

Written by Gerald Dowling (Nephew to John Hanrahan- from Maniototo).

My re-collections of the Moses Halord Hanrahan Family.

April 2021.

During the years of the Second World War, 1939 – 1945, my memory of some events are

The home of Moses and Elizabeth Hanrahan built of sun-dried bricks near the top of Stuart Road. They had grown up in St. Bathans and married in 1903, living first in Alexandra being employed on the bucket dredge "Lady Ranfurly" working the river near Clyde, and later working at the cold-water wool scour during shearing at Blackstone Hill Station Becks, before moving to new Ranfurly in 1907.

Their neighbours going down the road were the Bell Family and their large house, Ken Marslin house near the corner, engine driver, and turning left into Granville place, the large house of Tom Mitchell, and nearer the railway station was Marty Hanrahan.

Turning back up Charlemont Street West was the Thos. Mitchell and Son's joinery shop, with a large timber rack attached, the open space where the wooden wagon wheels were assembled and steel running tyres were heated and fitted around the wheels, before being cooled with water to snugly hold the wheel together. This space was also the entrance to the smithy, where George Phillips was the long-time blacksmith, and horses would await their turn to be shod with new shoes, and then Thos. Mitchell's Office, Tom Mitchell being the local builder and undertaker, owned these buildings.

Then came Dick Templeton and his billiard rooms, Jock Anderson dentist, Eileen Grant Woman and children's clothing, McLean's Boarding house, now two flats one occupied by Peter and Tricia Simmons, and Jones the baker opposite Hanrahan way. The remainder of that triangle was where Mosie grazed his cow. Though, fire destroyed a single man's hut and the person, Mick Ruddy, years before at the top corner.

I particularly remember the loving and welcoming Hanrahan home, where my Grandparents made everyone welcome. Moses and Elizabeth were one of the pioneering Families, having moved to Ranfurly in 1907, only 9 years after the first passenger train puffed in, when he opened his first Hairdressing and Tobacconist shop, between the Ranfurly Hotel, and Donald's Boarding House and Tearooms. As photos show this was a simple building built on two runners, which if needed could be moved.

Following school their children obtained work locally. Nellie was the first telephone operator at the new switchboard in a room at the north end of the railway station. Maimie at Donald's boarding house, where commercial travellers would stay to conduct their business before catching the train out next day, then office manager for Tom Mitchell, Robert (Lance) was a post office counter worker in Ranfurly, Rob began as a building apprentice for Tom Mitchell, Vera assisted in farm homes, and Jack an apprentice lineman with the Post and Telegraph.

Mosie was a hard worker, and his business grew with the growth of the new railway town. Unfortunately, in 1933 a huge fire consumed the original Ranfurly Hotel and Mosie's wooden hairdressing shop. Mosie always regretted that he lost his collection of early Ranfurly history, paper clippings and other interesting information.

It is interesting to note that the first Wedding Breakfast held at the new Ranfurly Hotel was Maimie Hanrahan and Bill Dowling on the 7/8/1934, just three weeks after the big opening on 18/6/34.

Mosie's new shop was built on a new section wedged between Pringle's Garage, including Wright Stevenson's one room shop, and the double storied Bank of New Zealand, and next the new Hotel. I am sure that Rob Hanrahan came home from completing a farmhouse in Poolburn (as yet an apprentice builder, as Tom Mitchell had to lay him off during the 1929 – 1933 slump) to assist in the building of this substantial new shop. This two roomed building was extended by Rob yet again at a later date, to include a long magazine display shelving and more counter space, and now two barbers' chairs in the hairdressing saloon.

No matter what style of hair cut you suggested to Mosie, by using his scissors and hand clippers you would sport a short back and sides haircut. Granddad Mosie was in his sweet place. He knew who was in town and of course the latest news about people and Ranfurly growth. Remember, Naseby was the undisputed capital of Maniototo and did not enjoy coming second to that "dusty and windy railway settlement."

The front part of the shop was tobacco and cigarettes, and all manner of handy items for travellers or daily reading material. Remember, no TV and Hanrahan's were agents for many Dunedin services, Art Union tickets, and several Families had their mail delivered to Box 6 Ranfurly. His shop telephone number was always, number 1 please.

When running the shop by himself, even though the barber's chair was through a doorway and in the second room, Mosie could attend the counter, while the customer sat in the chair.

