To Myrtle and Walter Spooner and their descendants.

Stag Spooner

WILD MAN FROM THE BUSH

THE STORY OF A NEW ZEALAND HUNTER AND ARTIST

CHRIS MACLEAN

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Preface

Tantalising tales of rare finds fuel the minds of auctioneers, estate agents and researchers. Long-lost works by old masters found in dusty attics, or the forgotten scores of composers discovered in music libraries, make headlines. Such remarkable revelations seldom occur, if at all, in a writer's lifetime.

When I first saw Stag Spooner's remarkable visual diary *Those Wild Men from the Bush*, its significance was immediately apparent to me. This echoed the response of many others who have championed Stag's work, especially his family who have long recognised the uniqueness of his art and wanted to do something to preserve and publicise it.

In 2006, Stag's niece, Gayle Douglas, was working at Fox Glacier on the West Coast of the South Island and showed Stag's visual diary to Mike and Carrol Browne. They, in turn, showed it to the Hokitika bookseller and hunter Bruce Watson, who also recognised its value. He suggested publishing *Those Wild Men from the Bush*, perhaps another book to showcase the Spooner brothers' wartime envelopes, and even a childrens' book of Stag's drawings of their early hunting escapades.To those ends, he arranged for a friend, Bruce White, to scan Stag's artwork and his hunting diaries.

In 2010, Bruce Watson showed Stag's diaries and *Those Wild Men from the Bush* to Chris and Margaret Cochran, as well as Geoff Norman, which is how I came to see them. Had it not been for their generosity in sharing Stag's work with me, I would never have come to write his story.

Bruce Watson then arranged for me to visit Gayle to discuss the book. At the same time, he also showed *Those Wild Men from the Bush* to Craig Potton and Robbie Burton from Craig Potton Publishing. They both immediately understood its importance and agreed to run with Stag.

During the severe winter of 2011, with its snowy similarity to the same season in 1939 which Stag alludes to in the opening caption of

Those Wild Men from the Bush, I regularly drove over the Rimutaka Range to consult the extended Spooner family. These trips had to be during the week because, as Rick Spooner explained, at the weekend he was usually away hunting, shooting or fishing. He and his sister, Christine Cunningham, provided new archival material during each visit. As my understanding of Stag's creative output increased, so did the scope and size of this book. What began as an explanatory essay to accompany the publication of *Those Wild Men from the Bush* grew to become a biography of Stag himself. His original art in a variety of media demanded nothing less.

My increasing knowledge of Stag's diverse creativity mirrored his evolution as an artist. His early work is limited in its awareness of a wider world but, by the time he produced *Those Wild Men from the Bush*, Stag had broadened his horizons.

Active service overseas during the Second World War transformed Stag from a raw country lad to an educated man of the world, whose grasp of global events enabled him to depict the entire history of the war in a single dense drawing, *Remember All These*.

In his final wartime letters, Stag makes it clear that he intended to devote his life to art. Yet less than a year after the end of the war he died at the age of 28. What more might he have created had he lived a full life?

It is our hope that this book will bring Stag Spooner well-deserved recognition for his unique contribution to New Zealand culture.

Chris Maclean, 2012

The following 81 pages are a facsimile of Stag Spooner's visual diary, *Those Wild Men from the Bush*.

