

59206 (RAMC): MALTA 1917-1918

P.E.H. Hair

My father, Thomas Edward Couchman Hair, who signed himself to his mother as Edward but was generally known as Ted, then aged 23, enlisted on 1 June 1915. After three months in camps at Aldershot, Shorncliffe and Dartford, he was shipped to Malta, arriving on 9 October 1915 and serving in the island for two and a half years, mostly on 'general duties'.¹ Although otherwise medically Class A, his eyesight was poor and he wore thick spectacles, this being probably why he was allocated to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), in which he remained, with the unchanged rank of private, until demobilised in May 1919. After four months at Ricasoli Hospital he was sent to Cottonera Hospital where he spent the rest of his time on the island.² Only his diaries for 1917 and 1918 have survived.³ Their entries are normally brief (and totally unheroic in tone) but still give an impression of the life of one soldier in the 'Great War', in terms of social history if less so in terms of strict military history.

Apart from fatigues, fire piquets, occasional route marches and a weekly telephone duty, general duties only produced a record of the following events of moment: '*Colonels inspection & kit insp. Capt. McW[alter]*' (19 Jan 1917), with more of the same at later dates — '*Medical inspection, passed Class A*' (22 Jan), lectures by Capt. McW. and Sister Taylor (8, 9 and 22 Feb), '*Capt. Newlands raid on Barrack stores*' (11 Mar), '*Inspection in Store. Stocktaking*' (26 Mar); on 24 July another stocktaking, when '*Capt. Wheeler did not turn up*'.⁴ The references to the stores may indicate that, as a responsible

¹ For information on localities in Malta and in respect of other local references I am deeply indebted to Dr Charles J. Boffa of Santa Lucia, who answered my queries, carried out researches on my behalf, and generously supplied me with references to relevant material; and grateful to Ms Anne Bradley of the British Council at Valetta, who put me in touch with Mr Lino Camilleri, Secretary of the Malta Branch of the British Legion, who in turn put me in touch with Dr Boffa.

² Cottonera Military Hospital in the district of Sanglea, on elevated ground with a view of the Grand Harbour, was built in 1873 and enlarged in 1900. The hospital closed in 1920 but since 1929 the buildings have served as a secondary school. The military hospital situation in Malta 1914-1919 is described in detail in W.G. Macpherson, *History of the Great War. Medical Services. General History*, 4 vols (London, 1921), I, pp. 235-48 (with a map indicating the island's hospitals); see also a contemporary work by a chaplain, Albert G. Mackinnon, *Malta: the Nurse of the Mediterranean* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916). As a result of the arrival of casualties from the Gallipoli campaign, during May-December 1915 the number of hospital beds in Malta was increased from a few hundreds to 20,000. in 27 hospitals and tented hospital camps; some 50,000 casualties reached Malta but half were transferred to England, more or less immediately. The thousands of additional hospital personnel rushed out from England included a group of distinguished consultants from hospitals in Britain (Macpherson, *General History*, I, p. 245; Mackinnon, pp. 149, 156) — and also TECH.

³ The diaries are in my possession.

⁴ Edward William Newland, aged 50 in 1914, was a non-medical officer and Honorary Captain,

and experienced literate, TECH worked at times as a storekeeper's clerk. Presumably, however, the daily duties also involved work in the hospital, although one may speculate that the soldiers had to keep out from under the feet of the female nurses (half of them VADs).⁵ Only the telephone duty seems to have involved night work and most days there was leisure time during which, almost invariably, TECH carried out activities away from the hospital.

However, this order of things changed. It is not clear why, on 3 July, TECH went to the Commanding Officer and sought a transfer to Infaly (presumably another RAMC site), with a friend, Stephens. '*C.O. very nice and said he would put facts through records. Not much hope*'. However, a fortnight later, '*Capt. Patrick arranged with C. O. for me to have job in laboratory*', and on 31 July 1917 he '*commenced duty in laboratory*'.⁶ On 9 July TECH had noted that he '*did a report for Capt. Patrick*', and perhaps this helped, as did the fact that 'Steve', a Laboratory Attendant, had been unwell and therefore probably needed an assistant. We may assume that Captain Patrick was in charge of the Cottonera Hospital pathological laboratory.⁷ But it seems to have been otherwise staffed by at most two men — the senior being Stephens, known in the diaries as alternately (and confusingly) 'Steve' and 'Bill'. This was a great moment in my father's life. When he was demobilised one of the discharge papers described him as a laboratory assistant, which greatly pleased him at the time.

But *gloria mundi* passes. On 28 January 1918, after TECH had spent six months in the laboratory, '*Bill interviewed [? by] C.O. and presented a letter enumerating grouses & asked to be removed from lab.*'. A copy of this letter was preserved among my father's papers. On Y.M.C.A. notepaper headed 'On Active Service/ With the British

serving in Malta 1913-1919 (W.R.M. Drew, *Commissioned officers in the medical services in the British Army, 1660-1960*, 2 vols (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1968). Because service in Malta was certainly not 'in the field' and apparently was not considered strictly 'on active service', Malta personnel do not appear in the lists of multitudinous wartime awards to RAMC members. But on 13 March 1918 a few were noted for a commendatory entry in their record of service, presumably the lowest distinction, and one of the names was that of 'Qmr. and Hon. Capt. E.W. Newland' (*Corps News*, March 1917, p. 59 — the monthly Corps News was appended to the relevant quarterly issue of the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*).

⁵ 'The men of the RAMC may know their business and make excellent nurses but at one hospital worked without women, the patients would have preferred a woman's touch' (Mackinnon, p. 50).

⁶ A patriotic work of 1916 assured the public that 'the island was well supplied ... with able and earnest scientific workers [who] by their labours immensely assisted in unravelling difficult and obscure problems in Clinical diagnosis and treatment' (Mackinnon, p. 157). On the organising of pathological services, including the laboratories in the field and at hospitals, see chapter 1 of *History of the Great War. Medical Services. Pathology*, ed. by W.G. Macpherson et al (London, 1923).

