

Perpetrated by ARCHIE MERCER. Yngvi is a Louse. A MERCATORIAL PUBLICATION

Starting with THE FILLETED SHAMBLES for the 32nd Mailing and nearby postmailings.

OFF TRAILS 32 (Burn the AE) I don't know right now on what machine this AMBLE is going to be run off - I may even have to flat-bed the thing myself though I tend to hope not - so I'm landed with the biggest Mailing ever to review just when I want to get let off lightly (stop rambling about it then Mercer). ~~A~~I wouldn't have said that Ron Bennett came quite in the same category as John Roles, but if it's borne in mind that recently he hasn't been idle, but has been working hard for fandom on the 1962 Con, I agree that there was a strong case for keeping him. Good work.

RACKHAMART (Daphne Buckmaster) Natural poses against unnatural backgrounds, I suppose it could be categorised as. The models themselves are by no means unpleasing to the eye, but I think they'd be more to the point scattered around something else than all bunched up together like this. By the way, the one on the third page seems to be using an electric shaver.

OUTPOST 2 (Fred Hunter) Some years ago now I remember hearing on the wireless on e of the "Up-Helly-Aa" songs - I wouldn't know which one, but I remember being struck by it at the time. A good tune coupled with a vigorous performance. I didn't know how to spell it until I saw this zine, though. ~~A~~I understand that a traditional Norse-type language, known as Orcadian, still lingers on in the Orkneys. As the Shetlands are considerably further out than the Orkneys, I'd have expected their equivalent to be even more so. Any comments on this, Fred? ~~A~~Perhaps somebody can explain why, if "Buchan" is pronounced the way it is, "Buchanan" should be pronounced entirely differently? ~~A~~ A good title for some Hunterzine or column or something would be "Far Out Jazz".

A FOLIO OF PHILBY (John Baxter) Philby strikes me as being potentially pretty good, but at present he's too derivative of other easily-identified fannish cartoonists.

ERG 12 (Terry Jeeves) "Looking Round, by Brian Ball" - man, you'll have 'em rolling - - -

DARK STAR 1 (Terry Carr) The non-diatribes on Pp 3/4 set me feverishly searching through my more recent AMBLES. And damn it the man's right. In several cases I found myself using commas instead of periods. Usually, though, I use a dash - this is innate with me apparently, and fully recognised by myself, the dash being Mercereese for a colon or semi. My quoted bit "There's a third class, that repel me" I agree is wrong, and I'm only too liable to do that sort of thing when composing on stencil (as nearly always). The other quoted Mercer bit though, "Individuals are the ones who should have rights, any delegation to higher authority should depend strictly on blah blah blah" doesn't necessarily suffer from the comma-for-period syndrome. A full stop after the word "rights" - or the Mercatorial dash in lieu - would improve the structure true enough, but so would the alternative of substituting "depending" for "should depend". Anyway, it'll give Ethel a good laugh. ~~A~~On P.5, I tend to be slightly crogged (an understatement) by the prospect of 992 persons in an elevator. ~~A~~Re "The Chinese Doll" and (more specifically) the Tucker syndrome

in general, what baffles me is how when he wrote "Wild Talent" Tucker knew that fandom would acquire a Breen sooner or later. ~~On~~ P.24 things seem to be a mite confused with this "intellectual appeal of the mystery story which distinguishes it from the detective story" business. To my mind, there is no distinction - a mystery, or detective, story involves basically the protagonist (and the reader) being given a problem to solve and the protagonist (with or without the reader keeping up with his reasoning all the way) ultimately does so. This is distinct from the thriller, with which unfortunately it is often confused by the ignorant, in which the emphasis is on adventure. The two categories do meet, of course, but the distinction is usually there.

SOUFFLE 3 John Baxter) Precisely what the official definition of malleable iron would be I haven't the foggiest, but in practice it's iron treated with other substances so that it takes on some at least of the properties of steel. The ingredients (pig-iron and adulterants) are melted and cast to shape as per the customer's requirements, the casting then being annealed in a hot oven to give it a temper and make it tough and bangaboutable. Incidentally, in these parts it's pronounced "Malable" - sort of to rhyme with "fallible". Also incidentally, I no longer work there -, and by the time you read this I doubt very much if I'll still be living in a caravan, either. ~~Re~~ sports, it's the winning/losing aspect that puts me off as much as anything, and that applies equally to indoor, outdoor, sedentary or any other type of course.

SALLY-PORT 2 (Ken Cheslin) I've put a check-mark against your paragraph on putting the Queen Mary into orbit, but a fortnight later I'm damned if I can remember why - unless it was simply because it amused me (which it did/does). There's another check-mark further along against the paragraph about shoving an ordinary elephant out into the Arctic, but that's probably because I was amused at the idea of an ordinary elephant (let's leave the extraordinary ones out of this, huh?) becoming "emancipated" as you put it.

ENVOY 6 (Ken Cheslin I think) I mean how the hell can one tell? If ever two fans were natural twins, it's these two - not only do they put out the same zine, but utterly in the same way. It's fantastic. ~~The~~ reason I don't have covers on my zines is that I don't see any point in having a cover for the sake of having a cover. If I had a cover which was both attractive and which I thought expressed my personality, it might be different. ~~The~~ first film with the Goons in - or most of them - I believe was called "Penny Points to Paradise" - about football pools of course. I didn't see it because the trailer said something to the effect of "this is one film you must see" or something, so of course I couldn't go after that. I saw "Down Among the Z-Men", and was highly disappointed. It may have been a passable film on its merits, but it was not true to the Goon Show. And none of the four Goons, as it happened, took the part of a Z-Man (Class Z reservists, like me, called back for a fortnight's training some years ago unlike me) - the Z-men were simply background. Peter Sellers was the company commander, Spike Milligan was a private on the permanent staff, Michael Bentine was a visiting scientist who needed guarding, and Harry Secombe was a stray civilian who got mixed in with the Z-draft by mistake. For a start, all four should have taken the parts of genuine Z-men, likewise the entire Ray Ellington Quartet and Andrew Timothy. ~~Strictly~~, a busby is not "a big hairy hat worn by guards at Buckingham Palace". That's officially termed a "bearskin" (your guess is as good as mine what animal actually provides the fur these days). A busby is a lot smaller, and was if I read the signs correctly a sort of general-issue hat for a lot of the army prior

to the introduction of khaki service-dress. Pre-war red-coated toy soldiers (lead ones) are usually supplied with it.

