too, would be Indispensable. Re your comments on SCUFFLE - damn - SOUFFLE 1, the fact that the original tune in one's head adds an extra "voice" to jazz counterpoint has occurred to me in the past. Which is possibly partly why I like easy-to-remember tunes. Now to put OLLA POD aside prior to checking the address-amendments with my index.

Fred: the best cover of the Mailing. "Amleth" sounds a far more romantic name than "Hamlet". Not to mention without the swinish puns inherent in the latter. And hey, everybody - if we all pretend we haven't noticed Fred's justification, perhaps he won't do it any more.

Don: I like the Hinge covers. The labels on the front one look as if they ought to attach to gramophone records rather than food, but never mind. Re my "Be an Angel", you were right first time. I didn't when I did it know that anybody else was coming up with anything similar. Your chronological approach to music sounds interesting.

SOUFFLE 2 (John Baxter) John: I keep thinking of this as SCUFFLE. I
SATHANAS 2 (Dick Schultz) urge you to change it, before things get any
 worse. Re THE SECOND SATURDAY, there was only
 one copy in which pages 3 & 4 were the same way up, and that was a "scrap"
 page where P.3 (I think it was) had been interrupted by the packer's slip.
 (I sent that one - complete with packer's slip - to John Roles as a compli-
 mentary advance copy). It costs 6d (approx. 7½) to send an air-letter form
 anywhere in the world. I don't know where you get your 25½ minimum from -
 unless you write l-o-n-g letters. Even so, the minimum surface rate is also
 6d (for one ounce). All the Lehrer items you mention are on one or the other
 of his LPs available in this country. (Which I have, the second one in the
 longer plus-patter version).

Dick: Sathanas (as somebody said back there) is surely a variant of Satan,
 yes. Likewise Shaitan etc. Richard S. Shaver and Bob McKenna had a novel in
 Amazing for November '46 entitled "The Return of Sathanas" (according to the
 Daybook). "Tanz Motte" equals "moth dance" (according to the Anglo-German

Wörterbuch

THE WALL Part 4 (Bill Donaho)
 PACKRAT 4 (Jim Groves)
ENVOY 4 (Ken Cheslin)

Bill: you've done such a good job clearing up what 's already happened that it seems almost a shame that Ethel's now seen fit to bring the thing to a close.

Jim: a trapped animal is at least free to lead it's own life until it is trapped. It's keeping the things in cages all their lives only to kill them for vanity's sake that I find nauseating.

Ken: mate, there isn't any dividing line between history and archaeology. At any rate, not a dividing dateline. History is generally accepted as meaning written history. Archaeology, ie the unveiling and study of ancient monuments and other traces of times past, helps us to re-create history where it does not yet exist, and supplement it where it does. (So do certain other things, for instance mythology). But some written histories date back hundreds of years BC, whereas archaeological techniques can legitimately be applied to, say, mediaeval remains and even later. Also of course, archaeology sometimes uncovers written history - tablets and scrolls and things. One thing about the "Sanders" books - each episode is just the right length - a page or two longer, and it'd probably begin to pall. I wish all short (alleged) stories were no longer, if they were I might begin to enjoy them more. The Vikings is by Edison Marshall, who also wrote lost-race stories etc. Those hand-painted illoes are a labour of love - at least that's something that'll be easily expendable while you act as OMPA editor combined with BSFA secretary. In your extremity you can count on my sympathy - you'll need it!

THE WALL Part 5 (Ethel Lindsay)
ENVOY 5 (Dick Schultz)

Ethel: I suppose one ought to congratulate you or something for terminating this particular construction job. At any rate, it

saves me worrying about what I'd have done if an episode had been wished on to me. One possibility would have been a one-paragraph episode beginning "With one bound, he/I was free." But better still (for my purposes) would have been something more to the order of; "And as he lay there helplessly awaiting his doom, he suddenly realised that he was not Archie Mercer at all, but - - -" (naming the next victim).

Dick: not Marcia Varley, mate. It's a he.

UL 6 (Norm Metcalf)
SIZAR 6 (Bruce Burn)

Norm: many thanks for the comments on THE SECOND SATURDAY, which are being dealt with in a special supplement thereto and herewith. OK, FSM .. I could never learn to

tell that chain apart, but the correction accepted. I thought "Search the Sky" was fun, that's all. Lundy Island is generally understood to be part of the English county of Devon. I'm not sure if it's included in any official rural district, or what. I have seen mention somewhere of something that sounds like what you're thinking of, I've also seen something to the effect that a one-time owner tried to make out he had more sovereign rights than he did, but couldn't make them stick. It only has a population of a dozen or so, lighthouse-keepers and bird-sanctuary-keepers and their families. A somewhat similar case was the Scilly Islands, off the tip of Cornwall, which used to be excused income tax (though forming an acknowledged part of England) but are so no longer.

Bruce: "The Ladies' Ball" was dedicated to you on the two counts you mention, yes.

ZOUNDS! 7 (Bob Lichtman)

Bob: you wonder why everybody's been answering your

set-piece questions. Probably because you specifically asked them to. Which doesn't excuse me for never noticing the one about the typewriter layout. Sorry. As for the latest set; 1. (full-time job) - I'd like to work on a project for cataloguing all musical compositions worth preserving and arranging for a definitive recording of each to be commercially available. I'd specialise in light music and folk tunes. Not jazz, because such tunes as are specially composed for jazz performance are seldom worth preserving played "straight". Borrowings from pop songs, hymns etc, would be considered on their merits in their original categories. Full-length rags and the like would be a branch of light music. Alternatively, I'd like a job delineating boundaries, deciding where to have them and why and like that. In the first instance it'd help to be able to read music, in the second a certain knowledge of surveying would probably come in handy, but I feel I have the dedication for either. 2. - the first thing I'd look for would be somebody who tended to share my opinions but had a considerably higher IQ to whom I would pass my command. 3. - I want to read any fanzine (though I have been known to send some back unread on the grounds that they were overwhelming me) - and very, very seldom do I regret having read any particular specimen. Uh - amendment, I want to read almost any fanzine. Only if the entire contents appear to have no interest for me do I willingly pass one up. Flatbeds are no damn fun but can be extremely useful.