⁷ 'Captain Patrick', my father's patron, was Adam Patrick, M.B.,Ch.B. (1908), M.D. (1913) Glasgow, who in 1914 had a Glasgow address; in 1918 he was among the Malta RAMC personnel commended (see note 4 above); in 1919 he published an article on the treatment of malaria (*Journal of the RAMC*, 32 (1919), 407-29). After the war he practised in Dundee, his last entry in the *Medical Register* being in 1970.

Expeditionary Force' (paper nevertheless seemingly available in Malta), the letter runs to eight sides. Well written but with too many long words and a shade pretentious in its expression, it was clearly intended to demonstrate that Bill was an educated man, unlike those he grumbled about. The letter appears to bear some relationship, at least in part, to an incident recorded by TECH three weeks earlier: '*Adamson (Sgt.) made remark re lab. Had dust up with S.M. and Adamson*'. Here is Bill's protest:

I assert respectfully but confidently that excepting the Laboratory workers themselves, few among the whole staff have any but vague ideas concerning the work performed in the Lab. at Cott. Otherwise a sergeant would be unable to justify an order of his W.O. by pointedly remarking that 'there were two men in the Lab doing nothing'.

Bill went on (at great length) to complain that laboratory jobs were interrupted by general duties — '*the careful preparation of Tartar Emetic and Quinine for Intravenous Injections is of less importance than the transference of chairs from one spot to another*'. Since Stephens had been ill and away from the laboratory for most of the previous three months, his complaints must have drawn on information from TECH, and in fact the diary records on 19 January '*Carting luggage for Isolation (pretty fed up)*'. (Much earlier, on 1 November 1917, TECH had had some little trouble with his betters, although the incident, as recorded in an utterly baffling entry, may not have involved the lab.: '*On the peg. Scored off Kenna & S.M. Admonished. Chucked out of Notre Dame. Sleep on beloved!*').

One surmises that, while Stephens was away, advantage had been taken of the 'new boy', assumed perhaps to be a temporary replacement, and that Stephens was now anxious to re-establish his status and his privileged position in the hospital pecking order. He concluded by observing that, after more than two years of laboratory work, he was '*no better off*', that is, he was still a private. The day after Bill 'interviewed' the colonel, the diary records: '*Bill offered two stripes W.P. had great pleasure in refusing same*'. Perhaps the colonel thought that there was some substance in Bill's complaint about the low prestige of laboratory work, since the diary adds: '*C.O. to write D.M.S.*'. The higher-ups had discussions about Bill, who probably was a useful fellow; one month later he was given one stripe (W.P.) but the diary records that, the next day, '*Bill returned honour (?) with thanks, descended to Pte. once more*'. (Was Bill's indignation partly because the earlier offer had been of two stripes?)

The rumour spread that 'A [section] *men to be replaced by B, probably leaving lab.*' — and hence most likely being sent to France and the Western Front. After Bill's outburst and after the rumour was confirmed, TECH wisely took positive action and on 3 February 1918 '*Spoke to Capt. Pat. re qualifications*', with the result that two days later, '*application for exam approved*'. The rest of the week was given up to '*Swotting for exam in evening*', and the written and oral examinations were taken on 11 and 12 February.

(The typed written examination paper and the hand-written oral examination paper are extant, with an added note in my father's writing, '*Keep this copy in a safe place in case I may want it to refer to at some future date*'. (It was presumably sent to his sweetheart Flo in England, and after my mother died he eventually kept it in a used envelope postmarked 1958). The result of the examination was satisfactory. '*Told by Pat. I was recommended for a pass. Congrats. by Col. on good paper. 80.5%*'. Duly, on 17 March (oddly a Sunday) — '*Registered lab. Attendant from 21/2/18 (Coy. Orders)*'.⁸ Meanwhile Bill had been rejecting his stripe. Exactly one week after TECH attained his goal of a laboratory title, '*Bill and Tec warned for France*', and two days later they embarked. It would be amusing to suppose that their summons to France was a response to the at-first successful German offensive on the Western Front of 10-28 March 1918, or equally to suppose that their dismissal from Malta, to which TECH never returned, was due to Bill making himself a nuisance there, but their transfer was probably no more than a routine matter.⁹

While serving in France on humbler duties in the midst of battle, TECH hopefully '*Sent name in as Lab. Attd.*' (30 July 1918), but no response is noted. A newspaper in his home district, Tyneside, probably of a date in early 1919 (he kept a cutting), after the fighting had stopped, contained under 'Situations Wanted' the following notice:

Pathological Laboratory Attendant — Young man at present serving with Field Ambulance in France seeks appointment with either Institute or Private Practitioner; experienced in general laboratory work, also post mortems; holds army qualifications.

But TECH never saw a pathological laboratory again in the rest of his long life.

* * *

TECH was not a typical soldier, not even as a wartime volunteer. He had lifelong firm and deep religious convictions, as testimony to which he had, before volunteering for the secular army, worked for four years as an 'evangelist' in the Church Army, an organisation of the Church of England. He corresponded with the Church Army in January 1917, and a certificate from that body registers his service up to January 1919, so

⁸ The RAMC Standing Orders, Appendix 5, laid down that a Laboratory Attendant should have six months of instruction pursuing a set syllabus before being examined, a requirement dubiously followed in this instance. The examination was to be conducted by two officers. Perhaps it was, but Patrick seems to have been the only pathologist at Cottonera. The question papers are not signed.