MAILING COMMENTS (Jhim Linwood) Your "as the colliery has a communal shower I can expertly state that there is no truth in the rumour that negroes are sexually superior to whites" could have been better expressed I rather teenk, but one digs your meaning. ~~A~~ good point that about Harrogate con-participants having taken part in a sitdown organised by a member of the CND, too.

VAGARY 16 (Bobbie Gray) Re cricket, you've neatly side-stepped my point and gone dashing off in all sorts of irrelevant directions. I couldn't care less whether cricket is governed by rules, laws or regulations. I wasn't accusing cricket of being a soft game. And if everybody cooperates, it can be fairly fast-moving (though while everybody has to change ends every half dozen balls, it'll never be what one might term a fast game). What I said was: "In any ordinary game, the object is for the best side to win. In cricket, however, it isn't so far from the truth to say that the object is for the most sporting team to let the other side win". ~~Re~~ the planks and eyes quote at the bottom of P.7, I suspect that it emanates from this new more-or-less-official translation of the bible (or part thereof) which is being plugged these days. ~~Re~~ Agatha Christie (bottom of P.12), I once discovered a key to solve whodunit (without necessarily knowing why of course) that's a lot simpler than your plot-analysis system. ~~Same~~ paragraph of VAGARY, I have first-drafted a novel on toilet-paper. This was in the days before I had a typewriter of my own. It's actually a pretty efficient way of writing for some distance when one doesn't want anything to interrupt the flow of thought. (And for the economy-minded, the paper is still usable as originally intended afterwards. Oh, think of the glory of having genuine Shakespeare (or somebody) manuscripts hanging in the outhouse!)

MORPH 27 (John Roles) I don't do football pools either, but for a different reason - I think gambling is not immoral (on the part of the punter that is) but plain downright stupid. Obviously, the total money staked must exceed the total paid out in winnings, otherwise the promoter could never make a profit. Therefore, the average punter pays in more than he wins. Most people consciously or subconsciously accept the promoter's whack as a not unreasonable return for his service in redistributing the rest of the money. I happen not to. Only where the promoter is a cause I approve of (such as the government - I approve of governments taking their whack as painlessly as possible) do I gamble. I have some premium bonds, for instance. ~~Corfu~~ (no relation to correctine, you Americans) is a Greek island off the coast just where Greece and Albania meet. So Yugoslavs are no more likely to come from there than they are to come from Seattle. If you see what I mean. ~~Writings On The Wall~~ (this and the above reference both your P.5) - the best one I saw recently was on the sea-front on the Wirral peninsula (Hoylake I think) where underneath the routine juvenile pornography some wit had printed: A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR READERS. Even more recently, I forget precisely where (possibly Hereford come to think of it), I saw a different answer to the "I was here before Kilroy" rhyme. Not the usual "I was here but my pencil broke", but (to bowdlerise somewhat): "Hang your head in deep disgrace. Kilroy only built the place." Some time back I saw - I haven't a clue where - another rather amusing one. Not really clever, but it struck me as highly amusing the way it was put. I forget the exact details, but it was after the following fashion.

It began with the usual trivial pornography, followed by a list of endorsements. "I do for one - Bill". "So do I - Tom". "And me - Jack". "Me too - Mary". "How did Mary get in here? - Ted". "I wouldn't know - Sally". "If you did the book-catalogue, John, why can't you do Morph on the same typer and duper? And if you didn't, what is it?"

SCOTTISHE 28 (Ethel Lindsay) If I could remember what the trick-cyclists' reports actually said, I'd reproduce it in full with pleasure. As it was, I had to collect my medical documents from Point A and report with them to Point B, and I took the opportunity for a quick browse through in the toilet on the way. All I remember was that it was (a) fabulous, and (b) utter drivel. On the other hand, it was fairly important in the context, and I could hardly leave it out altogether. Sorry. Ian Peters on Scotland is of much interest. I'm not altogether sure he's all that correct in his delineation of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as "four ethnic regions" though. England, Wales and Northern Ireland, fair enough - if one bears in mind that the Irish ethnic region is even more so the other side of the partition. Scotland's a different matter. When one first hears of it, it was settled by Picts and other Brythonic peoples, whose descendants are still there (mixed up a bit of course, as we all are). Then the original "Scots" - an Irish tribe, Gaelic rather than Brythonic Celts - moved in from what is now Northern Ireland and occupied much of the western area and the islands. Meanwhile, the Anglo-Saxons had been pushing the Brythonic inhabitants of Great Britain (the island) westward, and their settled area extended in the north as far as the Forth. The original united Kingdom of Scotland was an amalgamation of the Irish-dominated area with the Brythonic states of Alban, Strathclyde etc, which took over the northern part of the English kingdom of Northumbria to give Scotland more or less her present frontier. (I stress the "more or less" to save possible irridentist argument). In addition, there were Norse settlements round the coasts - same as round everybody else's coasts. Thus Scotland, far from being "an ethnic region" is an ethnic nightmare, containing in microcosm all the main strains that comprise the British Isles as a whole. I didn't learn this in school of course - I agree that the teaching of history is too specialised - but had to work it out for myself later in life. Still with Ian, however ideally the clan system was adapted to its day and age, tribal life would be thoroughly out of place in twentieth-century Europe, and the system would have had to go eventually - though not necessarily so abruptly nor so cruelly. A highly stimulating article, anyway - Ian should write more.

BINARY 10 (Joe Patrizio) All right, BINARY 2 then - what's the loss of a mere eight digits between friends? "The Chromium-Plated Wilderness" (which is presumably your own work, Joe, though you don't actually say) is highly laden with emotional ~~misdirection~~ - so much so that mature consideration of the piece largely nullifies the very valid message behind it. To put it at one extreme, do you honestly suppose that were the entire population of the country (whichever country - England, Great Britain, the United Kingdom or what) to renounce all luxury in unison, to revert voluntarily to absolute subsistence living, the world would be a better place for it? It would be intolerable for a start - he who has it and loses it is far worse off than he who never had it. Certainly we should help the less fortunate peoples of the world - but from a position of strength, not from a sort of ecstatic panic.

