

### CHAPTER THREE --POST WAR

Although the war was over by mid-1945, it took sometime for the thousands of volunteers and conscripts to be demobilized -- or demobbed, as it was called at the time. My father's turn came in the autumn of 1946. He was to be demobbed in London, so we went over there to meet him.

I went with him to Wembley Stadium, which was one of the demob centres. I can't recall everything that went on there, but I do remember the assembly line process of turning a serviceman into a civilian again. You moved from one booth to the next -- selecting, trying-on and finally agreeing on the items that were going to make you look like a civilian again. Each person was given a suit, or a sports coat and slacks, several shirts, socks and hankies -- and just like magic, they were civilians again. One important thing it did not provide was a job.

When we got back to Belfast we were to learn (I think my mother had been told already) that we were going to live in France. As you can imagine, this was somewhat of a surprise to us. My mother was to go over to Paris for a short visit with my father, to meet a couple, Jacques and Genevieve (Gene) Le Blanc, with whom he was going into business.

My father had met this couple in Algiers during the war. I believe that they had been working for the French Government at the time. They owned a large house in northern Provence, in the foothills of the Dauphine Alps. The plan was to open this house as a convalescent home for people recovering from lung problems, such as tuberculosis and emphysema.

It was very apparent when my mother returned from Paris that she had grave doubts about the whole idea. Gene returned with my parents to Belfast. I believe that this was to meet us, the children.

It was clear that my mother did not like Gene. I think she might have been jealous. Gene was younger, with dyed blonde hair (a no-no in nice British families in those days), thick makeup and flashy.

Perhaps I'm stressing those characteristics as a reason my mother didn't like Gene, because that is the way I saw her when I first met her. Maybe my mother had other reasons. I don't know.

I'm not sure how I felt about going to France. I was sorry to leave my friends -- and even my school. I was now playing for the Under-13's rugby team, and enjoying it tremendously. But I suppose I was sorriest of all to be leaving Galwally. That house had so many happy memories for me. Unfortunately, with the death of Auntie Flo it also had its sad times. It's the place that I

associate with growing up. So much happened there in the six years we lived there. All my friendships originated there -- but it's ironic, that unlike Geoff and Thelma, contact with my school friends did not last. I don't know why.

We also had to say goodbye to Thelma. In retrospect, what we did to Thelma was wrong. She had no mother, her father was at sea, and in effect we were deserting her. She was still at school, so she stayed with her friend Oonagh, until she finished her schooling.

When she finished school, she went back to London to her home at Coopers Lane. Because she had tenants occupying her house, she was unable to move in without taking them to court.

My brother had finished his schooling and was now an officer-cadet in the army, so he would be staying in the UK. In early January 1947 we left for France.

We spent a few days in Paris before we went south. Naturally we did all the things that tourists do when they are in Paris. However, what I remember more than anything else during my first visit to Paris, were the small marble plaques secured to pockmarked walls in different parts of the city. Each one of these commemorated the spot where a member of the Resistance had been executed by the Germans.

In Paris we stayed in the Hotel Terminus, Gare St.Lazare. It was one of those grand hotels, with beautiful chandeliers everywhere. It must have cost a lot to stay there, but it didn't seem to cause any concern to my father.

We took the overnight Paris to Marseilles train -- but our destination was Montelimar, which we reached about five or six o'clock on that January morning. We had a large amount of luggage, because, although all our furniture would be coming over to France, we would be living out of suitcases for some weeks. So there we were -- my father, my mother, Gene, Aileen and me, standing amongst a great pile of suitcases in the pitch dark, on a snowy, cold morning at Montelimar railway station, waiting for a bus to take us to Dieulefit. I was not too impressed.

After a bone-shaking ride from Montelimar to Dieulefit on a rickety old bus, we were set down in the main square of the village. Some people -- I don't know where they came from -- loaded a big cart with our bags. From then on we were on our own. My father and Gene knew where they were going, but we didn't. I will never forget it. We pushed this cart through the village and down a narrow alley for what seemed miles. It probably was no more than half a mile -- but this whole thing was totally foreign to us. We were in a strange country, pushing a luggage laden cart through the snow and cold to who knows where.

We finally arrived at our destination and unloaded our luggage

in what looked to be a very strange house. Once inside, the furniture also looked to be very old and dark. There was no heat, and we were frozen. I think we (except my father) would have been delighted if we could have woken up and discovered that this whole thing was a ghastly nightmare. Unfortunately, it was real, and was an indication of further trouble ahead. The house belonged to Gene's parents, who were living in Paris. But now we were in "her" house, and there was no doubt who was boss.

I have already given my impression of her. My opinion never changed. If anything, it became worse. She interfered between my father and my mother. She would tell Aileen and me what to do, which would naturally be resented by my mother. Also, she would complain to my father about something or other that we did, cutting my mother out of the picture entirely.