⁹ The Gallipoli campaign concluded at the end of 1915. but between August 1916 and May 1917 an even larger number of casualties arrived in Malta from the Macedonian (Salonika) campaign and the number of hospital beds rose to 27,000. In the second half of 1917, however, with the removal of several Malta hospital units to Salonika, a dramatic fall-off in the island's occupied beds occurred — and hence some of the remaining personnel were transferred to France (Macpherson, *General History*, 1, p. 238).

that notionally he was still within the organisation during most of his soldiering.¹⁰ His diaries record his attending church every possible Sunday, even when on front-line service in France. According to a note he made years later, he took services at times when in Malta, although there is only one possible reference to this recorded in the diaries. On 26 January he '*Saw Banks (C.A.) from Polverista*' and a week later '*Service at Polvorista for Banks*'; but as the service was on a Tuesday, Banks may have been a casualty and the service a funeral. In France just before the armistice: '*attended service by Rev Douglas. Wonderful meeting*' — which probably means that the clergyman was a past Church Army acquaintance. (It is to be noted that at no point in the diary is there a religious expression — just as there is very little on the progress of the war — a reminder to historians that the entries in diaries are always selective and often highly so). What all this means is that he neither drank alcohol nor smoked (but he bought Gold Flake cigarettes to take in to his friend Bill when the latter was in hospital, although keeping an account so that Bill could reimburse him). Like some others of his generation, he had a contempt for drunkenness, brought on by the behaviour of his own father, and an indication of his feelings appears in one entry: '*Draft left Cottonera for A. S. camp. Mostly drunk, in carrozens [the local horse carriages]*' (29 May). Hence he did not participate in many leisure-time activities of the average soldiery.

Instead, when in Malta he spent much of his free time in a friendly Maltese household, situated on the Strada Bastione, going there often two or even three times in a week, frequently after Sunday service, and normally '*with Fred*'. Since the diaries record very little about the Esposito family it is likely that he had been there before January 1917 and had recorded details in an earlier lost diary.¹¹ The exact nature of the relationship with the Esposito family (apparently of Italian extraction) is not clear from the diaries, but the household seems to have offered select British servicemen hospitality. The diary twice records another serviceman encountered there, '*Chief Stoker Crane "H.M.S. Blenheim"*'; unhappily the second entry reads '*C.P.O. Crane (canned up)*'. The diary records '*supper at S.B.*' and '*to tea at S.B.*' (30 July 1917, 1 Jan 1918). It is conceivable that the Espositos fed servicemen on a commercial basis, but the intimacy

¹⁰ Although ordained clergy who volunteered for the Army tended to do so only for non-combatant duties (Macpherson, *General History*, I, p. 138), it is unlikely that TECH's connection with the Church Army had anything to do with his service in the RAMC. By the date he enlisted, 1 June 1915, direct volunteering for the RAMC had been halted, while poor eyesight was apparently still considered to make men unsuitable for combatant duties (*ibid.*, pp. 136, 138)

¹¹ Strada Bastione (Bastion Street) in Senglea, half a mile from Cottonera Hospital, lies alongside a dock and hence was severely bombed in World War II, most of it having to be later rebuilt. In 1917-1918 the Esposito family — Vincenzo and Maria, their children, and perhaps Vincenzo's mother — lived at no 117, Strada Bastione. but the descendants moved away in 1941-1942 because of the bombing. Later generations of the Esposito family continued British contacts in a variety of ways and a descendant is currently engaged in medical research in Britain. (The above information was obtained by Dr Boffa from Mr Vincent Esposito, grandson of Vincenzo and Maria).

between the household and at least some of the visitors indicates that this cannot have been on the lines of a mere cafe.¹²

The names of members of the family are insufficiently recorded. Illness of '*the old lady*' is noted in February and on 9 April she is dead. TECH buys flowers and records the funeral at Addolorata Cemetery. On 5 May TECH '*Took photographs at Sta. B.*' His friend Steve attempts to print out a photo of the old lady (no doubt using his lab. facilities), and on 31 May he accompanies TECH to the cemetery where they take more photographs, including one of the '*grave of late Mrs Esposito*' (the only reference to the family name). A previous visit of the two to Addolorata, presumably to the cemetery, records '*took photo of Fra. Samuel*' (a reference not now understood) and adds the following abbreviations, '*Mag. Syl. Mar. Ang. Wensa.*' The second abbreviation surely stands for Silvia, whose documented death in January 1919 at the age of 16 means that she was in 1917 a child of 14.¹³ 'Mag.' was 'Maggie': '*Note from Mag. - ill*' (13 May) and '*Mag. unwell*' (7 Aug) (the 8-week interval suggesting that the polite term concealed menstruation). Maggie was certainly not a child; after writing Letter No. 22 to Flo, his future wife, in England, TECH '*told Maggie attachment to Flo*' (11 Jan 1918). Perhaps Maggie is also indicated in another obscure entry: '*M. drew £13.11.0 compensation at St. Angela*'. It is possible therefore that all the five abbreviations represent the names of Esposito siblings.¹⁴ The following entry might explain the reference to 'Mar.': 'St. B. received pouch from Mary' (23 Oct 1917). Four days later: '*Sent Registered], letter containing pouch*'. The recipient was most likely Flo and the pouch was probably one made by an Esposito, one known to TECH as Mary and perhaps a child.¹⁵

With Maggie, and any other Esposito females who may have been single and adult, it is plausible that TECH and other servicemen flirted. That the conjoint activity went any further is unlikely, more generally in the light of Maltese mores, and especially in TECH's case on an assessment of his beliefs and character. The siblings' parents formed a resident generation in the Strada Bastione household between the 'old lady' and Maggie and the others, but their presence is unrecorded. After TECH left Malta the 1918 diary does not record any letters to the family, but some may well have been sent unrecorded since contacts were maintained after the war. At a later date, probably in

¹² A 1916 account of the Malta hospitals by a Scottish chaplain refers to the hospitality of "Maltese ladies' who give 'many a private party', and to Mrs Bonavia who ran a Tea Room at Sliema (Mackinnon, p. 162); cf. Macpherson, *General History*, I, pp. 246-47. Apart from the references to the Esposito family, there are no references in the diary to Maltese individuals, other than two references to meeting a 'Mr Valencia', reason unstated.