DOLPHIN 2 (Elinor Busby) You've put your finger right on the spot re "Catcher in

the Rye", Elinor. "The continuing discrepancy between (Holden Caulfield's) crudity of speech and keenness and sensitivity of perceptions and emotions" - that's just about how it hit me, except that I never thought of the words to put it into. ~~A~~Re coats and ties - me too. I almost never wear a jacket at work, winter or summer, and right now I don't even possess a tie - I threw my one away when I left the Malleable. I'll probably get one when I start work again though, unfortunately. ~~A~~Re infallible childhood tearjerkers, there was a time when I could never keep a dry eye when I heard "The Old Folks at Home" - the combination of the words (which in those days appeared to me as High Tragedy) and the tune (which I still think one of the half-dozen loveliest ever) was too much for me.

MAINIAC (Andy Main) Not a genuine Burgess checklist, surely? Brian concentrates on the British zines.

THE ELIZABETH ST. BUGLE 1 (Pat Kearney) If one discounts the hysterical style, Pat, you seem to make fairly good sense. And you certainly feel things. But when you start saying you've got letters of comment on the last issue and one bears in mind that this is supposed to be No. 1, unless you're another Linard it looks like you're ringing the changes on Kearneyzines maybe a trifle too industriously. In other words, if part of this zine is due to turn up elsewhere under another title, this fact should preferably be clearly stated.

INERTIA 1 (Joseph Fekete) OK, you've made your point - you're entitled to call yourself BJOE. Now why don't you settle down to being plain Fred like everybody else? ~~A~~"If a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing the hard way" was simply a sarcastic comment on the B.S.F.A. Committee as it was at the very beginning, with all the members living remote from one another and all business having to be transacted by post. (I was one of them, incidentally). My angle was that it'd be a lot more convenient if they all lived in the same area. Since then, sometimes most of them have and sometimes most of them haven't. ~~A~~The reason the Lair of late has contained so few sf or fantasy works is that I covered the fiction first of all. A substantial proportion of my fiction is of a fantastic nature. Or if you mean why don't I have more sf and less fantasy, that's just the way my tastes run or something. ~~A~~Is this issue non-identical enough for you? ~~A~~Please, how does one pronounce your surname?

PHENOTYPE Op Crif CCIV (Dick Eney) Who is Norman Vincent Peale? Tom Lehrer calls him a "deep philosopher" in such a way as to make one suspect that he isn't, but otherwise he seems to be a sort of Unknown Quantity. ~~A~~You're undoubtedly right about there being no true heirs these days of the mercenary armies of yore - I was thinking of professionals as against amateurs. ~~A~~I've only just discovered the difference between "chauvinism" and "euphuism" (so it turns out they're two entirely different concepts - how was I to know except by looking 'em up?), so now everybody starts throwing "charismatic" at me. That isn't even in the dictionary. It isn't fair! ~~A~~Shapiroism (with cattle) - don't you read your censored zines? ~~A~~ORUE 26, Ep 18/19. (Must have me' half-pint of egoboo). ~~A~~"Man Enters the New World" was highly interesting throughout. This is the sort of science to inspire the Mercatorial sense of wonder, and a pox on your sub-atomic particles, your orbital velocities and your $e=mc^2$. (Not your sub-atomic particles specifically, Dick - the whole subject of sub-atomic particles and the rest). Just one query - your text-para 2.3 - I don't quite dig how, during the land-bridge period, the Bering

Straits could very well be passable for fresh-water or salt-water fish - or any other conceivable kind of fish except possibly lungfish. ~~If~~ zoologists and botanists had their way, of course, the Mann Act would be applied to any plants and/or animals for any purpose whatsoever.

CYRILLE 4 (Bill Evans) If John Myers Myers was a woman, your remarks about Betty Wagman Wagman would be more relevant. ~~If~~ it makes sense for each state to have its own laws, then it makes equal sense for it to license its own bar of lawyers. If each state had its own diseases, it would make sense for it to license its own doctors. As it is, I'd have thought that having some experience in different parts of the country (if not of the world) would make a man a better doctor than if he just stayed in one area all his life. ~~This~~ is one of those zines where the material far outshines the repro, unfortunately.

ALSO READ BUT NO COMMENT (this is the Filletted Shambles remember): UL 7 (Norm Metcalf), PFOOT 1 (Ken Cheslin), ENVOY 7 (Dick Schultz - I teenk), SALLY-PORT 1 (Ken Cheslin again), SIZAR 7 (Ron Bennett alias Bruce Burn). That's three sevens out of five, plus two Cheslinzines.

AFTERTHOUGHTS. Bobbie: if Gardner knows practically nothing, where does that leave Parrinder? Ethel: I forgot to commend you for your spirited, and much to the point, defence of the NHS. John Roles: come to think of it, it wasn't Hereford, it was Ledbury. Part of the fabric of the apparently Mediaeval council-offices building, too. John Baxter: re "wrong Burroughs" - why should the AE wish to use his "little blue pencil" on a book-title? And in any case, if so why do you repeat the offence in your comment - if offence it be? Elinor: but damn it, the United States was built by movement of labour. I was very much under the impression that the average American had far more uprootable roots than the average Britisher. (Don't look at me - whatever I may be, I'm not average).

"If you doe bee troubled overmuchly in the mynde bye such an one as
 "doth thryve alle-together upon egobooc, no matter whether that
 "egobooc doe bee in its nature kyndly or unkyndly towards hym, then
 "speake of hym not at alle, and counsell alle your neiboures to doe
 "as you doe. And in the fulnesse of tyme will hee goe away suffer-
 "ynge fromme malnutrition."

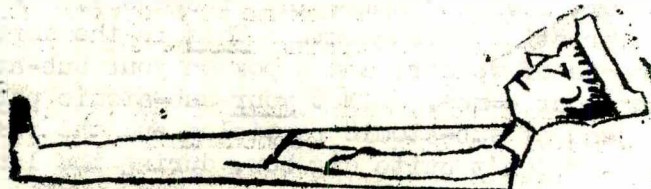
- St Alsobar

 SIX PAGES - THAT'S TOO MANY

PS. On filing the above zines, I find to my horror that PFOOT isn't a Cheslinzine at all - it's a George Spencerzine if you please.

 This is ridiculous.