But no matter who was in the shop come midday he closed the shop and hurried to the railway station, so he could meet the incoming passenger trains, sell the Otago Daily Times newspaper to people who had boarded early that morning, and greet old friends. He always stood with his left-hand fingers in the lower left pocket of his waist coat and clicked the small change coins together. The newspapers were folded over his right forearm. It was amazing the number of passengers who greeted him.

The up train left Dunedin at 8.00am and was due to arrive in Ranfurly at 12.05pm, the down train from Cromwell at 12.20 pm. Thus, there were two rushes of passengers into Lonie's tea rooms (two army huts joined end to end on the Centennial building site) for their cup of tea and food. On busy days people would be 2 or 3 deep waiting to be served and return to their carriage seat. Trains, as well as being the lifeline to the city and selling produce for processing and export, railway staff would exceed 20 people, so a significant number of railway families stationed in Ranfurly.

And of course, we had the Hyde railway accident on the 4 June 1943 where Aunty Jean was suffered serious injuries.

Both Grandparents were long term members of the Ranfurly Bowling club, with their names on the Roll of Honour. Mosie was one of the Hospital Board Members who travelled to Wellington, to petition the Minister of Health to provide land for the first Ranfurly Hospital, opened in 1929. And he played for the Ranfurly Curling Club.

The War Years.

Following the September 1939 Declaration of War against Germany by Neville Chamberlain Great Britain's Prime Minister, New Zealand formed up the N Z Expeditionary Force to support the Allied Armies. Jack entered Trentham Military Training camp on 14/5/1940.

I do remember the constant worry and concern for all those who signed up, and the attention paid to newspaper information regarding large and decisive battles, which in the early years were going

against the Allies. And the sombre hopeless feeling after the mighty British battleship H M S Hood was sunk in the English Channel.

Jack Hanrahan.

I do not have a reliable memory of Jack prior to departure with the Second Expeditionary Force for the Middle Eastern front.

Prior to enlisting into the Army, Jack worked for the Ranfurly Branch of the Post and Telegraph (P and T) as junior lineman (Signals) under Mick Mullen. They were responsible for installing new phones and the new wires, to connect back to the Ranfurly telephone exchange. At that time rural houses linked by phone were grouped into party lines, of up to fourteen subscribers, each contacted by their individual morse code number e.g., 47A was the short – long ring, which if your ring, you answered. The exchange operator received calls at his switchboard, you asked for the persons number you wished to speak to, and if that line was free, they would ring their call sign, and you could have a conversation.

One job performed by the junior lineman was the annual inspection of the toll line, from Deep Stream Hotel over the Rock and Pillar mountains, down past the Styx Hotel and over the Dunstan track to Galloway. This single wire line was strung between suitable rock outcrops, or hung on wooden poles used sparingly, so in places the wire was quite low between supports.

This was a long way between start and finish, you could walk or borrow a farm hack, and of course very few homesteads. The weather on the tops could be gale force winds and snowing. And you had to carry your spare insulator cups, wire and bolts. Not for the faint of heart. Jack enjoyed working with Mick Mullens, and of course they had one of the few work trucks in Ranfurly. Their work area was from Styx Hotel to Dansey's Pass Hotel, and every house in between. Replacing dry cell batteries in wall phones, fixing broken wires, or digging holes to erect poles for a new connection.

In this job, Jack followed on from Denis Dowling, who prior to his departure for England in 1935, had also been the junior lineman and carried out the same duties.

Jack had become engaged to Daphne Rance a bright young eligible lady, and he bought sufficient timber for their new house, which was stacked and stored in E. C. Wood's rabbit factory building, until the house was built by Thos. Mitchell in 1947.

Daphne worked for R. S. Pringle Ford dealership the busy motor garage in Ranfurly, Hanrahan's shop next door. Daph worked in a narrow cold office by the fuel pumps that saw no sun till afternoon. She kept the office accounts, and typist for Bob Pringle. Later, the office and workshop were totally rebuilt, and was a busy garage for Ford cars and tractors.

Daph was always welcome at the Hanrahan home, and would have been a strong support for Grandma Lizzie, during those dark days. The telegram informing Mosie that Jack was in a German "Prisoner of War" camp located in Austria, was immediately taken to Grandma by an excited Daph, who ran the distance, and remembered that Grandma's first comment was, "I hope they are keeping him warm". Grandma had only just arrived back from daily Mass, a measure of her concern for Jack who had been listed as "Missing in Action".