¹³ Silvia, the youngest daughter of Vincenzo and Maria, died at home on 18 March 1919 during the great influenza epidemic (information from Dr Boffa).

¹⁴ The names of the children, as supplied by their grandson and grand-nephew, were Margarite (presumably 'Maggie'), Antonia, Joseph, Eve, Michaela, Carmel Gaetano, and Silvia. The middle names do not, however, fit the list in the text — could there have been pet names?

¹⁵ The name "Mary" does not occur in the list of names in the previous note, but since the mother was 'Maria' a child known as Mary is not implausible.

1919, TECH received an *In Memoriam* card in respect of Silvia, who died after he left Malta; it bore a photo portrait above a long flowery inscription (*troppo buona per trovar conforto in questa valle di lagrime ... Silvia cara e pia*), perhaps copied from a grave memorial. Moreover the Espositos (I think I recollect the name 'Maggie') annually sent a Christmas gift of Maltese lace to my family up to the early 1930s. Because of the high customs duty we asked them to stop and thereafter lost all contact.

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TECH had three RAMC friends. Fred probably introduced him to the Esposito household since occasionally TECH met him there, and they regularly went together to the Strada Bastione. The record of a visit on 10 January 1917 is followed by '*Dissension re T. and F.*' No further explanation is offered and if this really indicates 'Ted' and 'Fred', the dissension can hardly have been between the two, since they visit jointly three days later and are well received.¹⁶ However, on 21 July 1917: '*Fred and I part company, did not go to St.B. but with Ham for swim*'; and when TECH went next to Strada Bastione he '*explained cause of quarrel with Fred*'. This blew over: a few days later they met at the same rendezvous. Fred was '*cordial*' (perhaps the Espositos had interceded), and they walked home together; thereafter joint visits were resumed. Fred also joined TECH on less regular walks and other leisure expeditions. Once Fred is noted as attending church with TECH and in March 1918 he was '*promoted to L/cpl*'; otherwise nothing more is recorded, not even his full name.

The second friend was Hammond (Private A.E.) or 'Ham', first mentioned early in the 1917 diary: '*Stephens Hammond & myself held supper in No. 3 Bunk Notre Dame [? camp]*'. And the following week: '*Supper in tent with Ham and Steph.*'.¹⁷ Ham occasionally joined TECH on walks and when the two went to visit Steve at Imtarfa Hospital, somehow '*Ham lost his helmet*'.¹⁸ On 25 November 1917 Ham '*started in laboratory*', perhaps as a result of his friendship with TECH and Steve, but on 19 December we read '*Ham gone*', — probably on a draft for France that left two days previously. TECH '*sent Ham's photos to England*' (31 Dec), presumably to the person whose address is given at the back of the diary, Mrs A. Hammond (mother or wife?) of

¹⁶ Could 'T.' and 'F.' indicate 'Ted' and 'Flo'? Ted had received a letter from Flo one week earlier, but, according to a list of dates of letters received and sent in the 1917 diary, he did not reply for a whole month, which may or may not be significant. Since Flo's 1917 diary is lost we shall never know.

¹⁷ The vast increase in hospital beds had produced tented extensions to hospitals, in which apparently some of the staff lived; see the photograph of St Paul's Hospital Camp in Mackinnon, opposite p. 80.

¹⁸ A faded photograph of Ted in 1917 shows him, posed against a cactust?) and a distant hospital?) building, wearing, above a shin with a partly-open neck and rolled-up sleeves, a sun helmet.

Hyson Green, Nottingham. TECH was now *'alone in lab. had a very busy day'* (20 Dec 1917).

To explain these last circumstances introduces the third and closest acquaintance, 58659 Re. W.J. Stephens, 'Steve' alias 'Bill'. Stephens had worked in the laboratory for two years before January 1918 and was a Registered Laboratory Attendant, as we learn from his famous letter, and it was therefore probably his doing that TECH was transferred to the lab. Although he is not recorded as visiting Strada Bastione, he accompanied TECH to the cemetery where old Mrs Esposito was buried and he printed out her photograph, *'unsuccessfully'*. Private Stephens was a go-getter. On 7 March, *'Stephens went to see Col. Sullivan'*. This probably had something to do with TECH's vain request, on 3 July, for transfer *'with Stevens'* [sic] to Infaly.¹⁹ From mid-1917 Bill was at intervals unwell, with high diary-recorded temperatures (no doubt taken by TECH) and short visits to hospital; in September he went to Gozo for a week, presumably to recover. Bill's health explains why Hammond was temporarily recruited for the lab. and why subsequently TECH was alone. Almost immediately after returning from Gozo Bill was hospitalised with dysentery, which must have been very severe since he was kept there until 24 December. In hospital he was visited weekly by TECH and Ham, in the case of the former no doubt partly to report on how he was managing in the lab. After discharge, on 2 January 1918, *'Bill [was] tested for Shiga [now Shigella, an aerobic bacterium causing dysentery]'* and found positive. Perhaps Bill was tetchy from ill-health when on 28 January he sent in his letter of 'resignation' and complaint to the colonel. His laboratory services may have been appreciated inasmuch as the next day, as we have seen, he was *'offered two stripes'*, which allegedly he declined. On 2 February — *'S[ergeant]. MfajorJ. long talk with [Captain] PatfrickJ. re Bill... Bill had long talk with Pat.'* The friendly captain appears to have confirmed a rumour that *'A class to be replaced in staff jobs by B'* (which apparently meant that the existing laboratory hands were to be removed), although nothing happened immediately. However when Bill was awarded one stripe in March but straightway *'descended to Pte. once more'*, this was perhaps too much and on 5 March he was sent to Fort Benghisa (where there was a General Hospital). TECH met him there and at intermediate points (16 March: *'Met Bill at Zeitun cariozzi to Cott.'*) and it seems that Bill did not come back to Cottonera before the two were drafted for France. At Rouen on 21 April TECH noted *'Cfhurch], A[rmy], Hall with Bill'* (Bill had not previously been noted as attending church occasions); but on 25 April the two were separated. *'Bill went on draft. Felt more miserable than have ever done. Roll on Peace!'* (Two days later, however, TECH, although on a *'funeral party'*, received a letter