AMBLE 9 (me) I see I dropped a clanger on the back page. I described "The French Quarter" as "a history of the picayune side of New Orleans". I meant, of course, the picaresque side. I must've been thinking of that fershlugginer N.O. newspaper.

ERG 11 (Terry Jeeves) All I can say about Tubb's piece is that I hope to hell he's wide, man, but wide of the mark. The trouble is, in this sort of a world he's only too likely to be right - or even to err on the happy side. Tower for the kind words on my duping, but as it's done for me at work I can't really claim the credit. According to the early OFF TRAILS (which incidentally reinforces my recollection of the matter), Terry, Eric the Bent was an original member and you weren't - you were strictly a guest-writer. This is thus your first incarnation officially. Why don't you persuade Val to do some writing for ERG? I know she's articulate - in fact it was only last year that I was admiring her joints at the fancy-dress party.

ROOKA 12 (Don Ford) Don: gauge, naphtha, sizeable, diphtheria, judg(e)ment, dietician, indispensable, harrassment - t'others are OK I think. (I haven't checked with the dictionary - that'd be cheating. And to think what fabulous arguments on spelling could be conducted in OMPA with recourse to dictionaries banned as against the rules). But what about parallel, liaison, definite? The personal diary thing was of absorbing interest, I'd like to see more of this sort of thing in OMPA (and out of it for that matter). Pity it tended towards the illegible in spots. It deserves better treatment. Re your views on Broyles's "Who's Who", what d'you expect him to do with non-repliers - invent the details himself? Incidentally, where were YOU when the questionnaires were being dished out?

VAGARY 15 (Bobbie Gray) Bobbie: RUNE was a Wansboroughzine. On at least two occasions I've listed it for satirical reasons among the Ashworth titles, however, and you're the first person ever to mention having noticed it. Congratulations. My thoughts when ascending or descending the

Villiers Street steps are usually hostile ones, directed at the confidence trick whereby Strand underground station is located in the forecourt of Charing Cross main line station, whereas Charing Cross underground station is an annoying hike away - particularly if you're loaded with luggage. What a spot to pick on. Corporal punishment degrades whoever has to administer it, among others. Bill on witchcraft brings up what I don't think I've seen suggested before - namely, that black and white have entirely separate organisations, rather than being simply different faces of one organisation. This would account to a certain extent for various indiscriminate writeups disagreeing with each other. They aren't necessarily writing about the same thing. I notice, incidentally, that in two places Bill says that white witches don't like being organised and immediately follows it up by stating that they have their organised rituals etc nevertheless. Gardner's book (mentioned in the LAIR last issue) seems to concern itself mainly with Bill's whites. For legibility, size and interest VAGARY is still right on the top shelf.

CONVERSATION 17 & 18 (Lynn Hickman)

Lynn: I like the cover-pic on 17, for a start. The paper even suits it, too.

But I too was a help! I told you which one I liked best, namely the big one that they could all have been if they had been. I tend to wonder just what proportion of the population of Italy, Texas, the city council really spoke for when they turned down the offer of federal help. If it was a genuine popular sentiment, all praise to them. If it was just the reactions of a few "leaders of the community", then possibly otherwise.

MORPH 26 (John Roles)

Sorry mate - Fred Hunter's copped the cover-prize this time. "The Times" rather than the "Times" - I suppose

you're right, tower. Though the classification of contents you mention is by no means watertight. 2/6d stamps can be used on the occasional parcel if necessary - but I usually pay small fannish debts in book stamps. Long drum solos (you re SOUFFLE) - there are two sorts, the rhythmic sort and the freewheeling sort. A drum solo that preserves the beat and rhythm for a chorus or three can be an asset to a performance the same as any other competent instrumental solo. But where the drummer loses sight of the beat altogether and just cuts loose to show how many of his bits and pieces he can hit how hard as simultaneously as possible, he's a menace and should be drummed out of the band. The anti-carol is justifiably gruesome, which is why I don't care for it. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, true - but it may be a mitigating circumstance. I doubt if a foreign visitor would be prosecuted, for instance, if he genuinely mistook a pillar-box for a litter-bin. I guess some people (not necessarily me, I'm bewildered by it all) would say that the West Germans don't know how well off they are (this is a comment on the Loliterary correspondence).

SCOTTISHE 27 (Ethel Lindsay)

For one who doesn't seem to be musically inclined, ATOM draws some fabulous musical instruments at times.

You say in Scotland you're taught that "Scotch" is wrong. In England, if anything, we're just taught that the Scotch don't like the word. I still don't see why the Sassennachs shouldn't have their own dialect words if they want to - you have enough of the things in all conscience. MachiaVarley this time excels himself, writing on two distinct levels simultaneously - and succeeding on both. I have often wondered how the South African authorities would set about classifying an Eskimo. Put it in a zoo, possibly. As usual, the only complaint about Walt's instalment is that it should be ten times longer. At this rate he'll never beat the calendar. Your life-history, Ethel, is beginning

to read like a female "Starship Soldier". How anybody ever comes through that lot with a sympathetic personality unimpaired I can't quite understand - though you, for one, seem to have done.

ETHEL FOR T.A.F.F. by the way - even^{though} the campaign will be over by the time this gets distributed.

OFF TRAILS 31 (Burn the AE)

I'm sorry indeed to see Jim Caughran dropped, also Hel Klemm from whom I was looking for great things.