On Sunday morning's following the 9 am national radio news, there was an announcement from the Military Defence Office titled, here are the names of those "Killed in Action" and those "Missing in Action", and Mum (Maimie) always tried to keep an ear on the report as she dressed us for Church.

We would call in to Grandma's after Sunday Mass, to see them and catch up on happenings in Ranfurly. That would be our only outing for the week, as grocery's bread and paper would come by the Naseby bus that met the midday train, or further out the occasional trip into Ranfurly. When we went to Naseby Mass at 8.30 am every second week, Mum would be anxious to visit Grandma.

During petrol rationing of 1944 --45, Dad would yoke up the horse in the jogger, a light rubber tyred and spring mounted cart, with one seat across the jogger and a small area behind the seat. Us children were between our parents on the seat, or on the floor area, sheltering behind a horse cover as Dad drove us to church.

Jack Hanrahan returns home to Ranfurly.

Huge emotional day, Jack was back safe in Ranfurly, and the Family were so happy. The long dark and emotional days of war were now a raw memory. Peace had been Declared, and everyone could look ahead to a safe and free future.

The previous evening Bob Pringle had found a ride to Palmerston for Mosie and Daph, to catch the troop train bound for Dunedin, and next day to Ranfurly.

My very clear memory is of all the Hanrahan Family and us children, (Dad had picked us up from school) standing on the north end of the station platform, and watching the train pull in on the up line, second away from the platform.

Jack appeared beside Mosie on the open-ended carriage platform, i.e., wrought iron railings protected passengers from falling off, opened the side gate, jumped down and sprinted across the near track, bounded onto the station platform, just ahead of the down train freewheeling silently into the station.

Grandma Hanrahan and Others were visibly gasping and shocked, but young Jack overwhelmed them all with his greeting's, to be safely home after 5 turbulent and dangerous years away. A memory you cannot forget and are happy to remember!!

Then all the local people formed a line walking past Jack to welcome him home, as Jack was the first ex P.O.W to return home. So, eventually we all returned to the Hanrahan home to celebrate a special welcome home dinner.

As Jack walked around to the back door of the house, he stopped to speak to Snow, the white dog who had been Jack's puppy. Snow by now an old dog, lifted her head looked up then put her head on her paws. Jack came back out and clicked his tongue, but still no recognition from snow. However, on the third time Jack came out among all the people milling about and clicked his tongue, snow responded, recognising Jack, got up wagged her tail and then would not leave Jack, even going inside the kitchen.

As Jack and Daphne wished to marry within a few weeks, Daph supported by Jack took religious instructions from Fr. Charles Tylee Parish Priest of Ranfurly, and they were married at the Sacred Heart Church on The wedding breakfast and celebrations were at the Dick Rance family home on Knowles Crescent. I can clearly remember Bob Pringle walking around wearing the English Army greatcoat of Denis Dowling, home on compassionate leave, which nearly fitted him. And Mrs Rance tipping the dregs of the hogshead down the sink, to end a memorable day.

Following their wedding Daph and Jack lived with the Dick Rance Family, until their house was completed at no 6 Bute Street, one of the first new houses after the war.

So, Family and business life became the norm, Jack would milk Grandad's cow and deliver milk to their customers before work. Granddad also ran 3 – 4 cattle in the school paddock on By Pass Road, site of the original Maniototo school. Ranfurly was becoming a busy place, so also their shop.

While Rob was involved in community affairs, Jack was quickly invited / volunteered into sports administration. I believe he was secretary for the Maniototo Rugby Sub Union. I have memories of Jack working out the draw on Friday night, for the annual seven a side tournament, a big event, teams coming from other sub unions to play. I recall Jack saying one year when the President came to assist, "I can concentrate and do it faster myself" instead of all this yacking.

Jack for many years played rugby for Ranfurly and Maniototo County teams. Jack also coached the boys of Sacred Heart School, including myself the art of rugby. "Here is a shilling for the first boy to scoop up a loose ball one handed, as you run around the opposition." So, Jack had some sweet skills.

At a Lory Cup final (15 aside) while playing Gimmerburn, Jack as fullback was running the ball forward, only Gerald Clarke their fullback to beat, Jack sold Gerald an outrageous dummy while sprinting on to score.