There were some good times I suppose, but they were mainly overshadowed by the bad times. I never met Gene's husband. He was a geologist, and was out of the country. His mother and father were very pleasant. We had the impression that his father was not a fan of Gene's either. They lived in a big farm house called Les Cedres.

I would often walk to Les Cedres on fair days and spend the afternoon kicking my rugby ball around one of the fields. Occasionally Aileen would come with me, other times she wouldn't. It was a very lonely period. I knew nobody of my own age.

In those days my closest companion was a small radio which I used to listen to the cricket Test Matches between England and Australia on the BBC World Service. After all the happiness and joy of Galwally, this was a very depressing time for Aileen, my mother and me.

We were to stay in this old house in Dieulefit, while we were waiting for Gene's house in the nearby village of Poet-Laval to be renovated for us. It was called Le Manoir, and although I had only seen it from the road -- from about a quarter of a mile away, it looked lovely.

One day we went into Montelimar to make arrangements for me to start school, as that was the location of the nearest secondary school. I was going to go to the College Moderne, which would mean travelling back and forth on that rickety bus twice a day. But none of this was to come about.

While both Aileen and I were not happy, our feelings could not have compared to those of my mother's. Gene was either interfering between my mother and father, or she was completely ignoring her, but raising her eyes to the heavens every time my mother did something that she thought was odd.

Gene spoke a little English, but my mother spoke almost no

French. My father spoke good French, so all conversations with Gene were conducted in that language, which further isolated my mother.

She was living in this totally foreign environment that she hated, which was bad enough -- but she didn't need to have a husband who would not support her, and another woman living in the same house who looked upon my mother with derision. She put up with this for some months, then she must have told my father that she was packing up and taking us home.

This situation had evolved because my father had not thought it all out. He was wrong. Totally wrong. However, he had now committed himself. He did not have a job to go to when he came out of the Navy. So the idea of running a convalescent home must have sounded very attractive to him. But why was he in the act at all?

Gene and her husband owned Le Manoir. They didn't need him. He had no medical expertise. He had no business experience. He was a sailor without a job. I will never understand his thinking at all. We had given up the house in Belfast. He had cut his ties with the UK. The furniture was in France, waiting to be moved into our new home -- but he forgot the most important aspect of it all -- his family's feelings.

My mother, Aileen and I came back to England, and stayed with my mother's sister, Ivy, in Liverpool. Her husband, Archie, had died a few years earlier, so she only had her youngest son, Roy, who was my age, living at home. My aunt also had a maid, or family retainer, who was an institution in the area. Emma could neither read nor write, but she made up for that by her enthusiasm in every thing that she did. She was known and loved, not only by the family, but by the surrounding neighbourhood, and the many other people that had met her, in many places throughout the world.

My aunt had a Tobacconist and Newsagent shop in Larkhill Place, West Derby. We all lived above the shop, where it was relatively spacious. All we had were the clothes that had accompanied us back from France. Everything else was in Poet-Laval.

As my cousin Roy was attending Liverpool Collegiate School, it was arranged that I would join him there. I quite enjoyed it, but I wasn't really there for long. I don't think I excelled academically, but I did very well at cricket. I moved from the Under-15's to the Second Eleven after only about two games, which was seen as being quite remarkable for my age at the time.

It was decided that I should return to my old school in Belfast, while my mother and Aileen would remain in Liverpool. I'm not sure why, or who made this decision, but as I liked both Methody and Belfast, I was happy to be going back.

My aunt in Belfast found a lady who was happy to have a student as a boarder, so I went to live with this lady in a house on the Antrim Road. Unfortunately, life at my new home was not all we had

hoped. I forget the details, but after a few weeks my aunt decided that I should not stay there any longer. My next move was to move in with my aunt and uncle, and of course, my cousin Olaf. I was happy again.

Olaf and I had always got along well. While I mentioned earlier that my own school friends and I lost contact after we left school, which was not the case with Olaf. He has been, and remains a very close friend to the present day. We enjoyed ourselves. We both liked rugby and cricket, and would go to all the big games together.

I met and made friends with his friends. Olaf was a great prankster and had a ready sense of humour. In one particular incident I ended up in juvenile court partly through my cousin's sense of humour -- and his self-preservation.

I'm not sure if it was actually Halloween, but it was certainly around that time. Olaf, his friend Sydney, and I were walking up the road not far from my aunt's house. Sydney, who was eighteen, was smoking a cigarette, and was holding it down by his side. I thought it would be fun to light one of the fireworks which I had hidden in my hand, by lighting the touch paper on Sydney's cigarette, without him knowing. It may not have been fun -- but it was interesting. As the firework was jumping and cracking all over the road, I turned to run from it, as did Sydney, who was totally surprised by the whole thing. My surprise came when a heavy hand landed on my shoulder. It was the arm of the law! He had both Sydney and me in his grasp -- but Olaf was nowhere to be seen, yet he had been standing right beside us.