ROOM FOR FABULOUS FRED



OH DIDN'T HE RAMBLE - THE COLUMN WHERE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN BUT SELDOM IF EVER DOES

OUTLINE OF
 AUTOBIOGRAPHY
 PART 2 PART 3
 MERCER THE SOLDIER
 PART THREE

Our vast equipment was moved to Hamburg by R.A.F. transport (ground). This can be seen as a praiseworthy example of inter-service cooperation, or an argument against having separate services anyway, depending which way one looks at it. We ourselves went by train, of course, a special military train that followed a long, rambling course across Germany, stopping frequently for us to be fed, or for no apparent reason. We were in it overnight. I remember looking out on the newly-discovered German countryside, and finding it compared very favourably with our own. I still think so. In Britain, most of the trees one sees around the countryside (apart from plantations) are arranged in hedgerows, thus keeping them out of the way of agricultural land. But now, I was confronted by huge landscaped vistas where the fields were open and the trees gathered in artistic-looking clumps with a house or two beside them. A far superior arrangement, I thought. Whenever we stopped among buildings though, the train was besieged by children, at that time by no means too well nourished, clamouring for gum and chocolate and anything that was going. Apart from such words and "Hey Joe" and that sort of thing, they all seemed to know one English expression, a vulgar equivalent to "go away" which doubtless had been used on them so often that it had gone into their English vocabulary. I don't know if they knew what it meant as used, I very much doubt if they knew what the words themselves meant.

GHQ 2nd Echelon was now located at Boehm (? spelling) Barracks, between Farmsen and Rahlstedt on the outskirts of Hamburg. While we were there it was renamed "Adam Barracks" in honour of the Adjutant-General, though I'm glad to note that it now seems to have reverted to its proper name. It was in a bit of a mess though - not war-damage, plain and simple neglect - and while it was being rebuilt and redecorated our entire male element, officers and all, were housed under canvas in a nearby field. The company offices and stores were under canvas as well. The barracks had previously been occupied by some sort of mechanised unit of the German army, and the range of long garages were being converted to our offices. When we got there the ATS quarters were the only part of the barracks that were properly habitable. Work had begun on the offices, and the garage doors had been bricked up, but beyond that we had to use them anyway and have the interiors fitted up and decorated while we worked. (If you've never worked in a small cubicle, ^{naked} stone or brick all round, while workmen fit up a central heating system, you've never lived).

The other ranks' dining hall was even worse - it didn't pretend to be anything but a garage, with huge metal doors and all. Some stoves and things had been set up at one end, screened off by dilapidated corrugated iron, and the remainder of the building filled with portable tables and benches as was. As it turned out, however, there was a compensating factor. At that time the electricity supply was chaotic, and would often be off for hours at a time or even all night. When that happened, they used to illuminate the dining hall by running an ambulance (don't ask me why an ambulance of all things, I don't know) in at the far end and turning its headlights down the room.

With the planned rundown in size of the occupation forces and their 2nd Echelon, my section now shared accommodation with another small section with which we were to merge. The merger was effected with brilliant simplicity - whenever anybody left on demob, his or her work was taken over by his or her

opposite number in the other section. The miscellaneous sub-section - myself, the Durham Light Infantryman from Dundee, the sapper and his Green Howards assistant, all privates or the equivalent - was put in one of the small cubicles at the end (the other one was occupied by the Officer i/c and the chief clerk), together with our opposite numbers of whom there were two only - an ATS sergeant and another sapper, my mate's old mate. Officially, from then on the ATS sergeant was in charge of us all, but in practice it made no difference. And both she and her sapper (another Scotsman, by the way) were presently demobbed, and the four of us took over their work between us and carried on exactly as before.

The Durham Light Infantryman never took to clerical work, and was eventually posted back to general duties, being replaced by an ATS girl. (Another private). Meanwhile, there was trouble in one of the other sections, and it was decided at high level (high 2nd Echelon level of course) to cure the trouble by amalgamating that section with ours - which was rapidly becoming a catch-all. The troublesome section only brought half its staff with it, however - the half that was least responsible for the trouble, the balance being moved to sections where they could cause less confusion or posted away altogether. The sharp drop in personnel was then made good by drafting in a lot of new ATS girls fresh out from the U.K. From then on, the girls outnumbered the men in our combined section, even including the German civilians with the men. And the miscellaneous sub-section settled down with a strength of seven - myself, two ATS privates on my side of the business, the sapper and the Green Howard, another ATS private and a male German civvy who worked with them. We were then turfed out of the cubicle on the grounds that it was more functional to put the typing pool in there, and joined the main body in the big room outside. (Are you still with me?)

I understand that in combat units, officers are expected to be sort of supermen - and very often are. This did certainly not apply, however, to GHQ 2nd Echelon. I'm damn sure that we could have been at least as efficient - probably considerably more so - if every single officer on our strength had been posted elsewhere and the place had been run entirely by the existing complement of other ranks. Our officers came in two varieties. The ordinary "P.I." sections were in the charge of ordinary unspecialised regimental officers from various mobs. These, for the most part, were utter nonentities, just bodies that sat in little offices and signed whatever was brought to them as required. The officers at branch level and higher were staff officers ("A" Branch) (note that the word "branch" there has two distinct meanings, like so many other military terms including "army" itself). These were pretty clever, but unfortunately out of touch with reality. They would lay out instructions in immense and awesome detail - things will happen thus, and are to be dealt with so. And when things obstinately refused to happen thus, we on the lower levels dealt with them as best we were able, adapting our betters' fabulous systems to the realities of the situation.

We ourselves were an utterly heterogenous lot. We included men from all the large corps and most of the infantry regiments, besides ATS girls and German civilian clerks of both sexes (males however predominating, and our section having no German females at all to compensate for all our ATS). Then there was one section staffed entirely by Marines and Commandos - some ordinary Marines, some Marine Commandos, and some army Commandos. These worked and lived together, and didn't mix with the rest of us at all. Alone amongst us, they spent a not

inconsiderable part of their time drilling, route-marching and generally keeping in fighting trim. It's beyond me why they used such people as base HQ clerks in the first place. We also had a Polish liaison section - at least that's what it was officially called, though I'm under the impression that it was in fact a little GHQ 2nd Echelon in miniature, dealing with the Polish forces in north-west Europe under British command. Various other national liaison sections attached themselves to us from time to time, but they all melted away when the fighting was over. The Poles, however, were always with us. They too kept very much to themselves.