Jack was also secretary of the Sacred Heart School Committee. I clearly recall at least two working bees replacing the frosted concrete outside the wooden school building and building of the school baths. I was at the first working bee watching Jack and Kevin Weir (builder) mark out the 5 trenches, to be dug by hand, which supported the concrete base. And it was hard dry ground to dig. The walls surrounding the baths and changing sheds were built using 2nd hand red bricks from Digger Wier's, the original Eweburn Station Homestead.

Daph was a tower of strength to our whole family. As well as establish their new house and dry section of old grass, she found time to teach us young men how to dance and support a young lady, she was very outgoing and good company. Raising their children, supporting her Parents, and the fun with the modern tape movie camera. Enjoying family picnics and outings, children everywhere.

Ranfurly, of scattered houses along each street, the empty sections being waist high grass in summer with walking tracks across them as people took short cuts to the shops. Every street was gravel and very dusty, on nor west windy days.

Each house was responsible for their own water supply, and disposal of "night soil". Sometimes, a house cow would graze a small, fenced section. The 1950's and 60's were a time of progress for Ranfurly.

First, was the delivery of reticulated water for the town from the Eweburn creek in Dick Chapmans farm. Next was the sewerage scheme and treatment plant, a huge benefit as individual house wells were being contaminated by neighbouring "night soil" disposal. And Kearney's dairy shed allowed fresh milk supply to every household.

Following the formation of the Ranfurly County Town Committee, the whole of Ranfurly was progressively improved. Streets were reformed level and tarsealed, with house frontages built up with soil, grass sown, and flowering cherry trees planted. New houses were built in the empty sections, and residents maintained their tidy street frontages, and flower gardens flourished. "That upstart dusty railway town", became a distant memory.

The main streets became a place of business as more shops were built, services were provided, and the town prospered. It was a time of relief, the war was over, and everybody could look forward

with a positive attitude, to a peaceful future. Sport of all forms flourished, school rolls increased, and following the control of rabbits farming could again flourish.

Irrigation water was at long last provided to large areas of Maniototo, production increased and therefor permanent jobs were available, so Maniototo enjoyed a productive future, which the original settlers could only dream about. People could sleep easy at night.

Two memories of Jack before capture by Germans.

Jack fought in a rear-guard action on Greece, after German paratroopers had surprised and overrun the Island. The boats sent to rescue the troops were being bombed so pulled off the beaches. Jack was only 3 away from embarking, so then he was on the run.

While hiding in an olive orchard from the Germans, and receiving some aid from local pheasant farmers, they were caught in a German air raid. Everybody hugged the ground to avoid casualties. At the height of the bombing, an object hit Jack on his back. Too scared to move he glanced to the side but saw no blood on his tunic. He had visions of serious injury. He tenderly put his hand behind his back feeling for blood, then partially rolled over and yes, he could move, and then something rolled off his back. It was a dry clod of earth spewed out by the bombing and had landed on his back. The jubilation, he was not a casualty.

Soon after as the 3 were staying out of sight, they were surprised when a cultured voice from behind said, "put your hands up, for you the war is over". On turning around, they saw a German Officer and two soldiers with their weapons pointed at them. So began their long march, followed by a long train journey, to four years of capture.

Upon entering Stalag XV111 A, Jack was included in a road building group. The work was all by hand tools, even in the depths of winter. The detail Jack was assigned to, were required to rebuild the road including a large bend just outside the camp. Civilians pegged out the camber of the bend and did any gelignite firing. But a person slightly altered the position of the original marker pegs, and it was not a German Guard. Came the big day of completion.

The camp Commandant announced that he would carry out the opening ceremony by driving around the road. Sitting proudly on the back seat of an open car, he instructed the driver to proceed at 100 km per hour. The prisoners could hear the car winding up and approaching the bend. Alas, the car veered ever closer to the outside of the curve before diss- appearing over the side of the road. The prisoners chalked that up as a victory for them.

Life as a Prisoner of War was far from cruisy. While you were not actively fighting, surviving was a struggle. Hungry, cold and unpredictable guards. The savagery of war is de-humanising to everyone. To my mind Jack showed true "resilience", didn't want to be there, but had the guts to stick it out, for the longer-term benefit of seeing his homeland and family again. Who knows, the declaration of their love for each other by becoming engaged before he enlisted, and the determination to again see his Parents and Ranfurly, could well have been his saving grace, when daily existence was at a low ebb....