While the policeman was taking our names and addresses, the firecracker was still bouncing all over the road, which added a certain amount of amusement to the whole thing. In the midst of this chaos Olaf appeared, walking towards us. Passing us, he looked in our direction with a quick nod and a, "Good Evening," to the three of us! Two of us were caught -- the third was just walking away!

After about two months I thought the whole thing had been forgotten, when an official looking envelope was delivered to my uncle, who was now my guardian. He was summoned to appear in court with me, on a certain date, on charges of letting off fireworks in a public place. Sydney, because of his age, had to appear in the Petty Sessions Court on the same day.

My court appearance was a laugh. Before we went in to the court, a policeman came into the waiting room and read out the names of about a dozen boys. When they all acknowledged their names, he said, "OK, that's the football team -- follow me." When my turn came, Uncle David pleaded guilty, on my behalf. The Magistrate, I can see him still, a Major McCallum, gave me a lecture on the dangers of fireworks, then fined me seven shillings with three shillings costs -- a total of approximately one dollar! Poor Sydney was

ined about twice my fine, because the Magistrate told him that an eighteen year old should know better, which was a bit unfortunate as he was an innocent party! I had to note that conviction on my application to emigrate to Canada.

Later that year my mother and Aileen returned to Belfast to live. They had been provided with a brand new council house, in Innisfayle Gardens, not far from where my uncle and aunt lived. I obviously moved in with them, but because it was only a short distance from where Olaf lived, this did not cause any disruption with regard to our friendship.

It was during this period that I was now playing for the school's Medallion rugby team. Not only was I playing on the team -- I was vice-captain of the team. I had moved from Captain of the Dunces to vice-captain of the rugby team. The following year I was elected vice-captain of my house -- Bedell. I was getting there -- slowly.

This was also the school year when I would be sitting for my Junior School Certificate, which meant that I would have to get down to working on the academic side of my life.

I don't recall many events of my life during this period. Geoff, who was now a second-lieutenant in the Royal Signals, would come home on leave occasionally. He didn't have too many of his old school friends left in Belfast, as most of his close friends had emigrated to Canada in 1947.

Either because my father wanted me to go, or because I wanted to go -- I can't recall who, but I went to Poet-Laval for my summer holiday in 1948. My original views of Le Manoir were confirmed. It was a beautiful, spacious house, and its name was well suited.

I got on better with Gene this time, although I could never have liked her. I don't know what the relationship was between my father and Gene was -- but I doubt that it was anything other than a business relationship. I was never to meet Jacques, Gene's husband. He was always away surveying.

Another couple, the Cristaldi's, also lived at Le Manoir. He was an artist -- mainly pottery, and he sold quite a lot of his work.

It certainly looked very good. I think his wife helped Gene with the running of the house. Also, while I was there on my holidays, there was a boy of about my own age. He had suffered with tuberculosis, and was now convalescing. It was very noticeable that he was the only patient, and from discussions I had with my father, it was apparent he was one of the very few patients that they had ever had.

While I was there I phoned home to see how I had done in my Junior School Certificate. The news was good, so I now had that hurdle out of the way. I was not that keen to stay at school for another two years to take my Senior Certificate, so that may have

played a part in my decision to go to sea.

I enjoyed that holiday. It was the first time I had travelled so far by myself. Another worthy thing of note was that during that holiday I learned to swim. Although I was 15 I had never learned to swim before now. Le Manoir had two swimming pools. One was in working condition and the other one required extensive plastering work, before it could be used again.

I used to shoot snakes in the damaged pool. No, that's not quite true. I would walk round the edge -- lift a piece of masonry lying on the bottom of the pool with a rake to see if any snakes were lying in the shade. If I found one, I would shoot at it with a .22 rifle. Unfortunately for me, they were faster at slithering out of the way than I was on the trigger, so the score was slightly one-sided. Hence the reason for qualifying my statement about shooting snakes. I tried shooting magpies -- with the same result!

It was during this holiday that my father and I discussed what I was going to do after I left school. He was keen on me going into the Royal Navy, which to me sounded like a good idea at the time. But there was never a, "golly gee, what a great idea," approach to that suggestion. It was agreed that I would look into it when I went back to school.

Northern Provence, with its old stone houses and their pink and red tiled roofs, was, and is, a beautiful part of the world. Le Manoir, was half way up a hill, with a panoramic view of the valley and lavender fields below us. Behind us, further up the hill, were the ruins of the old village of Poet-Laval, including the church and castle which had been built by the Knights of Malta in the twelfth century. In spite of the domestic situation it was an idyllic place to live.