THE SON OF THE FANALYTIC EYE SQUINTS SIDEWAYS AT OMPA (Jhim Linwood)

A far more fair

write-up of the Broyles Who's Who than Don Ford's, Jhim. Good work. The Alamo and Katanga - you have half a good point there I think. The "Cult" extracts are of interest, I hope some more from this source will forthcome. You re ENVOY - what profits aren't ploughed back into the wage-packets? Last I heard, the National Coal Board was running at a perpetual loss. I can never understand why the nationalising Labour government didn't go the whole hog and nationalise distribution of coal as well as its production. The coal merchants are still making a profit - they wouldn't remain in business else - even though possibly most of the coal for big industrial users is shipped direct by rail from the pithead to the consumer without the merchant setting eyes on it, he draws his whack. If the government had (or would) set up an integrated public industry, this ought to show some sort of an overall profit one would have thought, in which case there would be more money available for the labour force.

AFTERTHOUGHTS AND THINGS

Joe: you re SOUFFLE - I agree that the difference between a pleasure and a frustration is not hair splitting.

Elinor: you'll understand OK of course, but for the benefit of any casual clueless perusers of the paragraph addressed to you on P.1 hereof, I'd better explain that the second sentence has no connection with the first. Also, although your championship of the British atmosphere in OMPA is acknowledged with thanks, has it occurred to you that we British might like to exchange thoughts with Germans and Swedes as well as with Americans? In its early days OMPA had several valued continental members, including Jan Jansen.

Postmailings: these seem to be coming in for some unkind words just now. Personally, I just can't wait to devour the Mailing when I get it, and therefore any straggler (which can therefore be perused at greater leisure) is actually liable to be appreciated more than if it had been in the heap with the rest. On the other hand, if a month or two then goes by before I comment on it, it sort of goes stale and the comment is more forced - besides being harder to do at all. There is another side to postmailings, though. Once upon a time, some years ago now, I used to postmail my mailing comments besides having a zine in the regular mailing. That way, I contrived to run a serial at approximately six-weekly intervals, which just cannot be done if one sticks to quarterly Mailings.

The Wall: in retrospect, I think it compares unfavourably with the "Future History of Fandom" series in the early TRIODEs, which also had each instalment by a different hand than the one before. This may be because that sort of thing's now had its day - but it shouldn't be, because anything good enough should never have had its day. I think it's more the approach. The "Future History" was simply a humorous extravaganza involving fans. "The Wall" (like "The Times", John?) seems to depend more on seeing how complicated the plot can become, with anything else (and not much else in any case) strictly subordinated to that.

Comments over I think.

OH DIDN'T HE RAMBLE

THE COLUMN WHERE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN BUT SELDOM IF EVER DOES

OUTLINE OF
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PART 2 PART 2

This thing's looking like getting out of hand. If I'd known it was going to run to so great a length, I doubt if I'd have started it at this juncture. Still, that's life. (Biography usually is).

John Roles's column "Roles's Rollings" was apparently written-up from a diary of some sort. The Mercatorial equivalent, which might be called "Mercer's Meanderings", is written straight from memory. Actually, I did keep a diary for a couple of years, an intimate unconfined affair in a notebook. It covered approximately the last year of my school life and the first year of my army life. I discontinued it because it became a chore writing it up, and when some years later I read through it again, what I'd written disheartened me so much that I promptly destroyed the thing. So take it away, memory mine - - -

PART TWO PART TWO:
MERCER THE SOLDIER
PART TWO

GHQ 2nd Echelon, 21st Army Group, was a sizeable office-type unit (at the height of its activity its strength was some three thousand or more) which existed to form a link - some might say a barrier - between the units being readied for the Normandy invasion on the one hand and the home record offices on the other. The offices flowed around one of the Bayswater squares - Sussex Square - and the billets were scattered across the face of central London. Our own administrative HQ was in Cambridge Square, a couple of squares away from Sussex Square.

There were ten of us in the draft from Aldershot, and we were put together in two rooms in Clifton Place, adjoining Sussex Square. There were no bunks, only straw-stuffed palliasses. Of the ten of us, I remember six more besides myself. There were two blokes answering to the name of Olly. One of these was an ex-socialite - I'm not quite sure what he was doing as a private - with a fund of "and so I said to the Governor-General" type anecdotes. When he wanted to express excitement - a sort of verbal exclamation-mark - he used to say "Bang bang" in much the same tone and delivery that some people say "Whacko". The two Ollies were in the other room. In with me, besides two fairly uninteresting middle-aged types, were two more eighteen-year-olds. This was apparently a new departure - the three of us were far and away the youngest people in the entire GHQ 2nd Echelon - even the ATS girls were all older than us.

That first night, we three young'uns went out walking in London. There was a full moon, and in the blackout the place looked actually beautiful. We hadn't a clue where we were going, and wandered all over the West End, Trafalgar Square and the Duke of York's steps and places, and I was really taken by the appearance of it all. That was the only occasion upon which I've ever thought London - apart from isolated buildings, gardens etc - beautiful. It never holds up by daylight, or anything else but unspoiled moonlight.

We were put to work in various offices. I was in one of the "P.I." sections. P.I. stood for "Production of Information". I have since discovered that in (I think) every other GHQ 2nd Echelon scattered around the overseas commands, the equivalent department was known simply as "R" - for "Records". We were different.

Ironically, the P.I. section where I was first put to work was that dealing with the Royal Corps of Signals. The clerks were a mixture of R.A.S.C., A.T.S., and the regiments and corps concerned, so I was actually working alongside, and doing the same work as, signalmen of the Royal Sigs. However, a new P.I. section was soon afterwards set up to deal with miscellaneous corps, and as the last arrival I was transferred to that.