Those WILD MEN FROM THE BUSH by Stag Spooner

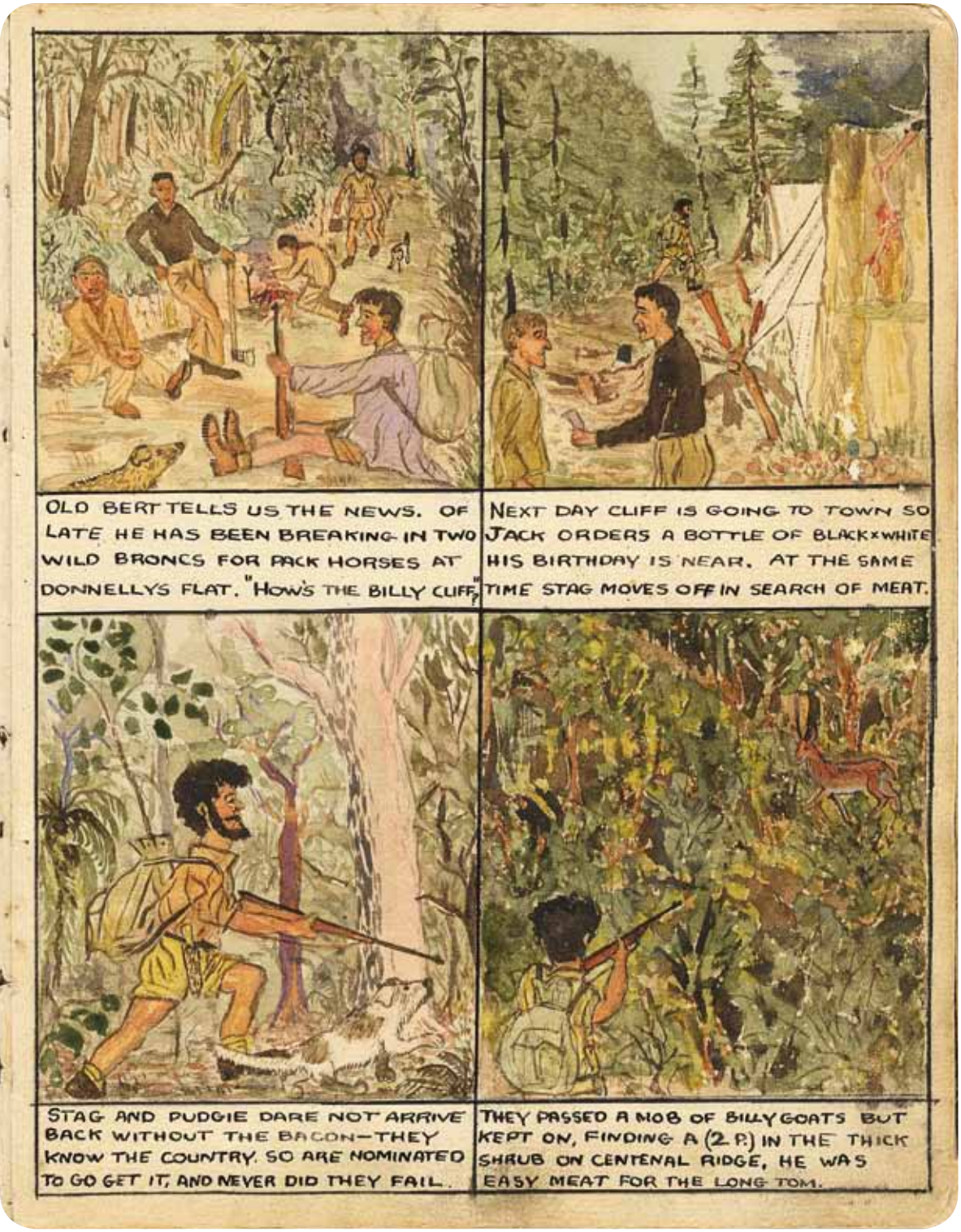
IN THE SEVERE WINTER OF 1939 GOV. DEER SHOOTING MEN WERE ENGAGED IN CUTTING A PACK TRACK BETWEEN MT. HOLDSWORTH CAMPING