In smaller denominations we had Control Commission civilians looking after the records of their own people, a National Fire Service bloke shadowing the NFS column that was attached to the invasion forces, and a bloke from the Civil Service Commission - though I think he was more of a recruiting officer looking for future civil servants amongst those about to be demobbed. We even had a detachment of the Catholic Women's League. The CWL was one of the bodies, mainly religious-based, that operated voluntary canteens in friendly rivalry with the official NAAFI (Navy, Army & Air Force Institutes). They first impinged upon our horizons in Brussels, where they ran one of the downtown canteens. When we moved from Brussels they came with us, and were on our permanent attached strength from then on. At first the CWL and the Naafi set up shop in two marquees placed end-to-end - which was a bit silly really. The Naafi moved into permanent quarters within the barrack area, whilst the CWL eventually set up house outside in a building placed strategically between our barracks and the Guards Armoured Division lines, which they called rather cleverly the "Adam and Eve Club". They still lived in the barracks though.

Circulating amongst the forces on the continent there was a brightly coloured magazine called SOLDIER. I think it circulated in the UK too actually, but it was produced in Germany on the presses of the former international propaganda magazine SIGNAL. Science-fiction magazines (and UNKNOWN WORLDS) were then beginning to show up on the British newsstands in hitherto unprecedented numbers - I remember returning from leave with half a dozen titles all different - and I was glad to note that SOLDIER ran a couple of articles by a Captain Somebody-or-other dedicated to proving that sf wasn't the rubbish that it was generally supposed to be. It wasn't till many years afterwards that I met Ken Slater personally though.

When I returned from my first leave from Germany, I came back to an extra bit of chaos. There had been a gale and a lot of the tents had blown away. Everybody had been evacuated post-haste into the permanent barrack quarters - which had just been completed in time. My kitbag was somewhere at the bottom of an immense pile of goods in the new company stores - the company stores marquee had blown away too - and for several days I was privileged to wear my shoes on duty, until this finally got straight. Later on, of course, in the general relaxation of some at least of the unnecessary bull, we were all permitted to wear shoes in the offices. I always wore brown shoes of course - black shoes just "aren't me". Black boots are all right as far as they go, but if I put on a pair of black shoes they look like somebody else's feet, not mine. Funny, that.

While in Hamburg I continued writing my Great Novel. Back in Brussels and before, I had mentally written several full-length novels of a far-fetched if not entirely fantastic nature, but this one was supposed to overtop them all. The offices now being accessible at all times, I was able to work in comparative peace

at my own desk, and eventually completed it. Then I set about typing it out in triplicate, and when I went back to the UK for demob I carried all four copies in a picnic hamper that just fitted them nicely. (Curiously enough, that same picnic hamper later held the stencils for "Tales from the Oubliette").

I was now rapidly approaching what proved to be the climax of my military career. In swift succession I received two severe shocks.

I fell in love.

And I was promoted.

As for the first, the other party was one of the two ATS privates who worked alongside me. She was a lovely, cuddly, friendly little thing from somewhere in the north of England. It was entirely one-sided, and doomed to frustration from the outset. We had nothing in particular in common and all sorts of things out of common, and she had a regular boy-friend anyway. Whether she ever guessed anything of my infatuation I never knew, but most of my spare time I spent 'hot-writing' episodes in a barely conceivable joint future history - a wonderful, heart-breaking occupation (you've seen all the adjectives for it around the place at various times so I won't elaborate further). As she sat next to me and had by the nature of things to be constantly referring things to me anyway, I could hardly forget her, so I started drinking. This wasn't much good, because not only did I hate the taste of the stuff - though it did begin to give me the beginnings of a taste for future enjoyment - but drink does not in itself change my mood, it just heightens it. (Or deepens it, which is the same thing). I had an excellent opening to the drinking campaign though. It was Christmas, and there was an office party for all ranks including the officer, and there were bottles of assorted hard liquor laid on that ranks below that of sergeant did not normally get to see. I tried just about everything there was, and got beautifully high. When it was all over bar the straggling barrackward, I duly straggled. In the barrack-room (they were all little rooms, holding a maximum of six men) I clambered on to the window-sill to open the top window (as usual, the place was like an oven) and got down again safely, then undressed and went to bed.

Once in bed, I was in bed for keeps though. I had a lovely long sleep and woke up feeling fabulous. I still have the piece of paper I scrawled on to record that I was drunk for the first time in my life.

The best counter to the lovesick feeling, though, was the promotion that followed.

I knew that my name had gone in on the latest list of recommendations, but I didn't really expect anything to come of it. I was always hoping of course, but I had good reason to suppose that it wouldn't go all the way through. I had been recommended a couple of times before (I'd seen the file copies of the letters recommending me) without anything coming of it. Promotions in GHQ 2nd Echelon were run according to a peculiar system (though probably other HQ-type units have the same setup). Names were recommended by sections, countersigned by branches (one stage higher) and approved by Central Office. But - and it's a very big but - subject to the Camp Commandant's veto. The Camp Commandant was the officer responsible for administering us as a unit, as distinct from a working office, his subordinates being the adjutant, the various company commanders, and various specialists (messaging officer, transport officer etc). The adjutant

had taken ~~adverse~~ note of my existence at the time of the religious troubles I've already mentioned, and had since given the impression that he wasn't altogether on my side. And the adjutant was the camp comedian's right-hand man, so that was that.

So when one fine winter's day everybody started coming round congratulating me and citing Part I Orders on the notice-board, at first I just thought they were kidding. I didn't believe it until I saw it in black and white - and then I hardly could. Private Mercer appointed Unpaid Acting Lance-Corporal with effect from a day or two previous.

This was heady wine indeed, more so for me than for most people. Back at school, I had been alone among the senior boys in not being appointed to any office - prefect or club secretary or anything at all. Since then, in the army, I had long been left behind in the promotion race. I had developed a king-sized inferiority complex as a result. It wasn't that I didn't have the ability - it was a fact that barring a couple of specialised jobs that required a week or so's practice I could have stepped into the shoes of anybody in the section and done that person's job as well as he or she could - including the chief clerk's. I'd been in the section longer than anybody else, for one thing. But no - I might be perfection itself, but I was (apparently) doomed to be the perfect private.