As my home lay now within easy reach - in the southern suburbs - I immediately wrote my parents that I'd be able to come home for the week-end - it being generally understood that there was no objection to this for local residents. However, they did a dirty trick on me by making me duty clerk the first week-end. They always, it transpired, put newcomers on duty their first week-end if they could. The house wasn't on the phone, and I didn't think of sending a telegram, so I just had to hang helplessly around the office unable to tell them that I couldn't make it this week-end after all. From then on, however, I was home most week-ends. When the invasion started, and we started seven-day working at the offices, I still used to get my one-day-off-in-seven at the week-end.

I was one of half a dozen or so assorted clerks who worked in the section's so-called registry, sorting incoming mail, enveloping outgoing mail, delivering stuff round the other sections, looking after the stationery etc. It soon became apparent that half a dozen was too many on that job, and the half-dozen was soon reduced to two - an ATS corporal and myself. She used to spend most of her time reading women's magazines, retouching her makeup up and the like, and when I was hard-pressed I had to beg her to give me a bit of help. Somebody noticed, and she too was set to other tasks and I was left alone, doing a job that I was to keep for the rest of my army career.

The offices expanded into Clifton Place, and I was moved to the same billet as most of my new mates in Upper Berkeley Street. This lay on the other side of the Edgware Road, near Marble Arch. So in those days, I could frequently be seen carrying a pile of blankets along the Edgware Road. Every time it was my turn to be duty clerk, in fact. The Upper Berkeley Street house was bomb-damaged, being internally shored up by baulks of timber, and lay right next to the Church Army HQ church. Most of the time I was in the top-floor room, in civil life an artist's studio. It was all one big room except for a small kitchen affair, with a skylight at one side and a blotchy mural of Phaeton's chariot over the mantelpiece. Oh yes - and split-level to boot, with a couple of steps in mid-floor.

In those days (early 1944) the bomber-raids were virtually over. But soon a new menace appeared - the V-wings, known colloquially as p-planes (P for "pilotless"), then as buzz-bombs or doodle-bugs. I had been away from London through all the worst of the bombing, but I was there practically the whole time with the buzz-bombs. Some of the blokes used to go down to the basement when an air-raid alarm went - the most prudent had their bedspaces down there permanently - and most of the rest would get up and watch at the window, talking all the time in loud nervous voices. As one who would rather sleep than do almost anything, I used to curse like hell as their noise (far worse than that of the war outside) brought me protesting back from sleep - and in the end I'd get up and join them. We'd watch the things coming along, belching fire from their tails (come to think of it, does one ever belch from one's tail? Call it a euphemism if you like then). They'd seem to rise as they approached the Cumberland Hotel, sail gracefully over it, then descend to their former level before continuing their last

grim journey. Then we'd hear the engine cut out - and count the seconds till the explosion. Then back to bed until the next alarm.

I was six months in London with the 2nd Echelon. Then we moved to Oxford. I'm not quite sure why they bothered to move us, but they did - just about a week before the V-one sites were over-run and the things stopped coming. And so I missed the V-twos, except when I went home.

At Oxford, we occupied Cowley Barracks and nearby Slade Camp. Generally speaking, we lived at the camp and worked at the barracks. The office accommodation allotted to my section was half the gymnasium. At first there wasn't room to sleep everybody at the two locations abovementioned, so a company of us were billeted in the grounds of Headington Hill Hall, from where we commuted daily by special transport. The billet my section (or the male rank-and-file thereof) occupied was (I think) formerly a stable. I may as well mention here that for our own administration we were organised into nominal companies of maybe 400 or 500 men. All the men in any one section (a "section" being the basic unit of office organisation, varying from half a dozen to a couple of hundred in strength) were allotted to the same company, and the section was used as a sub-unit of the company as well as of the branch (such as the "P.I." Branch). The ATS had a parallel organisation on the same lines.

There were two large dining halls on Slade Camp, approximately equal in size, and these were allotted one each to the men and the ATS. As the men outnumbered the ATS by at least two to one, after a few days of chaos it was decreed that the Headington Hill Hall company should in future eat with the ATS. This was a pleasant and civilised arrangement, and lasted even after room had been found for us all at Slade Camp. I don't know why they didn't go the whole hog and arrange permanent mixed messing for everybody.

It was while we were at Oxford that a certain NCO started what is known as empire-building. There were several odd one-or-two-man sub-sections, such as myself, scattered around the section and he put forward the idea that we should all be brought under his orders. This was officially agreed to by everybody except me. I just took no notice, and carried on as before taking my orders direct from the section Chief Clerk, who was quite happy to continue giving them. It made the NCO feel happier though, or something, to think that he had another subordinate.

Oxford is not all that far from London, and I got into the habit of going home every other week-end. It was during this period - the latter half of 1944 - that the family domicile became finally disrupted. My mother was admitted to hospital from which she wasn't due to emerge again. My brother was sort of taken over by an aunt - my mother's sister - and her husband, who lived in those days at Cheltenham. The small bad-tempered Sealyham bitch, which was lost without my mother, had to be put to sleep, and my father moved into digs and sold the house - which was still mostly intact. (The caravan had already been sold). Such of the furniture as was not transferred on permanent loan to various relations and things, and boxes and boxes of personal effects, were put into store. I spent that Christmas at Cheltenham. My brother had contrived to have my bicycle and one or two other things brought to Cheltenham, and I rode back to Oxford on Boxing Day, keeping the thing around until the next move when it was restored to my brother's safekeeping. (I wasn't depriving him of it - we each had one).