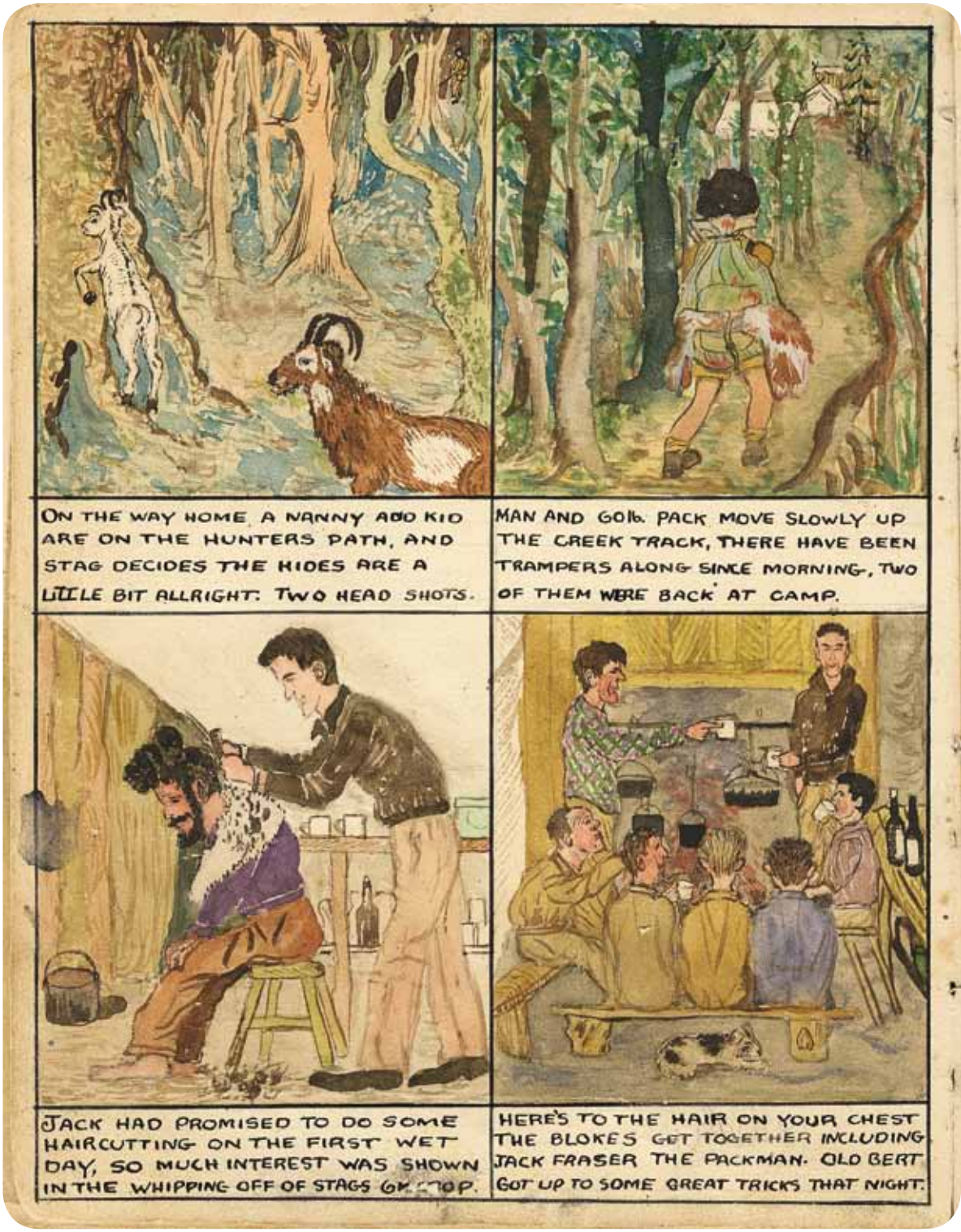
GROUND AND KAITOKE. A GANG WORKED FROM EACH END AND HERE WE SEE THE LES OWENS GANG AT LUNCH TIME ON A HOLDSWORTH SPUR TOTARA CREEK

