

WORRIES OF THE WARREN.

"The Artillery camp of New South Wales was at this time under the command of Lt. Colonel Pierce and located at The Warren, one time a convent in the suburb of Marrickville on a rocky eminence at the foot of which may be traced Cooks River the course of which may be traced till it empties into Botany Bay. On the shores of this bay Capt. Cook had landed nearly a century and a half ago, discovering for the British Empire a new country which had become a great and prosperous dominion, a land of sunshine inhabited by a free and self-reliant people. As Marmalade's eye traversed the panorama and rested on the spot where this great discoverer set foot in the name of the King of England, he wondered at the enterprise, hardihood and devotion of these intrepid explorers, at the grit and determination of his fathers who pioneered the land, and resolved in his turn to continue the illustrious cycle, to emulate the grand example and leave a history for his generation worthy of those who went before him.

Those grim grey walls of the old convent building, within which were the quarters of the officers and the orderly room, now once more echoed with confessions, less reliable no doubt than in former times, for it did not profit a man to tell the truth when he had been absent without leave for nearly a week without good reason. A sentry paced up and down the verandah in front of the building, his duties being to prevent unauthorised persons from gaining admittance to the august presence of the colonel, and to salute all officers, presenting arms to field officers ("anything above a major" as the vernacular of the Sgt. of the guard had it) and bestowing a dexterous wink on an occasional gunner who entered the doorway to gain access to the telephone under the stairs. When the Colonel and "stripy" (H.Q. Sgt. Major) were well out of sight he would even venture to look around the door to watch the distressed gunner endeavouring to learn from the girl at Manly or Chatswood where he was to meet her for dinner, above the noise made by the field service boots coming at the double down the carpetless stairs overhead.

In front of the building was an 15 pounder gun as used in the boer war, now serving the dual purpose of adding dignity to the artillery camp and rousing the troops by firing the day in at 6 a.m. reveille. On the first and several mornings succeeding, the latter purpose was fulfilled, some of the gunners even strolling out in pyjamas to see the gun fired, but as future experience fully illustrated in France, the slumbers of tired healthy warriors soon become impervious to even the firing of a gun. At first too, the report frightened the horses picquetted on the slope of the hill below the gun park. They strained at their head ropes, pulled out the pegs securing the heel ropes and caused the tired and sorely tried picquet a considerable amount of trouble and a great deal of language to restore equanimity and order.

The leading spirit of the horse lines was "Big Stretch," length 6'5". His big stentorian voice sounding like the safety valve of a locomotive struck fear into the hearts of the troops, installed into them devotion to duty when the Sergeant was looking, and a disposition to throw boulders at him when he wasn't. "Stretch" knew more about military procedure than did Marmalade or the bulk of the new soldiers, his qualifications for the three stripes being the terror-striking propensity of his voice, a number of years handling kanakas, his longitude and his knowledge of horses. He could sit an unruly horse by the simple procedure of putting his feet to the ground alternately to preserve his balance as the horse swerved one way or the other. No stirrup leathers were made long enough for "Stretch." It sometimes became necessary for him, acting in the capacity of an N.C.O. to put a picquet of working party through some elementary footdrill. This was by no means his long suit, but "Stretch" was ready though rough. On one occasion the orderly officer directed him to move his party a little to the right. What did it matter to "Stretch" about the correct military order so long as his party was moved! Throwing his chin forward and with his whip rapping his leggings in staccato he bellowed "Party 'shun. Three strides to the right! Go! "Stretch" as may be expected, never became a sergeant on the guns, but went to France about the same time as the rest of the Brigade and became a jackeroo over munitions, and was frequently seen riding a lanky horse bearing a singular resemblance to himself, a chestnut, long and gaunt of 18 hands or so and with a stride like a camel.

The recruits at this time knew little of matters military. Most of the citizen forces were already fighting on Gallipoli or occupying some staff position in Australia. N.C.Os therefore were selected for accomplishments other than military knowledge; some for personality, some for sheer hide. The former qualification secured quality and the latter quantity. A plausible personality in a credulous community profits by impressing those around him with his own importance. This is how "Locky" another N.C.O. rose above the little band of comrades with whom he enlisted and became their Sergeant Major.