It was some time in mid-1945 - nine months after moving to Oxford - that the GHQ 2nd Echelon, 21st Army Group, finally got its orders to join the main body of said Army Group on the continent. We were then by far the largest unit under 21 Army Group command remaining in Britain. The move this time was quite an operation. There was a lot of sorting-out done of medically unfit personnel to start with - particularly among the girls - and we were brought up to strength with theoretically fitter types. It was at this point that I realised that I had somehow got beyond the influence of my trick-cyclists' reports. Apart from the loss of personal liberty, my biggest objection to military life is that one is followed round the whole time by ~~affiliated~~ dossiers of various descriptions, particularly when they consist largely of imposing gobbledegook. One of the definite recommendations in mine was that I should not be posted abroad unless yet another trick-cyclist gave his consent. So I was posted to 2nd Echelon, which although not at that time abroad, was on "overseas documentation" in anticipation of going abroad some time in the future. So my medical history file was sent back to the regimental record office for safe keeping, and when it came to the time for me to actually go abroad, nobody bothered to refer to it - so I fell through a hole in the system. Vive les holes in the system, say I.

For the move, our MT section was virtually converted into a full-blown (if temporary) transport company. The ordnance parks were combed for spare lorries, and the reinforcement units for spare drivers, and the SladeCamp parade-ground couldn't be seen for the parked transport. The lorries were carried across by a fleet of landing-craft, each lorry crammed full with some particular section's effects. The men had a whole troopship and part of another one, all travelling across the channel - or North Sea, rather - in one convoy arrangement. (The girls flew). We spent the night on board the ships, lying in the Thames estuary, before sailing, and docked next day - or possibly the day after, they seemed to be in no hurry to get us there - at Ostend. We formed up in our sections to march off the ships. Later, when down on the docks, streams of men were still disembarking and I heard one onlooker saying to another something to the effect of "They tell me all these blokes belong to one unit". At which once again my heart leaped with egoboo - I may not have had any esprit de corps for the R.A.S.C., whose cap-badge I wore, but I had plenty for the GHQ 2nd Echelon, 21st Army Group.

The Ostend transit camp, where we spent the next night, dwarfed even us. (It was there I fell through a bed, though I'm not sure if it was on this occasion or later when I was travelling on leave). Uncountable though we were, there was room for all and to spare, including the lorries. I remember hearing it announced over the P.A. system that while we were there ordinary sergeants would have to eat in the rank-and-file messroom leaving the sergeants' mess for the warrant officers (we had more than our fair share of WOs and sergeants), but that seemed to be the only ripple we created on the transit camp's all-embracing surface. Then into a train with escape-proof netting on the windows, and so to Brussels.

Brussels was still in the throes of just-having-been-liberated, and every other building seemed to be occupied by somebody's army - whether British, American, Canadian, Polish, or even Belgian. Those were the Good Old Days of the Brussels trams, which were free to members of everybody's armed forces, and always packed to beyond capacity with soldiers on the buffers and on the roof. I've ridden the buffers myself, though I never made the roof.

Brussels is probably typical for a continental city of its size - cobbled streets, attractive city-centre architecture and the rest - with its own trademark of bilingualism. All public notices are repeated in both French and Flemish. When the tram conductor asked for a fare he'd say "S'il vous plait - Als't U belieft". (Spelling of the latter courtesy of Jan Jansen - until he entered my fannish life I'd always thought of it as "Esterbliff"). I always tended to like the place as a place. The male component of GHQ 2nd Echelon (now "British Liberation Army" rather than "21st Army Group") inhabited the Belgian military academy alongside the Cinquantenaire park. There were far more of us than the number of cadets it had been designed for of course, and we slept in lecture-rooms and everywhere. For offices we had a block of luxury flats, called the "Residence Palace". Or rather, one of two blocks. The twin was inhabited by American WACs. At night, guard duty over the joint entrance was shared by a detachment of us and a detachment of American males.

The Residence Palace was umpteen floors high - I forget how many, but I'd say ten at a guess, not counting three separate levels of blind basement. Quite a lot of indigenous furniture was still in place, and came in most handy, besides plenty of hot water in the bathrooms - which was more than we could get at the military academy. I was put to work first of all in the entrance-hall of our section's flat. Space was then at a premium, and all entrance-halls were in use - but in other cases the working area had been walled off by cupboards. This I was unable to do because of an enormous great table that practically blocked the passage by itself - cupboards would never have gone round it. I constantly protested, but for a while nothing could be done. And after all, I was only a private, whilst some entrance-halls were full of sergeants and things.

One thing I forgot to mention while dealing with Oxford - though we had him at Brussels as well - was that the unit acquired the bloke with, to my mind, the best job in the army - a job he'd invented himself. He was a corporal in the Pioneer Corps, and he possessed a set of radio receivers, turntables, loudspeakers, a lot of records and untellable quantities of wire, which he carted round with him wherever he went. Every unit he was posted to, he'd offer to put all this at the service of all, and was thus given a permanent job looking after it. Soon after his arrival at Oxford, both dining halls and the Naafi were constantly filled with (mainly) light music. This I found most welcome, because I'd been musically starved since leaving Aldershot and the military bands. He was a bit clueless on some things though. I once asked him the name of a march he'd just played, only to be told in all seriousness that it was not a march but a military two-step. That march, as well as several other of his stock pieces, I eventually bought copies of when I started collecting again.

When I went on leave, I always used to spend it wherever my brother happened to be. This applied both when I was at Oxford and when I was on the continent. (Sounds posh - grand tour and all that, doesn't it). I think I had four leaves all told since I lost my home address. The first two provide a nice study in contrasts. I don't remember which order they came in, but no matter. In one case my brother was on holiday from school, staying with this aunt at Cheltenham. I must give her her due - she provided him with a home when he needed one - but I never got on very well with her and hers. So she tolerated me around the place in the daytime, even fed me, but wouldn't let me sleep there on the transparent grounds that there was no room. So I had to sleep at the Y.M.C.A. downtown. They had an end of their main assembly room affair curtained off with half a dozen beds for the forces. Their library was in the same room - it was there that I

first met the works of Dorothy Evelyn Smith, which curiously enough I found utterly absorbing.