To me, the thing that I remember most about that holiday was lying in one of the many hay fields below Le Manoir, and looking up at the beautiful deep blue sky surrounded by the mountains, and being totally absorbed by it all. I was all by myself, in a world of my own. Now, many years later, I realise I have always been an addictive sky watcher. Day or night, I have a fascination for a clear sky, whether it's a clear blue one, or a black one with a million stars. I can sit back in a deck chair and gaze up at the sky, and I am no longer in this world.

By September I was back at school. I passed any information I had about joining the Royal Navy on to my housemaster, Mr. Todd, otherwise known as "Sweeney." After a month or two he informed me that I was too old to write the Dartmouth entrance examinations. My father was very upset over this, because he blamed the school for not acting quickly enough. He may have been right. I don't know.

Uncle David, Olaf's father, had hoped that Olaf would follow in his footsteps, and go to sea as a cadet in the Merchant Navy. Unfortunately, Olaf failed the eyesight test, which immediately disqualified him from entry. This was a terrible disappointment to Uncle David. It was probably about this time that I started thinking about going to sea myself. I didn't want to stay at school -- so it only remained for Uncle David to encourage me, which he did with great effect.

Because of his high profile in Belfast's shipping circles, it wasn't too difficult for Uncle David to have my name accepted as a prospective cadet with the Head Line of Belfast. As there was a waiting list, and it would take some time before a vacancy occurred, Uncle David managed to find me a place at Captain Boyd's Nautical School. I left Methody at Easter 1949, and started the Nautical School at the same time.

Captain Boyd's Nautical School was a strange place. In effect, it was a one-room school house on the second floor of an office building, just opposite St. Anne's Cathedral. There were about 20 students, ranging in age from approximately 30 years, to me and another lad, at 16 years of age. The students were studying for examinations from Master Foreign Going to Mates Home Trade -- plus the two sixteen-year olds, still waiting to go to sea.

The day always started with about twenty minutes of flashing light and semaphore exercises, in which everybody participated. This was followed by each student working through his text books, on a subject designated by Captain Boyd. Each student worked at his own pace, with Captain Boyd being available to assist if anyone needed help. How he kept up the pace remains a mystery to me. Every so often we would stop one subject and start another. I will never know how he could keep up with who was doing what. The man was magic -- as well as being a prince.

One day a letter arrived requesting my presence at the Marine Superintendent's office of G. Heyn and Son -- the Head Line. I was to be interviewed by a Captain Finlay, who I found to be a very cantankerous old man. He had served as Master in sailing ships, and my immediate reaction was that he could have been a reincarnation of Captain Bligh. I don't recall the content of the interview -- just the interviewer. Anyway, I must have been acceptable, because he told me to go home and tell my parents to buy me a uniform.

It was with great excitement that I went to get measured for my uniform. When it finally arrived I hung it up on the back of my bedroom door, so that I could see it from my bed. Needless to say I was very proud of it, with its gold striped lapel patches. But I couldn't understand the laughs and sarcastic remarks from my fellow students, who had the advantage over me of having spent a considerable amount of time at sea. They made a lot of comments



about me not spending much time in uniform, and that I was better off getting a few good sets of overalls.

For the first time in my life academic subjects took on a new meaning for me at Captain Boyd's school. Navigation and its mathematical principles opened up a new world for me. At school my best subjects had tended to be English and French, followed by History and Geography. I had been an average student, but now I was doing something I could really understand. But not only that -- I was actually using mathematics that had a practical use, which I found refreshing and challenging. For the first time I was starting to enjoy academic subjects such as trigonometry, algebra and physics. Subjects that I had never enjoyed before.

Seamanship was a subject that seemed to come easy to me, because Uncle David had taught me a lot already. He had taught me many knots and splices, long before I went to the school. I owe a lot to Uncle David's early coaching, including learning verbatim the thirty-one (at the time) Rules and Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. Once learned, they were never to be forgotten -- even now.

Finally a letter arrived at my home instructing me to come to the Head Line Building with my mother, to sign indentures as an apprentice for four years with the Head Line. The indentures spelled out how much they were going to pay me over the four years. During my first year I was to receive the princely sum of four pounds five shillings a month -- approximately nine dollars at today's rate. This was to increase annually until my last year, at the age of 20, I would receive the sum of eight pounds per month -- approximately 16 dollars! I was not going to get rich in a hurry!

Shortly after that, I received another letter instructing me to join the ss. Ramore Head at 0900, on Wednesday the 12th of October 1949, at the Pollock Dock in Belfast -- and that the ship would be sailing that day for Montreal.