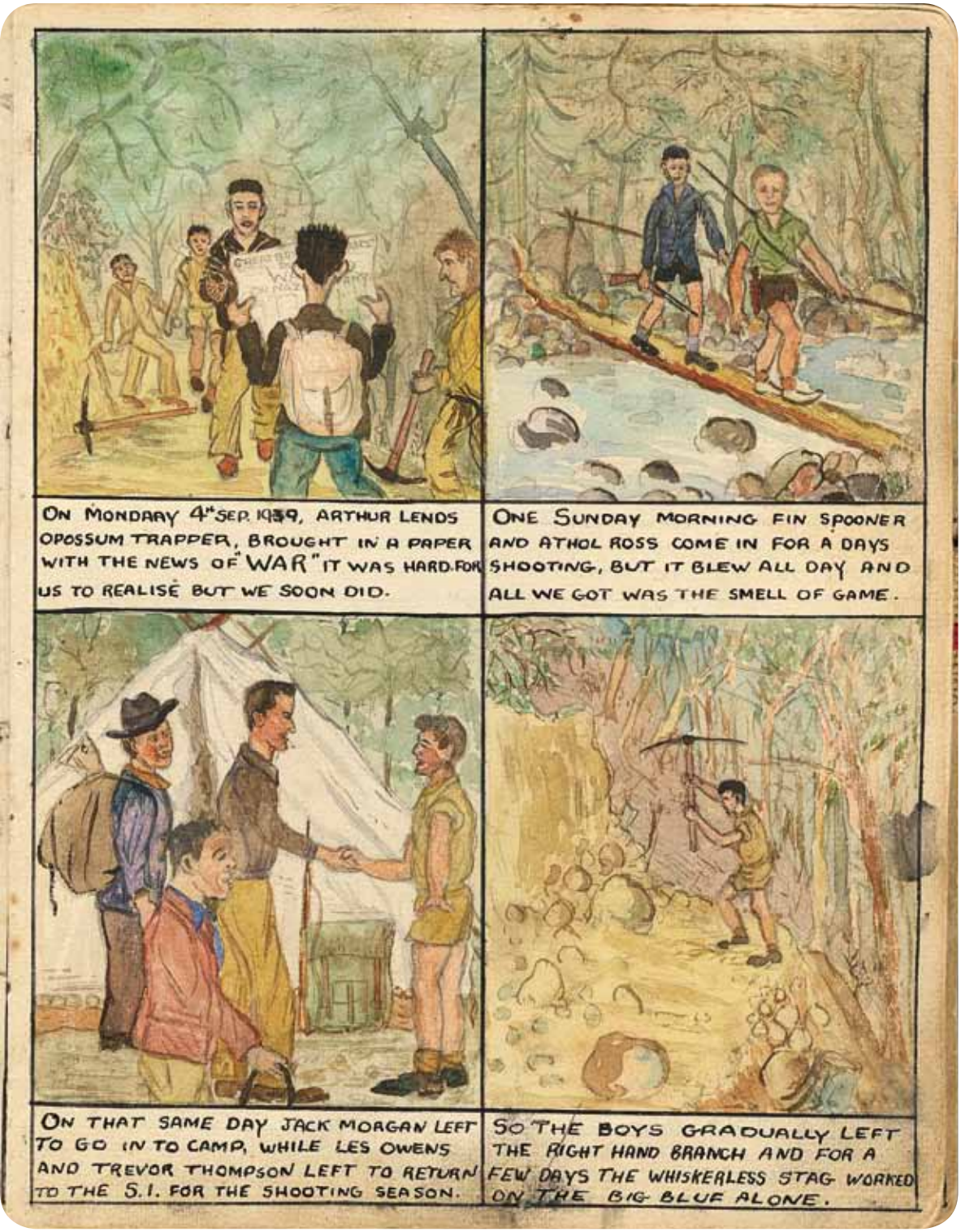
LES OWENS OF SOUTHLAND AND STAG CRUSOE SLASH AT THE DENSE MANUKA. THE OLD TRACK WAS POOR AND HARD TO FOLLOW