¹⁹ 'Infaly' is not mentioned in the account of Malta hospitals (Macpherson, *General History*, I). Had TECH got the name wrong, or is it a badly-written or abbreviated 'infantry'? On 20 August he records, *'Age of troops taken at first parade. Rumour. Infantry.'* The sympathetic 'Colonel Sullivan' was probably the 'Major (temp. Local Lieut-Col.) O'Sullivan' commended in 1918 (see note 4 above).

from his mother and '*3 from Flo, with photos*' and '*Cheered up wonderfully*'). After a further three weeks TECH received the address of Bill's new military unit and wrote to him. In the remaining seven months of the diary Stephens is not mentioned, but an address for him at the front of the diary, that of a Liverpool military hospital, must mean that some time during later 1918 he was transferred to England, either wounded or still suffering from his Malta disorders.

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Although Malta was far from the battle fronts on land, the war was closer at sea. On 1 February 1917 the diary entry reads: '*Telegram Reuters* "*Germany orders all [Allied] ships off high seas*"'. On 31 January the German High Command had announced unrestricted submarine warfare, and thereafter there were frequent sinkings in the central Mediterranean by German submarines operating from Austrian naval bases in the Aegean.²⁰ On 5 February (but the entry refers back to 26 November 1916, without explanation, and the 1916 diary is lost), TECH records '*French transport on fire in Massamucitto harbour. Torpedoed by B.7. [?] 60 killed & wounded, about 10 deaths*' (presumably of the wounded brought ashore). On 16 February, '*ship sank outside harbour with prisoners on board*'; the entry concludes with the curious statement: '*12 pillows feathers for women prisoners*'. On 18 February, '*French transport S.S. "Athos" from China torpedoed. Senegalese troops landed from it at Custom house*'. After a few months of apparent respite: '*Went to Valetta. saw survivors of S.S. "Cameronian" torpedoed 110 miles from Malta, voyage Marseilles to Mesopotamia 3000 troops on board few lost*' (16 Apr).²¹ '*"Dover Castle" torpedoed*' (23 May). At the end of March the Germans had announced that hospital ships would be attacked and the 'Dover Castle' was the first such ship to be sunk.²² It had called at Malta, apparently to off-load less serious casualties for treatment there: '*180 patients admitted per H.S. "Dover Castle". 100 in camp*' (17 May) and when '*Boating in evening*', TECH had '*visited H.S. Dover Castle*' (21 May).

Casualties from sinkings in the vicinity involved the RAMC at Malta: '*H.S. [Hospital Ship] Ghurka mined about 16 miles from Malta. Patients taken off by destroyers tugs etc. Ship Towed in. 141 surgical cases sent to Cott[onera Hospital], [from among] survivors*' (17 Oct). (On 8 November TECH saw this ship in the dockyard

²⁰ See the maps showing sinkings in Henry Newbolt, *Naval Operations*, vols 4 and 5 of *History of the Great War* (London: Longmans, 1920-31) in 12 vols, IV (1928).

²¹ In February 1917 50 Allied vessels were sunk by U-boats in the Mediterranean; in March the sinkings were mostly in the western Mediterranean. The 'Cameronia' was attacked between Sicily and Greece on 15 April (the 'Cameronian' was a different ship. also sunk but at a later date). Of 2,600 men aboard all but 200 were saved by the escorting destroyers and by craft sent out from Malta (Newbolt, IV, pp. 277-81, 286).

²² Newbolt gives the date of the attack as 26 May. The ship was sailing westwards along the Algerian coast with 821 on board, of whom only eight died, all the patients being saved (*ibid.*, IV, pp. 309-10; Macpherson, *General History*, I, p. 370).

with a 'large hole in port side').²³ Finally, on 10 January 1918: 'Tel. "H.S. Ruoa torpedoed at night" on hoard Vivian, Keogh, Doherty (malaria cases)'.²⁴ While the 'Ghurka' may have been bringing casualties to Malta, perhaps from Salonika, the 'Ruoa' was presumably en route for England, taking home those already treated at Malta. RAMC involvement was not limited to hospital care. The entry for 26 November 1917 reads, 'Fortress Orders: Albert Medal 1 Fms. 2 Ptes. RAMC & 1 Sergt. N. E. rescuing 3 men from burning troopship "St. Laurent" (see Feb. 5)'. A slightly sour note on 2 March 1917 ('Serbian medals for Noble, Baxter & Lloyd. "Some have greatness thrust upon them" ') presumably indicates that certain of the RAMC medical staff at Malta had previously served, or had been transferred to serve, in the Balkan campaign.²⁵

Before TECH took up duties in the laboratory, his 1917 diary contains few references to medical matters. Various officers and nurses give lectures on unstated subjects. Additional to the references to admissions above, '35 patients arrived 80pm [?]' (14 Mar), 'Patients admitted from Dockyard' (11 May), '112 patients arrived on H.S. mostly surgical. None in Camp' (20 July), and ' "Glenart Castle" patients from Salonika. 46 adms.' (25 Jan 1918). An entry on 2 February is now inexplicable and somewhat mysterious: '(Reut. Tel.) Albert Missany German informer, invalidated from Cottonera. November. Sputum test 30/8/ laboratories'.