And now here I was a lance-jack. So, incidentally, was my mate the sapper, thus making both of us official at long last.

But there was more to it than that, beautiful to the ego though it was. A couple of weeks later, before I'd even completed the probationary unpaid period before becoming a Paid Acting Lance-Corporal (all lance-corporals are acting lance-corporals, the rank is never substantive) a special promotion list went up on the board. Lance-Corporal Mercer to be Unpaid Acting Corporal with effect from the same date as the original promotion to lance-corporal.

Obviously, the Army had seen my worth at last.

A slight hitch followed. The ~~company~~ stores had no corporal's tapes in stock, neither had the regimental stores. So for a week or so I went around still wearing lance-jack's tapes on the grounds that there weren't any other, until people started to wonder whether that had been my name they'd seen. Then one of my various overlords, whether office or company I forget, gave me an ultimatum - get those tapes up before next time I see you or else. I was rescued from my predicament by the girls in the typing pool, one of whom turned out to be hoarding a pair that had been bequeathed to her by one of her mates on becoming sergeant. As my need was clearly greater than hers, she disgorged them, and sewed them on my tunic for me while I waited. And so justice was seen to be done. (Badges of rank are of course a common issue to both sexes).

And I carried right on doing precisely the same work I'd been doing since the 2nd Echelon had been stationed in central London. (Work that in other sections carried a corporal's tapes more or less automatically).

Our section experienced rather an odd promotion around that time. The other one of the two girls who worked with me acted as PT instructress, so the ATS administration made her a lance-corporal on their strength. She con-

tinued to be held on the section strength, however, as a private. This was in order that she wasn't regarded as filling a lance-corporal's vacancy, and thus blocking promotion for somebody else in the section that our officer deemed more worthy (such as me, for instance). Thus if she was absent, she'd go on the absentee return as: "Privates, ATS, 1 (L/Cpl Holdsworth)". If ATS HQ wanted to block promotion for one of their own full-timers, that was their affair.

While I was a corporal, I went on my last leave. This time I spent it in London - still with my brother, it was his holiday-time and we stayed together (I forget precisely where most of the time). I can't even remember what we did, except that we took photographs of each other (with my brother's camera) standing on the suspension-bridge in St James's Park. Probably visited around relatives and things, actually. And saw my father, of course, I was forgetting him.

Back at 2nd Echelon, I found a strange corporal in the barrack-room, a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps. What had happened was this: the R.A.M.C. was one of the bodies with whose records our section now dealt, and at one time there had been quite a number of R.A.M.C. clerks working in it. All had now been demobbed except for one man, a staff-sergeant, and he was due to go shortly. According to his records, there was an R.A.M.C. corporal clerk kicking around in some holding unit somewhere, and he suggested to the officer that in order not to break the chain ~~altogether~~, it might be possible to get the branch of 2nd Echelon who authorised postings to authorise this one to be posted to GHQ 2nd Echelon, earmarked for our section. This plan found favour with authority, and here he was as a result. At first I trembled for my tapes, because I was not yet what was known as war-substantive, and when an acting NCO is rendered redundant by the posting in of a war-sub NCO, he has to revert. (I should be speaking in the past tense there, because the present army's on a peace-time basis). Any time served in the higher rank counts towards next time though. However, my fears were for some reason groundless. In fact I only remember two people in 2nd Echelon ever having to revert to a lower rank because they were rendered surplus, one a major who had to revert to captain and the other a warrant officer first class who had to revert to WO II. All the lower ranks seemed to be permanently safe. I don't know if this was because they always kept a few vacancies in hand to be on the safe side, or whether the branch that controlled postings were able to fiddle round it, though I suspect the latter. It would be simple - and perfectly legitimate on the face of it - to keep the war-sub NCO on the strength of a holding unit and "temporarily" attach him to some other unit (such as ourselves) for instance. Come to think of it, as we held the records of R.A.M.C. personnel I could have quite easily checked on it if I'd thought.

But whatever the reason, I held my corporal's rank and after the required three months I became war-substantive. That meant that under wartime conditions (which were to still apply for a year or two yet), nothing could deprive me of my rank short of a court-martial or an Act of Parliament. As I didn't have so very much longer to serve, I was well away.

The R.A.M.C. staff-sergeant (a pleasant bloke, as I remember him) didn't have such a good idea after all though. The corporal he'd wished on us turned out to be a proper bastard as they go. In the barracks, he soon had everybody's backs up. I didn't mind him at first, although my two ATS girls both insisted that he was a slob. But then, I was the same rank as he was. The privates saw a different side of him. One day - I wasn't present at the time - he got one of the blokes real mad at him in barracks, and this bloke hit him. The

corporal promptly lay down on the floor and shouted for the regimental police to be fetched. This was too much. From then on, the R.A.M.C. corporal was sent to Coventry by all the rank-and-file of our section and another section that shared our quarters (and to which the bloke who'd hit him belonged). I moved out of that room into another room across the passage on the grounds that there wasn't any NCO there - on the ostensible grounds that is. I wasn't the first to move out, either; from then on nobody slept in that room except by choice. I think there was one private who preferred to remain.

The next time there was a sergeant vacancy in our section, it was given to the R.A.M.C. corporal, and he moved into sergeants' quarters and got out of our hair. He was still in the office of course, but he wasn't in such a position to throw his weight around there - at least one NCO senior to him would have taken a delight in getting a chance to squash him.

Talking of NCOs - when I first became a corporal (unpaid acting), I was in the peculiar position of being at once the most senior and the most junior corporal in the section. This was because I was the only male corporal - all the others were ATS. As a male, I was technically senior to any female of the same rank. On the other hand, as the most recently promoted I was for all practical purposes - for place in the promotion ladder for instance, other things being equal - junior to the girl corporals.

(By the way, in case any Americans etc are wondering - "ATS" stood for "Auxiliary Territorial Service". There was no regular corps of women in the army prior to World War II. The ATS eventually became the Women's Royal Army Corps.)