HOME TIME AT NIGHT, THESE BLOKES STICK TO 40HR. WEEK BUT WORK HARD. CLIFF NICHOLAISEN LEADS WITH TALL JACK MORGAN AND TREVOR THOMPSON IN REAR.

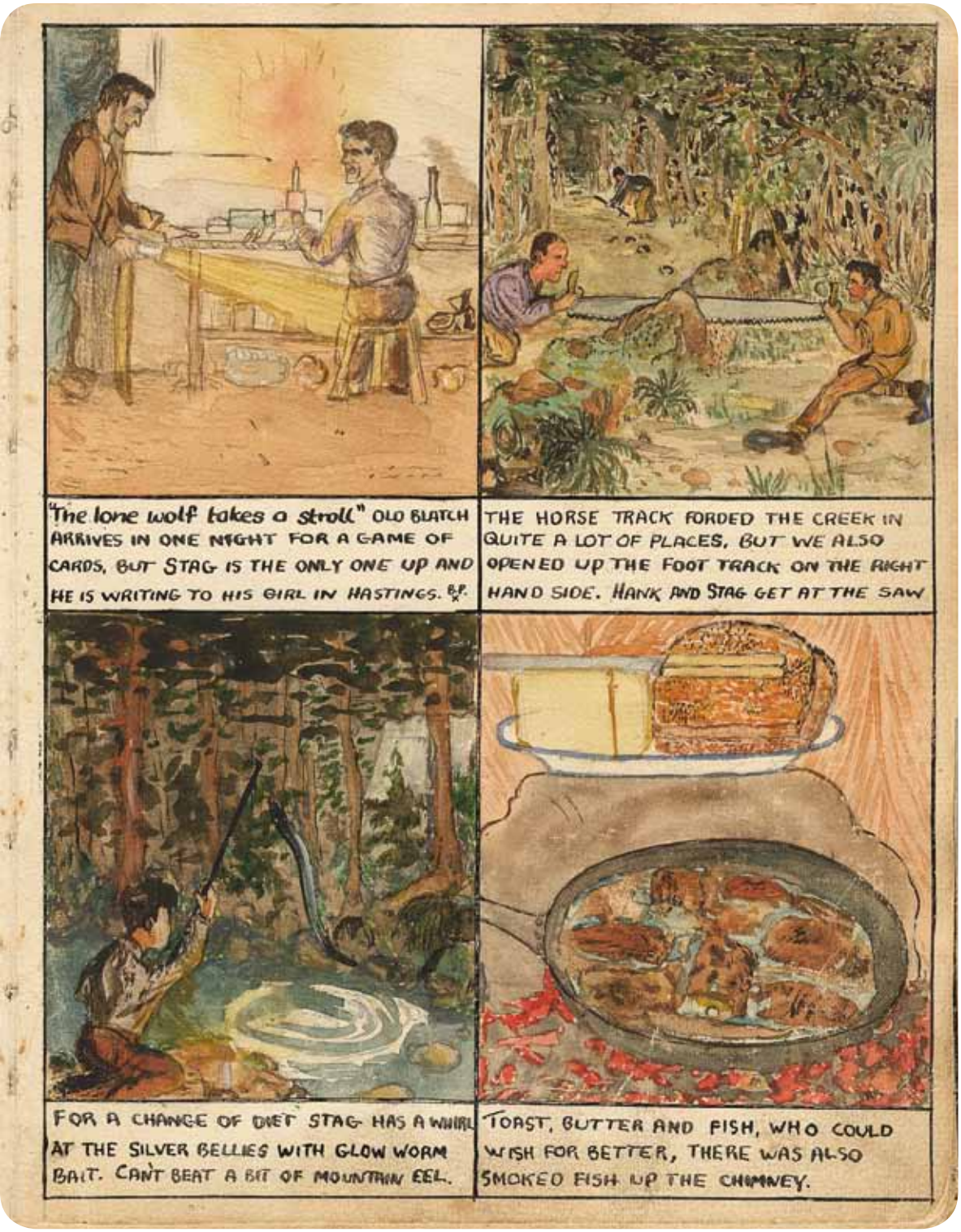

LOOKING DOWN ON THE TOTARA CREEK CAMP AND STAGS BIRCH LOG BRIDGE THIS IS A FAIRLY CENTRAL CAMP SITE BEING 1½ hrs., WALK FROM BANNISTER
AND AN hr. TO TOTARA FLATS, THE BIG TENT AND 16ft. FLY SERVES AS COOK HOUSE, KITCHEN AND STORE ROOM WHILE THE TRACK BOSS ALSO SLEEPS THERE
THE FIRE NEVER GOES OUT, AND EVERY NIGHT THE JOKERS SIT ROUND AND TALK, AND DRINK TEA WHILE THE HAIRY MAN USUALLY PLAYS ON THE ACCORDION
WHOSE THAT TALL MAN WITH THE 4-ft. STRIDE ? BERT BARRA, SUPERVISOR AND MT. EXPERT. THE MAN WHO DROPPED 12 HUNDRED DEER IN THE LANDSBOROUGH.

