



# THE PIONEER

RURAL & RESIDENTIAL  
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## Cousin Jack

I never did understand why Cousin Jack came to stay with us at Gloucester. He was my father's brother's son and they lived on the other side of the range at Gundy near Scone. Their family was as big as ours, and as it was in the middle of the Second World War, we really couldn't afford to feed another mouth. It wasn't my problem though as I was only four years old.

Jack was the funniest person I ever knew. He was always laughing and playing jokes. He had a very annoying habit of tousling my hair and calling me 'little tyke' every time he came near me, or so it seemed. A pair of patent leather shoes was his most treasured possession. He called them his dancing pumps and of a Friday and Saturday night he always took them with him when he went to the local dances. Jack couldn't decide which he liked most, dancing or the girls he danced with. As if to enhance his self importance, he made up a little song that he used to sing to all and sundry.

***They call me Jack, but my name is John, And I can dance, all night long.***

***Girls all chase me, they love my song ... They call me Jack, but my name is John.***

One day Jack confided to me that he was waiting to turn eighteen so he could join the army. He had tried unsuccessfully a couple of times, but they all knew him, and that he was too young. He said that he wanted to go and fight the yellow hordes from the north and that he would knock the socks off them. I didn't know who or what the yellow hordes were or why he wanted their socks but if it was good enough for Jack it was good enough for me.

When the time came, Mum put on a small party for Jack when he turned eighteen. Because of rationing of food there wasn't a lot of fancy stuff, though everyone seemed to have a good time. Shortly after this Jack went missing for a couple of weeks. When he

returned he came dressed in army khaki's and he looked so handsome as he paraded around for everyone to see him, with his slouch hat tilted at a rakish angle. He told Mum that he wouldn't have need of his dancing shoes where he was going, so he asked her to look after them till he returned.

It seemed like half the town was at the railway station to see Jack and other young men go off to war. Gloucester railway station had refreshment rooms where they looked after and fed the soldiers as they transited through on their way to points of demarcation to the war front. It was very memorable for us as so many of the soldiers were local men. There were a group of girls around Jack wishing him all the best, hugging and kissing him. The whistle screamed a farewell as the train pulled out of the station. Waving arms were seen at the windows, though before long they were out of view and we all went home nursing our private thoughts as these brave men went off to war.

The memory of Jack almost disappeared, as time, for someone as young as me moved forward very slowly. Occasionally a letter would come from the front somewhere up in New Guinea. Jack had met up with one of his brothers who had also enlisted. They had met at a place with a strange name, Kokoda. His brother, Allan, we heard later, went missing in action. We never did learn whether he was captured or killed as he was never heard of again. We never really knew what they were going through as his letters were always heavily censored so as not to give away any information that could be of use to the enemy should their letters fall into the wrong hands.

News finally came through that the war had ended in Europe. The Japanese were still fighting in the Pacific but were being pushed back towards Japan. Later we heard that there had been two huge bombs dropped on the Japanese mainland and that they had capitulated and the war in the Pacific was over.

Jubilation hit Gloucester. There were parties in the streets. Church services giving thanks and prayers for the safe return of the men from all over Australia and particularly for the Gloucester boys. Troop trains that passed through Gloucester were met by locals hoping that the men of their families were on board. Because of the tumult caused by the ending of hostilities, no one had any idea of the whereabouts of loved ones and we all had to wait till some sort of news came through.

Some weeks passed since peace was announced. I was playing with my toy bike at the side of the house one morning when I noticed a stranger walking up the track from the road to our house, dressed in army uniform. There was something wrong with him that I couldn't quite make out. He only had one arm. I thought all people had two arms and I just stared in amazement. The man, who was extremely thin and sick looking, stood in front of me for some time. 'You are growing up big, little tyke.'

I didn't know what to say, but from somewhere deep in my memory came a long forgotten tune and I recited:

***They call me Jack, but my name is John, And I can dance, all night long.***

***Girls all chase me, they love my song ... They call me Jack, but my name is John.***

He then did the completely unexpected. He sat down beside me and started to cry. Great sobs wracked his body. It was like watching a balloon deflate. He sobbed and sobbed. As his cries subsided a little, he reached out with his one hand, tousled my hair.

'I made it home little tyke, I came home.'

~ This story was written by Stroud resident Keith Franks. Thank you for permission to print.

**LEST WE FORGET**