Still on the subject of rank - when I left, the section strength comprised 14 British army males: one captain, one WO I, one colour-sergeant, one sergeant, one corporal (me), four lance-corporals and five privates - ~~fourteen~~ men belonging to thirteen different corps and infantry regiments. There were about thirty ATS working with us, including a WO II, a sergeant, and half a dozen corporals and lance-corporals. And about a dozen male German civilians. On the face of the above listing, the distribution of ranks seems distinctly unfair between us and the girls. It wasn't really, though. For some time our male strength had been dwindling - the R.A.M.C. corporal had been the last male posted in, and he was a special case - and most of the girls were youngsters (not that I was so much older) straight from training unit. We were on a joint establishment, so naturally the older hands tended to get preferment, irrespective of the balance of the sexes.

And so my army life drew to its close. As an NCO, I tried to be an NCO according to my ideals - that is, to support those below me against those above me rather than the other way about. As it happened, due to my drinking campaign previously referred to I was far more "one of the crowd" amongst my section mates than I had been before. As one who disliked "discipline for discipline's sake" I was certainly not dedicated to keeping The System at the highest possible pitch. At work I was as efficient as I could manage in a vaguely light-hearted way - as I always had been. Socially, I was for the men rather than for the management. Contrary to the well-known saying, one of the nicest compliments I've ever received was something I happened to overhear - I was just coming in the room, or they thought I was asleep, or something. Anyway, one of the privates in the room was talking about NCOs, and said something to the effect

of: "unless it's somebody like Archie, who doesn't know he's got 'em" (" 'em" being tapes).

Actually, he was wrong. I did know I'd "got 'em". Very much so. I was continually conscious, whatever I might be doing, that I had two tapes on my sleeve. To one who had previously been condemned to spend his life as a perpetual private, the egoboo involved in wearing corporal's tapes was sweet indeed. For the last six months of my service my heart was one big glow.

Shortly before I left the army, my brother joined up. Heavily under the influence of various relatives, he signed on as a regular - in the Gloucestershire Regiment, because he'd been living with this aunt. We never met both in uniform - on my last leave he was a civvy, next time we met I was.

When, at the end of the war in Europe, the age-and-service-group system for demobilisation had been instituted, my group - No. 54 - was strictly for the birds. Gradually as the months and years passed, it became rather less so. And at last it reached the head of the queue. My time had come.

I could have stayed on. I might have signed on as a regular, or just applied to have my release deferred. If I'd done either, I had a good chance of making sergeant in the near future. I liked the work I was doing, too. Furthermore, while I held my war-substantive rank I need have no fear of my medical records being unearthed to my undoing - I couldn't fall lower than corporal. But there was no question of my staying on, of course. Not under military discipline. As soon as they said I could go, I went.

Two more of group No. 54 were in the same section, including the sapper lance-corporal. I'd like to be able to say that we all went out together. Unfortunately, that wasn't the army's way. We were all on different drafts of half-a-dozen men apiece. I don't know if this was to save any one section losing more than one man at a time, or if they threw all the names into a hat and drew them out for places. So one happy day I mounted into the cab of a small truck beside the driver - as NCC i/c draft this was my privilege - and started the journey to the coastal transit camp. There we ceased to be an independent draft and became fused in one large all-inclusive one. Boat to England, and then train to York. There was a blazing heatwave on at the time, and the carriage was one of those with non-opening windows, just little ventilators at the top. I reached York boiled alive. We arrived at the barracks that was doing duty as demob centre too late to be processed that night, so we were given beds for the night. One of the blokes in the room announced incredulously that his first night in the army had been spent in that same room.

I wandered into the corporals' NAAFI for a snack. It was, ironically enough, at the demob centre that for the first and last time I was segregated into a corporals' canteen. They'd been building one at 2nd Echelon, but it hadn't been finished when I left. I'd lost the rest of the 2nd Echelon detachment - they were nothing to me (or to each other), any more than any of the others present. Everything now was just a pointless wait. That didn't stop much celebration, though, all told. At least one stupid idiot (ever met a sensible idiot?) overdid it. In the morning, all men in Scottish regiments were ordered to parade. Then an ATS private, escorted by officers

of both sexes, slowly inspected them. One man was picked out and marched away. He wouldn't be wearing civvies for a year or two.

Then the processing began. Some of my army papers were taken off me, some given back endorsed. I was given my civvy documents - a formidable list; identity card, ration book, clothing coupon sheets, national insurance card, medical card, pamphlets on what to do, the whole works. I went into the outfitting dept for my civvy suit. This was a swindle. The best I could pick out was a horrible dark brown tweed set. ~~One shirt~~, with two detachable collars (collar-attached shirts weren't available). A hat - I never wear hats, and tried to pick one for my father. Turned out his head's too big though. (Literally). A tie. A pair of shoes - at least I could have brown, and not black. No chance of sports jacket and flannels. It is said that if one slipped the civvy storekeeper a little something, he'd let you have a chance at the better stuff. I'm inclined to believe it. ^{I needed them badly.} But at least they gave us a good allowance of clothing coupons. / My brother had worn my previous lot of civvies out in the four years I'd been out of them, and still needed his own ~~under~~ non-occupational conditions as he was.

Then into the train again, carrying my kitbag with odds and ends in it, a large cardboard box with the civvy clothes, and that picnic hamper. Still wearing battledress, which was supposed to be preserved against possible future need. (It was eventually stolen).

Hedged all around with restrictions lingering on from the war, 'tis true. But I was, for the first time in my life, a comparatively free individual.

(End of Part 2)

 POSTSCRIPT TO PART 2. I never really liked being in the army. Even when I was thoroughly enjoying myself, I'd have enjoyed myself even more thoroughly as a civilian. On the other hand, I cannot fail to recognise that my four years in the army did me a hell of a lot of good, both physically and educationally. Not formal-type education, but it gave me an opportunity - hell, it forced me damn it - to mix with types I'd never mixed with before. All this is a Good Thing.

The good results of my army career, though, are not so much due to the army as in spite of it. **Strictly a by-product.**

This by-product should be for all, in my opinion.

I am, therefore, in favour of conscription. NOT, emphatically not, though, conscription for the military forces. But every young person, of either sex, should some time in the late teens or early twenties put in a couple of years in a special youth service.

There would be virtually no exemptions, apart from the physically or mentally bedridden. The ordinary disabled - blind people, for instance - would be conscripted with the rest, and put to work or training as was most appropriate. There would be no exemption on hardship grounds. If a girl was needed at home to look after infirm parents, for instance, she wouldn't be entitled to exemption - it wouldn't be fair to her to deprive her of this vital part of her preparation for adult life. But the local branch of the

service would, in such a case, take it upon itself to look after her parents while she was away.