Gerald Dowling,

April 2021.

Timeline of events Jack Hanrahan.

14 May 1940

Entered Army training camp at Trentham -- no. 31887.

27 August 1940

Sailed from Lyttelton for Egypt, more training. Sailed for northern Greece - Overwhelmed by German Paratroopers. Rear guard action, 3rd in line for evacuation from the beach, when the ships retreated because of strafing and bombing. Then on the run avoiding capture.

28 April 1941

Prisoner of War at Kalamata, southern Greece. P.O.W no 7164

Jack and two other soldiers taken by surprise, when a cultured voice from behind said, "Put your hands up, for you the war is over". A German Officer and soldiers had their weapons trained on them. Taken to barbed wire camp at Corinth, open ground very cold, no blankets, insufficient food.

15 May 1941 Very long march to Solonika, stayed there for one month.

26 May 1941 Telegram to Mosie Hanrahan, stating Jack was "Missing in Action".

June 1941

Train to Wolfsburg in Austria. P O W. Camp. Travelled in cattle trucks 25 per truck, with one stop let out at Belgrade for 20 minutes, many soldiers very ill with exhaustion and dysentery. Red Cross gave each a loaf of bread and cigarettes. Travelled for 3 nights and 2 days.

June/July

Taken to Groppenstein a work camp. This was a work camp where Jack stayed 15 months, working on rebuilding a local road. (refer to the narrative) As the camp lay in a deep valley between high mountains, they were also required to break the ice on a local river. And this is where during a clean-up of the bombed railway station, Jack found the rosary beads he gave to Daph.

5 July 1941

The second telegram arrived from the Minister of Defence, informing them Jack was now a "Prisoner of War". Letters and parcels from Family, and parcels from the Red Cross were a vital ingredient of P.O.W survival.

8 May 1945

The Allied 8th Army released the Prisoners. Jack said they knew the war had swung in favour of the Allied Forces, they saw huge vapour trails from Allied bombers flying to Germany, and the camp Cook had a radio from which someone could interpret the broadcasts.

1984

- A Medal and Certificate presented to Jack from the Greek Duty Minister of Defence
- A Commemorative Medal of the Greek Campaign 1940 – 41.

Other snippets.

As Denis Dowling was in London studying at the Royal College of Music from late 1935, when War broke out in September 1939, he first served as the Local Air Raid Warden, getting people into air raid shelters, such as underground railway stations during the bombing of London. In 1940 he joined the British Army and served in many campaigns, right across Europe.

Following Allied advances into Germany and the celebration of V E Day, (Victory over Europe), Denis was stationed there in the British Army of Occupation, having now risen in rank to Acting Lieutenant. He was present at their release of the Prisoners in Belsen Concentration Camp. He was stunned by the forgotten humanity in their wretched state of starvation, and death. Even after release many people died from their emaciated condition, a sight not even a brutal war had prepared him for.

He eventually gained Compassionate Leave to return to New Zealand as his Mother was very ill in Ranfurly Hospital. He travelled by various trains or roads to his home 13 Hillway, Highgate, London N6, where he spent one night with Phyllis, whom he had married on the 11/9/43 and had not seen for two years. The following day by train to Southampton and boat to New Zealand. He was met on the Wellington wharf by Able Seaman Pat Merchant, his Cousin who had been their Best Man at their wedding in London. Unfortunately, His Mother had died as they were steaming between the Panama Canal and N Z. Even though "Victory over Japan" had been signed, it was feared by Intelligence, that Japanese submarines were still operating in the Pacific Ocean, therefore the Captain would not break radio silence.

However, he spent valuable time with his Family whom he had not seen for 10 years, and was able to attend Daphne and Jack's wedding.

The wedding of Muriel Dowling and Neil McCarthy at the Ranfurly Catholic Church 7/11/42.

Mary as flower girl, and myself as page boy attended this wedding. The wedding breakfast was held at the Boarding House opposite Gilchrist's Store. This double story building was burnt to the ground in 1944, the statue of Thompson the Surveyor occupies this space.

Mary and Self wore crepe paper clothing Mum had made to the Ranfurly Peace celebrations in 1945. A big crowd was gathered, and big bonfire held on ground between Hanrahan's and the railway line.