The other time, my brother was back at school. He had gone to this school because we had an elderly great-aunt living in the same town. (We used to have elderly great-aunts and things all over the south of England. They're a dying race though). The school in question was properly a day-school that had been evacuated from another town, and all the evacuated boys were living in lodgings - where my brother joined them. This great-aunt fixed up for me to sleep at the local forces hostel - even paid my board in advance (on her, natch). By day I wandered around the town, went to the pictures, visited the great-aunt, and so on. In the evening I adjourned to my brother's digs. They were approached rather romantically smuggler-fashion - in by the back entrance to a furniture-repair shop and up a rickety staircase to the living quarters above - which were now occupied independently of the shop. The landlady was a woman of perhaps thirty, with an absentee husband (there was a war on, remember) and a small daughter. Besides my brother, she had three or four more of his fellow-scholars lodging there, and I found the whole to comprise as happy a household as I've ever known. The landlady made me feel entirely at home - if it hadn't been for my great-aunt's well-meaning gesture in making - and paying in advance for - other arrangements, I'm sure she'd have been only too glad to find a bed-space for me somewhere in the establishment. And I still remember the place with pleasure.

Some time after the war, I forget on just what occasion, my brother and myself found ourselves in the same town again for a brief visit, and we called on his old digs. They'd been properly sealed off from the shop now, and were approached via an outside staircase - not nearly so romantic. She remembered me immediately.

After the cessation of hostilities my brother's school moved back to its home town taking him with it. He was boarded out again, and I spent a leave there with him, not merely in the same house but in the same double bed. (Very uncomfortable. He kicked). This was just an ordinary impersonal boarding-house, though, a vastly different atmosphere.

Said hostilities - in Europe at any rate - officially ceased just a week after my arrival on the continent. Technically, I am therefore entitled to the France-Germany Star on the strength of a week in Belgium. I never bothered to collect the various medals (I forget if there were one or two others, things that everybody got) I was supposed to be entitled to though. And as the army of liberation was converted to an army of occupation, the rundown of strength began. And as the army shrank, GHQ 2nd Echelon shrank with it. All the men who'd once been privates with me, who were now corporals, sergeants and staff-sergeants, left for home as their time came for demobilisation. There was one man I'd known as a private who became a WO.II (warrant officer, second class - equivalent to Company Sergeant-Major) while I was still a private. Proper bastard he was, too. Some of our leavers were replaced, but our strength gradually dwindled. At last an office became vacant and I was allowed to move in. It was properly a bedroom, and had its own private toilet and shower-stall. Later on I switched rooms with the typing pool, it being thought that since they were all girls they needed those facilities more than I did. In exchange I got an even bigger room to myself, with washbasin and two long couches that just happened to be there.

The NCO who was supposed to have taken me - together with sundry other individuals - over was demobbed, and so was his successor, and a mate of mine - a sapper (ie, private in the Royal Engineers) from Doncaster - was summoned to take over the threads of their work. This he did with the assistance of a young private from Tees-side in the Green Howards (the name of an infantry regiment in case any of you were wondering). Another job on which I had helped out from time to time in the past when it was overwhelmed had been performed by two corporals. These were demobbed practically simultaneously, and I came back from leave to find it in the dubious hands of an 18-year-old boy from Dundee, who hadn't a clue what he was supposed to be doing. This was where I started my own brand of empire-building, only working from the bottom rather than the top. I simply commandeered this youth and his installation and imported them into my own office where I taught him what to do. I had the oversight of that job from then on.

This youth, by the way, was in the Durham Light Infantry - the only case I can recollect that I ever heard of a Scotsman in an English infantry regiment, though there were plenty the other way about. He nearly always had his fingers stained with ink - his civvy job had been as a furniture remover, and he couldn't learn to hold a pen cleanly - and he was never so happy as when he was blowing up the section football. Quite a character.

It was in Brussels that I had a little brush with the authorities about religion. When first called up, I had given my religion as C of E - which was officially correct. Since then, I had attended church whenever I'd been fallen in and marched there. Now, an order came around, said to emanate from Montgomery himself, that church parades would be suspended except for special occasions, but that every soldier was to attend church once a month, and sign a declaration that he'd done so. My somewhat irrational attitude was that I'd go if I was marched there, but I was not under any circumstances willing to go there under my own steam. I told the CSM that I didn't wish to go, and he suggested that I sign a paper to say that I hadn't gone. Which I duly did.

Then the trouble started. The Company Commander sent for me, then passed me on to the Adjutant. The Aj tried his best to argue me out of it, but eventually passed me on to the 2nd Echelon padre. This padre belonged to one of the free churches, so I was passed on again - this time to the garrison C of E padre. He, it seemed, had full authority to negotiate - and a compromise was arrived at whereby my religion was officially altered from "C of E" to "Agnostic", and the matter of church-attendance was allowed to lapse into disuse.

On the whole, I won that fight. Won it on the point I chose to stand, anyway. And I have never regretted taking that attitude when I did - even though I have good reason to suppose that it was instrumental in setting my promotion back a couple of years.

In my free time, I used to go swimming and roller-skating, besides haunting all the welfare libraries that the neighbourhood possessed. I was seldom without at least two books - probably from different libraries - in my pockets. I was always a choosy reader, and could never find enough of the sort of literature I was looking for - not necessarily sf or fantasy, but anything I could really get immersed in (which was comparatively rare in any category). It struck my mind that if more books were written of the sort I liked to read, more would get printed. The solution was obvious, and I started writing my Big Novel.

This was a big novel as they go these days, some 125 thousand words all told. In it I put all the ingredients I'd learned to dig in other people's works - or at least I tried to. The result was a complete mess of course. (Extracts from it have appeared previously in OMPA under the title of TALES FROM THE OUBLIETTE). I started it in Brussels and finished it in Hamburg. I'll get on to Hamburg - and the remainder of my military career - in the next instalment.