Fairly frequent references to illness refer to TECH himself and his friends. He had diarrhoea and was 'unwell' for five days in January; on 30 June 'Fred went in dock' [slang for 'in hospital']; after a 'peculiar dream' TECH felt 'very groggy' for two days (8 July) and Steve followed suit thereafter, being admitted to dock where he stayed for a fortnight (on 24 July 'Bill's temp. 98.4'); meanwhile, TECH felt 'very unwell, sickness and diarrhoea, had awful night with mosquitoes' (23 July) — but the very next day he went for a swim. After starting in the laboratory, in early August TECH had two bad days: 'very groggy in evening. Tel. Duty. Temp. 101.6°', following a bad day for Steve. The latter's two months in hospital with dysentery has been noted above. In February 1918 TECH started a 'nasty cold', had a sore throat and headache all week, and eight days after the onset; 'Very unwell. Suspect dysentery & made plate of McConkeys BSA', but the self-test cured the disorder, no more being recorded about it. Clearly life in Malta had health hazards. TECH attended two RAMC funerals at Pieta cemetery: on 12 March 1917 that of 'Pte. Anderson 59208', and on 8 April, Easter Day, an unnamed individual who 'died of syphilis contracted at Forrest [Hospital]'²⁶ TECH must also have had some problem

²³ There were no casualties among the 362 patients (Macpherson, *General History*, I, p. 370).

²⁴ Described as Naval Hospital Ship 'Rewa', torpedoed 4 January 1918, four crew lost (*ibid.*).

²⁵ The Gold Medal awarded by the King of Serbia went to Private George Noble, and his Silver Medal to Privates William Baxter and Herbert Frank Lloyd (*Corps News*, March 1917, p. 59). Each issue of the Corps News is replete with awards of medals and other distinctions (the latter mainly to officers), but I can trace no record of an award of the Albert Medal.

²⁶ For 1915-1916 photographs of Pieta Cemetery and British graves there, see Mackinnon, pp. 144, 176, 208. In August 1915 there were 15-20 funerals of soldiers daily at this cemetery (*ibid.*, p.

with his eyes: '*visited Capt. Brown, eye specialist, got prescription*' (20 Feb). A prescription for new spectacles is noted at the front of the diary.²⁷

The diaries contain more medical references once TECH is in the laboratory (31 July 1917-28 March 1918). For the first seven weeks TECH worked with his mentor, Stephens. Thereafter Stephens was ill and away for the lab. for three months, during which period, except for three weeks when Hammond joined him, TECH worked alone, although presumably under the general direction of Captain Patrick. In 1918 Stephens and TECH worked together for two months but on 18 February '*S/apt. [?] Atkins commenced duty in lab.*' and on 5 March Stephens was transferred. Near the end of this period TECH passed the examination and became a Registered Laboratory Attendant, only, in Army fashion, to be instantly removed from that work.

The tasks of the laboratory can be gleaned from the diaries, as can the major ailments treated in the hospital: malaria, dysentery and venereal diseases.²⁸ TECH noted seven post-mortems, with occasional details: Private Trumper R.C.A. was accidentally shot (3 Oct), Lance Corporal France of the Lancashire Fusiliers died of dysentery (10 Dec), Private Murray died of T.B. — a '*bad case*' (1 Dec) — but Lance Corporal Rowe '*suspect T.B. - P.M. diagnosis Malaria*' (23 Nov). Other activities concerned the living. Materials had to be prepared, a responsibility TECH appears to have taken over only when Bill was away. '*First attempt Mannite (failure)*' (27 Sept); but the next day '*Made up Mannite (success)*'. '*First attempt at McConkeys (not much cop)*' (8 Oct); perhaps discouraged, nothing until 20 November — '*Made 2 litres McConkeys BSA (success)*'. On 9 October — '*Made up tubes for 10 water tests*', and on 21 November — '*Made 500 cc Blackhall's Agar (fairly decent)*'. Preparing specimens obtained from the wards and the subsequent testing were of course the major tasks of such a laboratory, and TECH no doubt spent time in the wards collecting specimens, although this is only once specifically noted. On 20 January 1918, the day after the 46 admissions of Salonika sick from the 'Glenart Castle', he '*took blood films of all the previous days adms.*' However the Cottonera lab. must have had limited facilities since on four occasions '*specimen bloods*' for Wasserman tests, and once a '*pituitary body*', had to be conveyed by TECH to the Tigne District Laboratory at Valetta. On 2 October 1917 the conveyance was in exceptional luxury — '*Visited Valetta with Capt. P. in Col. Tooth's car. took blood &*

167).

²⁷ For Army provision of spectacles, see Macpherson, *General History*, I, p. 136.

²⁸ Whereas many Gallipoli casualties suffered from dysentery and fevers of the enteric group, the Salonika casualties included a large proportion of malaria cases (*ibid.*, pp. 237-38). 'Of all diseases responsible for casualties [throughout the war and in all battlefields] malaria probably holds the first place' (*History of the Great War. Medical Services. Diseases of the War*, ed. by W.G. Macpherson et al., 2 vols (London, 1922), I, p. 226). For mosquitoes in Malta, which doubtless passed on the malaria of the Salonika casualties, see Mackinnon, pp. 139-42. As for venereal diseases, when Colonel Ballance addressed the troops at the opening of the Scottish Soldiers' Club in 1915, his up-lifting patriotic speech included a discreet reference to the need to 'he pure in body as well as brave in spirit' (*ibid.*, p. 93).