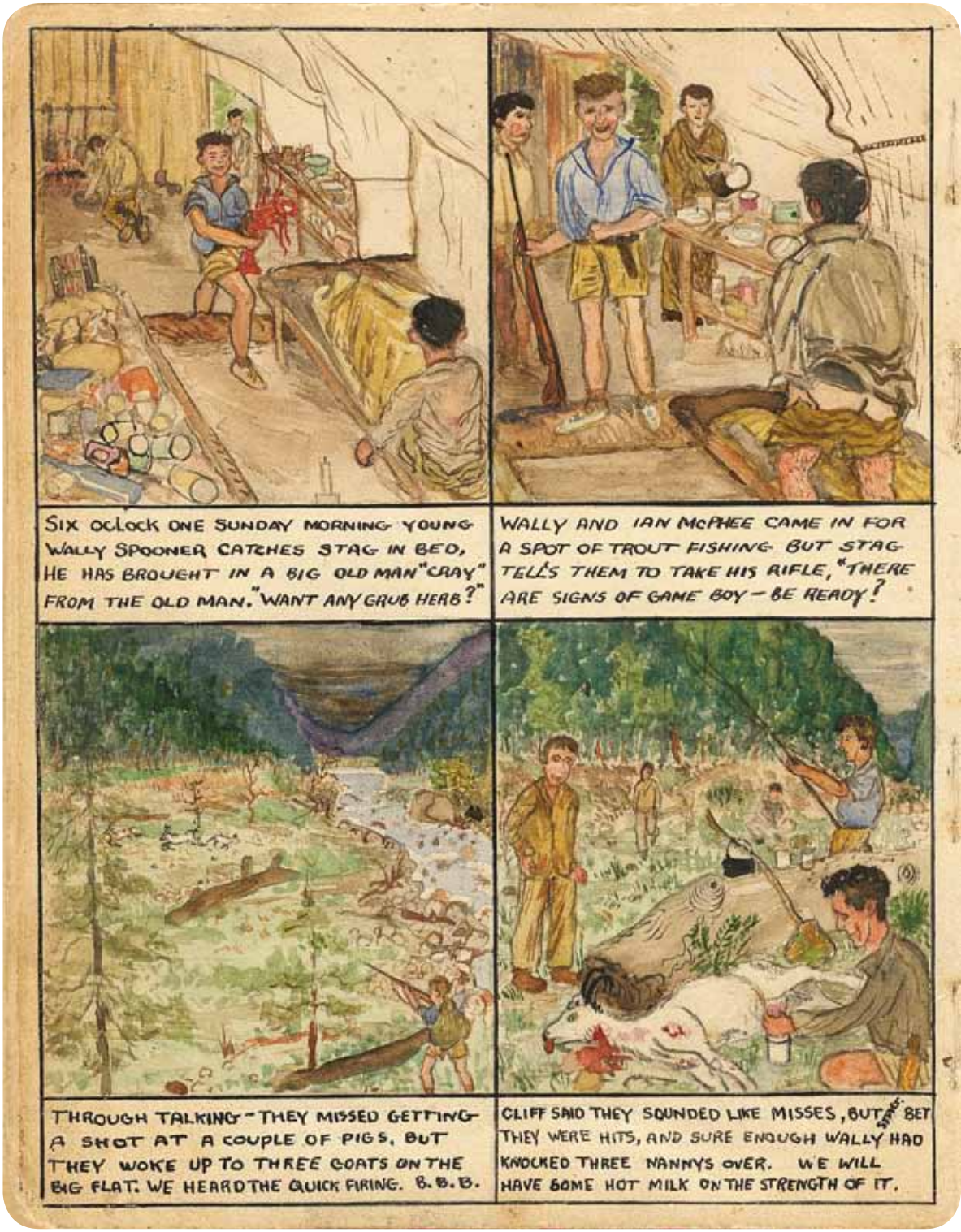

OLD BERT TELLS US THE NEWS. OF LATE HE HAS BEEN BREAKING IN TWO WILD BRONCS FOR PACK HORSES AT DONNELLYS FLAT. "HOW'S THE BILLY CUFF"
NEXT DAY CLIFF IS GOING TO TOWN SO JACK ORDERS A BOTTLE OF BLACK×WHITE HIS BIRTHDAY IS NEAR. AT THE SAME TIME STAG MOVES OFF IN SEARCH OF MEAT.
STAG AND PUDGIE DARE NOT ARRIVE BACK WITHOUT THE BACON—THEY KNOW THE COUNTRY. SO ARE NOMINATED TO GO GET IT, AND NEVER DID THEY FAIL.
THEY PASSED A MOB OF BILLY GOATS BUT KEPT ON, FINDING A (2 P.) IN THE THICK SHRUB ON CENTENAL RIDGE, HE WAS EASY MEAT FOR THE LONG TOM.