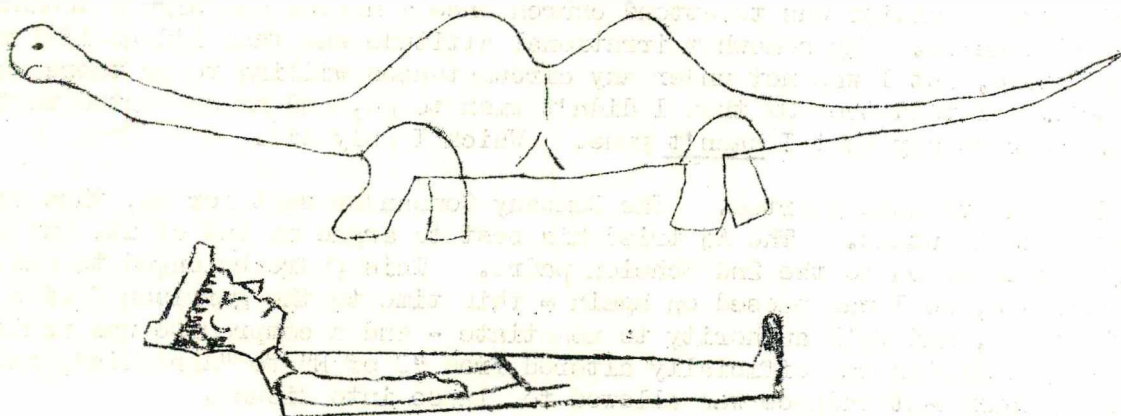
(TO BE CONTINUED)

"The peoples of western Uganda - Nyoro, Toro, and Nkole - preserve a legend of a wonderful dynasty of kings called the Chwezi, supermen to whom they owe all the useful arts, including that of government. The stories usually say that when the Chwezi arrived, they found the country inhabited by savages who ate their food raw, and even sometimes had no meat except the fish from the rivers. These wonderful people are also said to have been lighter-skinned than the populations they conquered. They are said to have given their countries two or three generations of rulers and then miraculously disappeared. There are various versions of this event. One is that they deliberately plunged into Lake Albert."

- - - Dr Lucy Mair, "Primitive Government" (Pelican Books, 1962)

I don't have the original to check, but the above legend sounds uncannily reminiscent of a South American one mentioned by Heyerdahl in "The Kon-Tiki Expedition" and probably elsewhere. So I just thought I'd mention it to see what happens.

"THESE REGULATIONS ARE MADE FOR YOUR INCONVENIENCE, NOT OURS" - Obvious Saying



FABULOUS FRED ABOUT TO BE TROMPED ON BY A BACTRIAN BRONTOSAURUS

"On one occasion I arranged to meet her under the clock at six - it being understood that by 'six' we both meant more like half-past. However, when I turned up at around ten to eight, she was nowhere to be seen. I was just about to head for the nearest bar to drown my sorrows when something made me look up - and there, sitting astride the clock, was my Grizelda. 'What are you doing up there?' I asked in no little surprise. 'Oh, I thought you knew,' my fair one responded sweetly - 'I always like to be on time'."

- - - Fabius leThargic in "The Fifty Minute Mile"

THE LAIR

(Twelfth instalment) occupies three pages instead of two this time, owing to the nefarious activities of one Pat Scott, who is entirely responsible for the bacovert. (It looks better still on the stencil. It's a green stencil).

HEINLEIN, ROBERT A.

6 x H

WALLACE, EDGAR

The Keepers of the King's Peace

FIGHTING MAD (a MAD paperback)

Three more for the collection. The first replaces magazine versions of "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" and "All You Zombies", the second is a Sanders of the River book, and the third is another completist item.

INTRODUCING THE BRITISH PACIFIC ISLANDS (a Colonial Office tract)

SHARP, ANDREW

Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific

DANIELSSON, BENGT

Love in the South Seas

HEYERDAHL, THOR

Aku-Aku

SUGGS, ROBERT C.

The Island Civilisations of Polynesia.

These can best be dealt with together. The Colonial Office thing I picked up at the Stationery Office (H.M.S.O.) in the days when I used to call there on business. It's a popular-type writeup of the British Pacific dependencies. The Sharp book is written to push the theory that the Pacific was settled accidentally rather than deliberately. The Danielsson book is not much more than an euphemism for "Sex in Polynesia", but is none the less interesting for that. (Sex can be interesting - didn't you realise?) The Heyerdahl book is particularly interesting. Heyerdahl claims to have discovered most of the lost secrets of Easter Island. Or, rather, that they were never lost at all - it was just that he was the first person who ever managed to ask the natives the right questions. In particular, the natives proved to him that they still knew (a) how to carve the famous statues, and (c) (sic) how to erect them in their appointed stations. That leaves (b), or how to transport them around the island from quarry to location. This was dealt with much less satisfactorily. Heyerdahl proved that the natives were capable of hauling them by community effort, but their lore didn't cover this point, everybody insisting that the statues "walked of themselves". Also, behind every mystery that Heyerdahl claims to have solved there looms another one that didn't previously exist - but that's probably inevitable or something. Finally the Suggs book. This, in the course of a grand tour of the Polynesian islands, deals heavy side-swipes at both Sharp and Heyerdahl. The latter are distinctly unfair - he twists Heyerdahl's words so that he can appear to demolish things that Heyerdahl never actually said or implied.

CARRINGTON, RICHARD

Mermaids and Mastodons

A book of exotic natural history, dealing in turn with legendary creatures, prehistoric creatures, living links with the past, and recently extinct species. It is notable for being the first place I found the full story of the passenger pigeon. Previously, I had been tantalised with references to this bird whose story "everybody was familiar with", and I had pictured this bird flying across country on the back of an eagle or somewhere. I was most disappointed to find that its name apparently arose from the habit of roosting on one another's backs. Incidentally, there is circumstantial evidence that John Berry is familiar with this book.