C.S. Fluid from Officer'. Another ward duty involved Captain Patrick: '*began to assist in quinine injections*' (15 Aug), apparently a procedure favoured by this officer since on 4 January 1918 a '*Medical Conference at University*' heard '*Capt. Patrick's paper on intravenous injection for Malaria*'. (This was followed up on 21 January with a '*Lecture on Malaria. Captain Patrick, in Dining Hall*', probably the same material presented to RAMC colleagues). Another reference to quinine occurs in an unusually lengthy but obscure entry (15 Jan 1918) which suggests a blunder by someone, perhaps TECH: '*Mich. foot forment. intravenous saline to Mr Glyn Ward 10. Col. Garrod Put 3 dozes of Quinine 30 grs instead of 1 with 10 grs Ag Anderson*'. 'Salvarsan' is noted four times: '*on Ward 5*', '*at Isolation*', '*German officers P.o.W.*', and '*2 Salvarsen's in Theatre (Captain Anderson)*' (17, 18, 25 Jan, 1 Mar 1918). '*Prince Hohenzollern*', presumably one of the German prisoners, is admitted to hospital on 20 October and the next day '*tested for dysentery (Negative)*'. The examination papers which TECH sat in February 1918 asked questions about practical means of sterilising and of preparing media and specimens. The longest question read:

'What arrangements would you make with the wards to obtain suitable pathological specimens for bacteriological examination for dysentery? How would you afterwards dispose of the material brought to the laboratory?'

My nephew, Trevor Hair, TECH's grandson, tells me that the range of elementary knowledge tested by the examination papers was not basically different from that required by the modern pathological laboratory technician.

* * *

Because much of Army life was routine the diaries tend to record off-duty activities. Other than the regular visits to the Strada Bastione these leisure activities are recorded as occurring on three or four days each week. Walks, 'strolls' and visits by unstated means to neighbouring villages and to Valetta, with one or both of the usual friends or occasionally with other men, were very frequent. On three occasions at Valetta and once at Senglea the 'pictures' were attended, once the film being 'The Battle of Ancre', and once a counterfeit 2/-piece being received in the change. In the summer months. May to September, the friends went swimming and boating on a dozen occasions, often at Rivella; TECH, who in later life was known to boast that he had swum across the Grand Harbour, once, on 19 July 1917 '*played [water] polo for R.C.A. v. Sliema (civil). Sliema 10-0*'. (He continued to enjoy swimming and diving, despite the cooler waters of the North Sea, until he reached his sixties). On 15 May 1917 he had to attend a '*swimming parade*': his extant Swimming Certificate from the Army is dated 13 June 1916.

His diary has few comments on the weather: a daily sirocco (January 1917), '*very bad weather*', a gale that wrecked the Y.M.C.A. (March 1917), a threatened storm (March 1918), and '*very hot walking*' on 28 August.²⁹ Once TECH went on a '*Scottish picnic to St Paul's Bay with Steve. Tickets [? bus] from Capt. P.*' (29 Aug): an attraction of this spree may well have been TECH's admiration for the saint after whom he was later to name his older son.³⁰ Other outdoors activities were a cycle run, a Camp Sports and three football matches, one between the N.C.O.s and the men (these all presumably only watched by the diarist, although there was sufficient interest to record the scores). Note was made of Maltese holidays such as the Carnival beginning on 17 February and the Procession on Good Friday at Senglea and no doubt their celebrations were observed. Malta experienced a small earthquake (25 Feb), 'Daylight Saving' (11 Mar), and a dockyard strike (7 May).

Indoors there were a few special occasions. '*Tea and Whist drive given to troops by matron and sisters, waited on by former & officers, decent time*': this event of January 1917 was repeated a year later. In September, '*Tea and sports given to patients by Officers and Nurses*', and in October a '*Farewell supper for members of draft. Waited at table*'. More common were concert parties, given at various sites, once on 'H.M.S. Foresight' but mostly at 'S. & 5.[?]'. Thus, '*"Dick Whittington" panto by Ghaim Tuffulo party, Corridino Naval Canteen. B.R.C. tickets*' (29 Jan 1918).³¹ Finally, at the end of December 1917 TECH attended rehearsals over a ten-day period for a concert given by a number of RAMC personnel, the performance given first on Christmas Day: '*Gave concert in evening to patients, splendid reception*'. Then on Boxing day — '*Detachment dinner. Concert to detachment. Present ColfsJ. Garrod Ballance, Major Goodwin A.D.M.S.*'³² A printed programme of this concert is extant. Part I comprised musical items: an instrumental duet by Private Preston and Corporal Broadbent, and much singing, including twice a 'Humerous Song*' and two sentimental songs by the chaplain. Part II was 'a farcical revue' entitled 'As Others See Us', that is, a skit on hospital procedures, "in two spasms", the second being set at 'Woollenera Military Hospital'. In the

²⁹ There is much about the YMCA and its various facilities in Mackinnon; these included a Recreation Tent (pp. 253-54; photograph of interior, opposite p. 240) and two prefabricated Recreation Huts erected in 1916, one seating 500 men (pp. 54, 256). For references to the reactions to Malta circumstances of a Territorial brigade unexpectedly sent there in late 1914, see Lyn Macdonald, 1915: *The Death of Innocence* (London: Headline, 1993) pp. 38-43.

³⁰ A Scottish chaplain supplied an account of 'the Picnic for Scottish soldiers' at St Paul's Bay (in apparently August 1915) attended by some 300 men (and the Governor of Malta), in a "secluded pan of the island' (*ibid.*, pp. 194-201). It seems that this started a tradition of 'a Scottish picnic' at St Paul's Bay.

³¹ In 1915-1916 among the concert parties were those of the YMCA ("splendidly equipped", apparently), 'Miss Lena Ashwell's Concert Party', the Red Cross, and an official organiser, Major Hasell. A 'splendid orchestra was organised at Ghain Tuffieha Camp. the instruments being provided by the Countess of Chesterfield's Ladies Auxiliary Committee' (*ibid.*, pp. 160-61, 255).