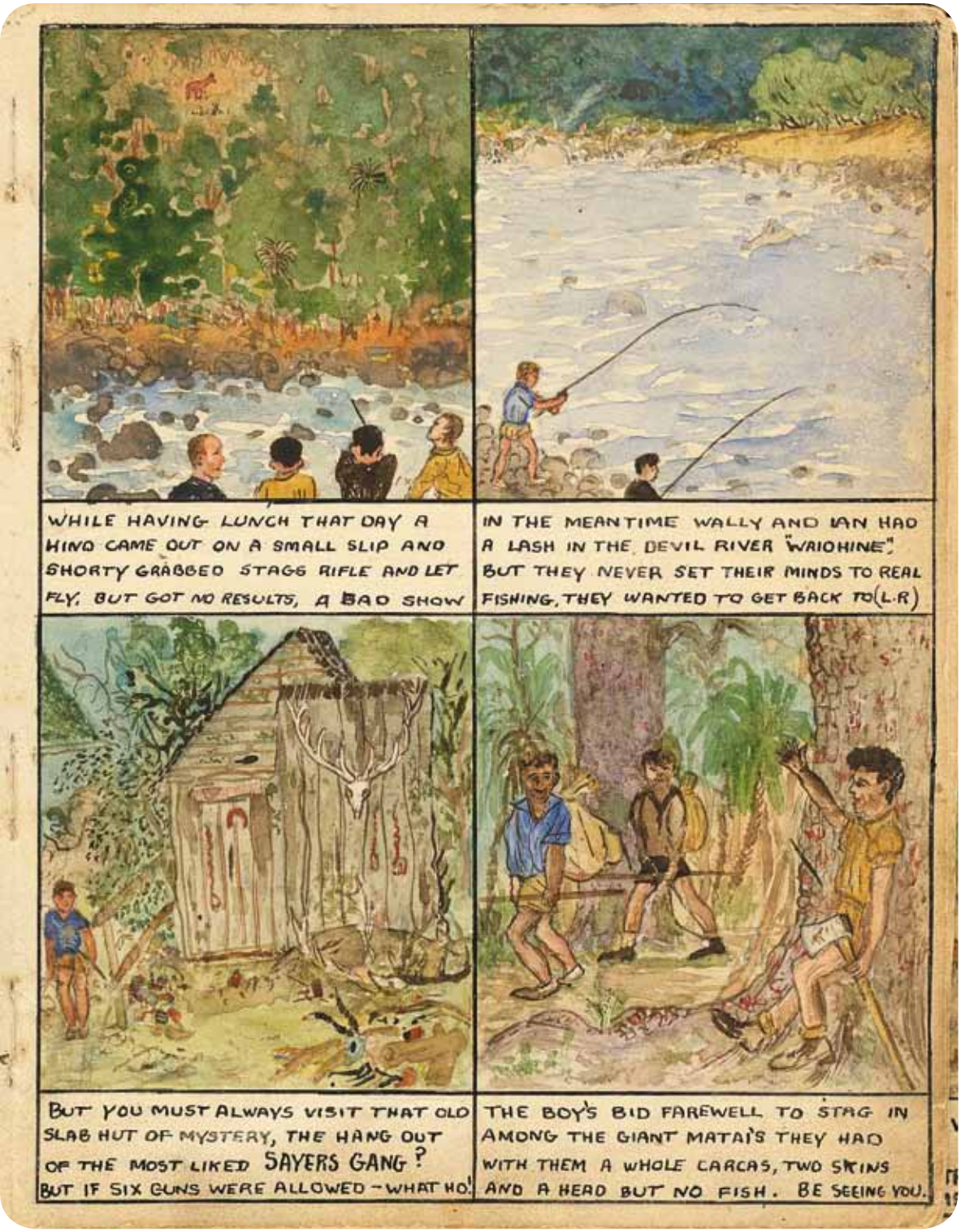

ON THE WAY HOME A NANNY AND KID ARE ON THE HUNTERS PATH, AND STAG DECIDES THE KIDS ARE A LITTLE BIT ALLRIGHT. TWO HEAD SHOTS.
MAN AND GOlb. PACK MOVE SLOWLY UP THE CREEK TRACK, THERE HAVE BEEN TRAMPERS ALONG SINCE MORNING., TWO OF THEM WERE BACK AT CAMP.
JACK HAD PROMISED TO DO SOME HAIRCUTTING ON THE FIRST WET DAY, SO MUCH INTEREST WAS SHOWN IN THE WHIPPING OFF OF STAGS GR[illegible]OP.
HERE'S TO THE HAIR ON YOUR CHEST THE BLOKES GET TOGETHER INCLUDING JACK FRASER THE PACKMAN. OLD BERT GOT UP TO SOME GREAT TRICKS THAT NIGHT.


ON MONDAAY 4th SEP 1939, ARTHUR LENDS OPOSSUM TRAPPER, BROUGHT IN A PAPER WITH THE NEWS OF "WAR" IT WAS HARD FOR US TO REALISE BUT WE SOON DID.
ONE SUNDAY MORNING FIN SPOONER AND ATHOL ROSS COME IN FOR A DAYS SHOOTING, BUT IT BLEW ALL DAY AND ALL WE GOT WAS THE SMELL OF GAME.
ON THAT SAME DAY JACK MORGAN LEFT TO GO IN TO CAMP, WHILE LES OWENS AND TREVOR THOMPSON LEFT TO RETURN TO THE S.I. FOR THE SHOOTING SEASON.
SO THE BOYS GRADUALLY LEFT THE RIGHT HAND BRANCH AND FOR A FEW DAYS THE WHISKERLESS STAG WORKED ON THE BIG BLUE ALONE.