GARDNER, MARTIN

The Royal Historian of Oz

The bibliographical writeup from F&SF.

COWELL, ROBERTA

Roberta Cowell's Story

Far more readable than might casually be thought. How much is original and how much due to some ghost-writer or other I wouldn't know, but the personality that comes over throughout this autobiography is definitely appealing, with a considerable sense of humour.

KALE, SUSAN

The Fire Escape

This is in the same category as the above, only even more so. Billed as the autobiography of a prostitute, it is much, much more than that. The authoress only becomes one comparatively late in life, the few chapters dealing with that part of her history being one long string of run-of-the-mill prostitute-anecdotes. Prostitution is, in a way, more or less inevitable for her some time in her life, given her outlook. She is, throughout, presented as a refreshingly different personality, who has few inhibitions and is willing to try her hand - or other part as appropriate - at almost anything. She's admittedly neurotically inclined - several times she tries to commit suicide, for instance - but her opinions and attitudes strike a distinct fannish bell. All sex aside, I'd still like to meet her, particularly if she could throw some light on certain obscurities in the text. Some of them are presumably so for reasons of delicacy, but the fire-escape of the title forms part of a sort of celestial game of snakes and ladders that I don't dig. Fire-escape though it be, it isn't a ladder by the way - it's the square that lies at the bottom of a snake. (Read it yourself and see what I mean).

MEADOWCROFT, EDID L.

The Story of Davy Crockett

CROCKETT, DAVY

The Life of Davy Crockett

The first is intended for children. The second is intended for the 19th-century American voter. I suppose you could say I collect paperback biographies of Davy Crockett.

LYTTELTON, HUMPHREY

I Play As I Please

ARMSTRONG, LOUIS

Satchmo - MY Life in New Orleans

WATERS, ETHEL (with CHARLES SAMUELS)

His Eye Is On The Sparrow

LOMAX, ALAN

Mister Jelly Roll

BROONZY, WILLIAM (as told to

Big Bill Blues

YANNICK BRUYNOCHE)

MEZZROW, MILTON "MEZZ", and

Really The Blues

BERNARD WOLFE

CONDON, EDDIE (with THOMAS SUGRUE)

We Called It Music

RAMSEY & SMITH (edited)

Jazzmen

Eight survivors of my days in the Jazz Book Club, from which I eventually resigned on the grounds that it was issuing too many textbooks and too few works akin to the above. The first seven are biographies, mostly more or less auto, and the lives of these jazzmen and bluesmen make fascinating reading - at any rate for one who likes at least some of the music they make. Particularly interesting is the contrast between Condon's "Really the Blues" and Mezzrow's "We Called It Music" (or rather vice versa - don't anybody dare tell them I was momentarily unable to tell them apart). Condon is an Irish-American and Mezzrow a Jewish-American, and both of them have fought all their lives against racial discrimination, but in entirely different ways. Condon has tried to encourage the negro to live on his, Condon's, level. Mezzrow, on the other hand, has

given up the white man's world in disgust and gone to live - during much of the period - among the negroes as a negro, his swarthy Semitic appearance making this possible. Both attitudes have their points - Condon's is probably the more sensible, but there's a certain emotional appeal in Mezzrow's nevertheless. The last-named title, "Jazzmen", isn't an individual biography, but more a biography of jazz itself, but these glimpses of the people, important individually or for what they represented, who made jazz add up to much the same effect.

HARRIS, REX

Jazz

LANG, IAIN

Jazz in Perspective

The former is the notorious Pelican, in its revised edition. I say notorious, because much scorn has been poured on to the author's anti-modernistic bias. Still, this was the book that first taught me about jazz (or the earlier edition was, to be precise), I found it highly enlightening at the time, and as my prejudices (or likes and dislikes if you like, come to think of it I do), on the whole coincide with those of Mr Harris, I'm all for it. The second work is another Jazz Book Club issue, the only text-book-type JBC publication that I've ever found worth keeping. It isn't very long, being really an extended essay, but everything is very clearly put - even the anti-Harris experts seem to agree on this.

HERE IS AN important announcement. THE LAIR is now up to date. All my collection, barring the reference shelf, has now been written-up. I intend to keep cataloguing any further additions as they arise, but otherwise that's the lot. I have a list of titles here, though, that I consider worth a mention although I didn't deem them worthy of a permanent place on the shelf. Here follows a few.

SON OF THE LAIR

LONGRIGG, ROGER

A High-Pitched Buzz

I didn't enjoy this as much as his "Wrong Number" (which I kept), mostly I think because it dealt with the world of advertising rather than of - oh, all sorts of things actually. But his dialogue really sounds spontaneous -when his characters talk, you could almost be listening to a hidden tape-recorder.

HUIE, WILLIAM BRADFORD

The Outsider

The Revolt of Mamie Stover

The Americanization of Emily

This author specialises in knocking hell out of whatever he finds sham - and he seems to have no trouble in finding plenty to work on. "Mamie Stover" (how the hell ever did they manage to make a film of it for crying out loud?) is mainly about wartime prostitution in Hawaii - in Huie's hands, the profession is reduced to its lowest common denominator and the result is absolutely side-splitting. "Emily" is a sequel inasmuch as it has the same narrator, and is about American officers in wartime London - it lacks the extreme deadly humour of the former work, and becomes over-serious towards the end, but was still enjoyable. "The Outsider" claims to be factual rather than fictional - in general, Huie seems to hover round the borderline between the two - and comprises several short episodes detailing matters that should be more widely known if (as one can only suppose) they are substantially true.