³² Colonel Charles Ballance, "the famous brain specialist", Surgeon to St Thomas's Hospital; Colonel Garrod, Physician to St Bartholomew's Hospital (*ibid.*, pp. 91, 156).

cast. Miss Marcey, V.A.D., gallantly played the MATRON, and Captain Anderson THE PATIENT, while the joint stage manager was Captain Patrick. The lesser players were listed as OTHER CRIMINALS and included Private Hair. The back of the programme printed mock reviews:

At the performance last night, strong men wept, women became hysterical, and even a goat was observed to forget himself and eat grass. Zeitun Star.

* * *

For the first few months of 1917 TECH kept at the front of his diary a list of letters received and sent. Letters were exchanged with his mother every ten days and there was a slightly less intense exchange with Miss Flo Hedley. TECH and Flo had begun corresponding in 1916 but had not met since the correspondence started. On 25 February, the diary records *'Debate in Y.M.C.A. "Which is preferable married or single life", proposed and carried "married life". Hair v McClerry'*. TECH was a fairly shy man but in the Church Army he had been trained to speak out, hence perhaps his choice as a debater. After the list peters out in April, diary entries begin to record at least some of the letters. The first entry to record a letter from Flo, on 10 April, is in simple French, and thereafter this device is common, the French often very wrong. Miss Hedley, when at a pupil teacher centre in 1913, bought a Gasc French dictionary (which I still use); her diary too contains simple French phrases, and TECH, who had less education, probably caught the trick from his younger correspondent. In March he had received a signet ring from a certain Madelina Styles, otherwise unrecorded, but from the earliest entry relating to Flo she is *'ma chérie'* (or sometimes *'mon chérie'*), and throughout 1917 the correspondence became more intense. A letter of 19 June is noted as *'(important)'*, and in October he twice writes by return. The letters become numbered — Flo's businesslike mind may be suspected of initiating this — so that by December he received no. 23 and sent her no. 20. In January 1918 he tells Maggie Esposito of his attachment. Flo, like his mother, sent occasional parcels, and also photos; he sent her, on 15 February, in letter 2A (a new numbering series had started), some lace. In March her letters raised the issue of her starting a course at a training college and immediately on receipt he *'Commenced letter to Flo re Coll.'* We have Flo's 1918 diary and elsewhere I have described how she agonized — to some extent — over this issue.³³ In June 1918 TECH came home from France on a fortnight's leave and the diaries of both parties record a *'glorious time'*. At a later stage Flo saw the 1917 diary and wrote in her large hand across the space for 15 June *'Home (June 1918). Some Time. Realisation'*. After this the Flo entries in TECH's diary are in English and refer to *'my darling'*; he noted the day in September when she

³³ P.E.H. Hair, 'Miss Hedley's diary for 1918', *Durham County Local History Society Bulletin*, 52, May 1994, 50-56.

began college. On arrival in France he added this note to the diary: *'In the event of this diary being lost, or myself becoming a casualty, would the finder please forward it to Miss Flo Hedley ...'*. TECH now served in a dangerous battle zone: the diary records that one month before the final armistice his favourite aunt's husband, Bob Lamb, serving in France, was killed.

* * *

Soldiers serving in Malta were regularly drafted to more active war fronts: *'Draft left Cottonera for A.S. [? Active Service] Camp'* (29 May); *'Names of draft for active Serv. put in orders'* (10 Oct). On 18 December, *'Draft warned to hold in readiness to embark'*, and the next day the draft duly left Cottonera and embarked for Italy. On 2 February 1918, TECH noted a *'Rumour A class to be replaced in Staff jobs by B'*, and by 6 February the rumour was confirmed, hence *'probably leaving lab.'* On 6 March a draft left, bound it was thought for Egypt, and finally *'Bill & Tec. warned for France'* (26 Mar). Two days later they moved *'To A.P.D. St Georges'*, and the next day, Good Friday, embarked on H.T. 'Isonga' for Taranto, where they stayed one week. On 8 April they entrained: *'Cattle trucks 35 [?] men in each'*. (After leaving Malta TECH wrote his diary in pencil, making the entries now less legible). Passing through central Italy the diary noted *'Lovely mountain scenery'* but the train took seven days to reach Rouen. In camp there, on 19 April the men were issued with gas helmets and the next day *'Went through Gas'*. Bill and TECH were separated on 25 April and on 5 May TECH joined the 62nd Field Ambulance stationed near Calonne and Barlin.

On 15 May TECH had his first experience of being under fire — *'Bombs dropped near'*. He was *'Sent to Gas Centre Councey'* and on 27 May dealt with *'Gas attack patients through Centre'*, noting the next day *'30 of unit gassed'*. For the next five months (with the exception of the period of his home leave) he served at the front as a stretcher-bearer. Every second week he went *'Up line'* to an R.A.P. [Relay Ambulance Post] for seven days. Bombing and shelling were occasionally noted: *'Heavily shelled this morning. Billet struck'* (4 Aug), and *'Hun bomb dropping very close "died"'* (2 Sept). Very few details of casualties were noted, the fullest being on 19 August: *'5 cases through night, man died on stretcher on way down with Pirie and I'*. During this period the diary is blank on many days and the commonest entry relates to receipt of letters from Flo. However, the British were more than holding their own: the diary noted raids on enemy lines when prisoners were taken, and on 3 July TECH, finding himself in a *'Fritz Dugout, Topping place'*, copied into his diary (illegibly) notices in German on the walls. By 5 October *'Jerry retreating'*, and thereafter the unit seems not to have been able to keep up with the advancing front line. On 1 November TECH *'Walked through Cambrai... Much impressed with lovely town and not too badly [illegible]'*. On 11

November, the whole entry reads - '*HOSTILITIES CEASED AT 11.0 A.M.*' TECH's war had come to an end.