Members of the service would always be stationed some distance from their homes, and thoroughly mixed up by local origin, social class, and any other category that tends to keep people apart. They might volunteer to work overseas. The work would be anything and everything that was within their physical capabilities and that was useful to the community. There would be no seniors or juniors among them - all would be on the same level, modified solely by differences in capability. They would be expected to work hard, during working hours, but given plenty of free time and facilities for enjoying it, including facilities for following their own hobbies.

There would be no military-type discipline as it's generally understood. There'd have to be, of course, some form of sanction to keep the youngsters from deserting, and to keep them working hard at whatever they're put to, but no more than this. They'd be able to dress as they please, behave as they please, and so on. Anything they ^{were given} to do would be useful, and seen to be useful. They'd be paid a fair amount of pocket-money, and given a bonus when their service was finished.

Whilst they'd spend their time working for the immediate benefit of the community, I'd like to stress that the basic idea would be to benefit the young people themselves - and thus the potential community in which they would finally take their places as free adults.

Running hard to keep in the same place, I hasten to list the latest increment to

THE LAIR

ALDISS, Brian W.

The "Hothouse" series (complete)

This saga is to my mind one of the most absorbing fantasies of recent (or any?) years. I know it's been attacked for its unscientific basis - I should worry?

DE CAMP, L. Sprague, and

The Castle of Iron

PRATT, Fletcher

Now I have the whole "Unknown" sequence of the Harold Shea stories in book form, and have thus eliminated the need to keep the original magazine versions.

The trouble is somewhat complicated. In the original, Harold Shea spent most of both the second and third episodes in the company of - or looking for - Belphebe, without anything being definitely settled between them. However, when the first two episodes (but not the third) were published in book form as "The Incomplete Enchanter", it was rounded off by having them definitely committed to one another for life. This meant that the third episode no longer made sense as it stood inasmuch as the relationship between the two principal characters of the series had now completely altered. In addition, it needed considerable padding in any case to bring it to novel-length. So it was virtually completely re-written - unfortunately, to my mind, to considerably less effect than the original. The title of the episode - "The Castle of Iron" - remained unaltered, but not much else, and one particular character was added (Pete the cop) who, whilst not so far participating in the body of the book, became intimately tied up

with the linkage between episodes.

Thus the three original stories in magazine form made sense. ~~The two novels based on these~~ three episodes still made sense. Then two further episodes appeared, one in "Fantasy Magazine" and the other in "Beyond". These episodes followed the continuity of the novels rather than of the original magazine versions, and thus in a complete collection of magazine versions (which I previously had) there was a distinct hiatus between the first set and the second. Hence my pleasure in having the whole saga in internally coherent form. It's a pity about "The Castle of Iron" though, nevertheless.

MICHENER, James A.

The Fires of Spring

This is a novel about the adolescence and young manhood of an American boy early in the century. It's long as novels go (nearly 450 pages), and I found it good reading when I first encountered it. But I didn't deem it quite worth keeping, and let it go again. Then I started to miss it, and have now purchased another copy. It's that sort of a book.

On the whole, I think it compares interestingly with Vaughan Wilkins's novels. Michener's hero isn't anybody in particular, with his adventures traceable back to the fact of his identity like the typical Wilkins hero, but the sort of things that befall him tend to resemble the Wilkins all the same.

And of course it endears itself further to me by introducing John Philip Sousa as a minor character.

PHILLIPS, Peter

Dreams are Sacred

The story I spent such a time trying to identify some years back.

TEMPLE, William F.

A Trek to Na-Abiza

The only Temple story, to the best of my recollection, that I have ever really enjoyed. Also the first of the "Science Fantasy" type of stories to overflow into "Science Fiction Adventures" as they've been doing lately.

TUCKER, Wilson

To the Tombaugh Station

Half of the Ace Double novel, replacing the magazine version.

THE MAD FRONTIER

Will these MAD paperbacks never cease?

This one shines by printing the fabulous Wordsworth parody, substituting axolotls for daffodils.

That's that up to date again. Room for a bit more SON OF THE LAIR, the department of the Worth Reading Once.

MORTLOCK, Bill

Grounds for Divorce (Lawyer, Heal Thyself)

JOHNSTON, Hamilton

The Doctor's Signature

Very similar, these two. One is about a lawyer, the other about a doctor, but they run parallel. The protagonist in each case encounters marital and extra-marital troubles against a background of his day-to-day work, the whole leavened with considerable humour.

COUSINS, E.G.

Give Me That Man

Dressed-up to Kill

E.G. Cousins (sex unknown, to me at any rate) uses the technique of multiple narrators to recount different parts of the story. Generally I'd say this would

be a distinct handicap, but Mr, Mrs or Miss Cousins manages to produce a couple of readable works despite it. Both are based on sensational-type themes - the first concerns a young man who is falsely accused of incest with his (mad) mother, the second concerns an outburst of race-feeling in a town in the southern United States.

MOLE, William

Trample an Empire

This verges on the borderline of sociological sf, being about the spontaneous opposition movement that is called forth by a British government's attempting to resolve the recurrent financial (etc) crisis by taking unto itself de Gaulle-like powers. The hero finds that without really trying he has become a key figure in the opposition. Actually it isn't all that good a book, but it is redeemed by one magnificent character-study - that of Tranquil Thorwaldsen, the hero's friend's mistress, whose absolute lethargy (she'd sooner lie down on the floor than take the trouble to walk across the room to a couch) is a wonder and a joy to behold. If he ever learns to write a better book, I hope he takes the opportunity to bring her back in a setting that is more worthy of her talents.

Illustration by
PATRICIA
SCOTT
MCLEAN



INNES, Michael

- From London Far

This is a curiously unsatisfactory novel. Each of its three parts is set in a fabulously wacky setting, right up to the author's best. And yet somehow it fails to add up to a perfect whole. Perhaps there are too many loose ends - the friendly bloodhounds, for instance. Why didn't they participate in the later adventures?

Archie Mercer, c/o B.S.F.A. Library,
(Basement) 130 London Road, Cheltenham,
Glos. (England)

Duplicated upon the Original Mercatorial Flatbed, in a monster operation taking some 10 - 12 hours. Sometimes it's handy to be unemployed.