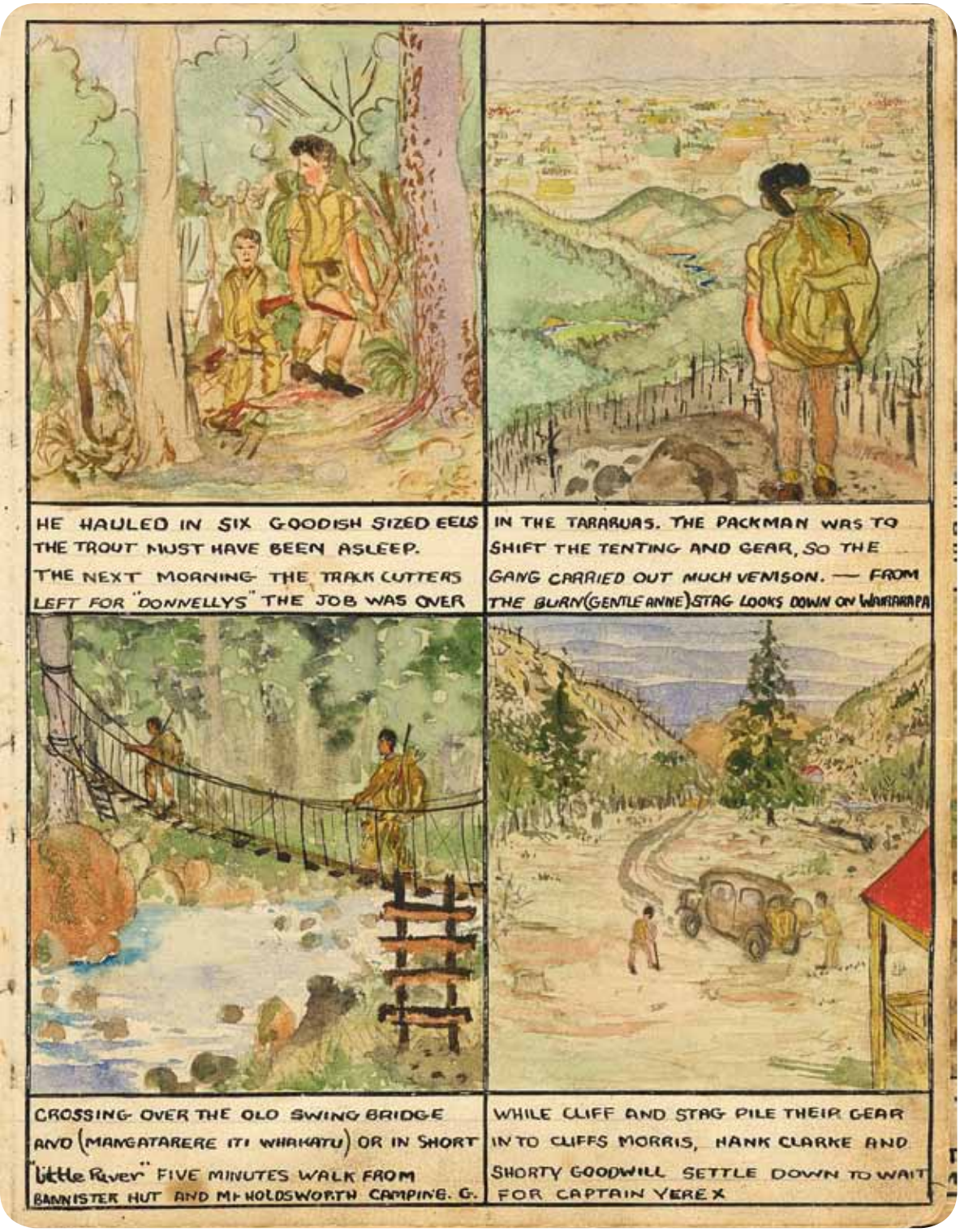

WHILE ON HIS OWN STAG PUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES TO HIS 12 lb. MAIRE FRUIT BOWL, THAT THE CHAPS HAD THREATENED TO BURN.
THE PACK TRACK WAS PUSHED ON WITH BERT DETERMINED TO GET THE JOB FINISHED BEFORE THE SHOOTING BEGAN.
THEN ONE DAY WHO SHOULD JOIN US BUT HANK CLARKE AND SHORTY GOODW-ILL, THEY HAD BEEN ON KAITOKE END.
FIRST PACK HORSE IN UPPER T. CREEK WITH A LOAD OF 4x2 BROUGHT IN BY JIM ? THE TIMBER WAS INTENDED FOR A HUT AT THE T. FLATS.


"The lone wolf takes a stroll" OLD BLATCH ARRIVES IN ONE NIGHT FOR A GAME OF CARDS, BUT STAG IS THE ONLY ONE UP AND HE IS WRITING TO HIS GIRL IN HASTINGS. B.F.
THE HORSE TRACK FORDED THE CREEK IN QUITE A LOT OF PLACES, BUT WE ALSO OPENED UP THE FOOT TRACK ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE. HANK AND STAG GET AT THE SAW
FOR A CHANGE OF DIET STAG HAS A WHIRL AT THE SILVER BELLIES WITH GLOW WORM BAIT. CAN'T BEAT A BIT OF MOUNTAIN EEL.
TOAST, BUTTER AND FISH, WHO COULD WISH FOR BETTER, THERE WAS ALSO SMOKED FISH UP THE CHIMNEY.


SIX OCLOCK ONE SUNDAY MORNING YOUNG WALLY SPOONER CATCHES STAG IN BED, HE HAS BROUGHT IN A BIG OLD MAN "CRAY" FROM THE OLD MAN. "WANT ANY GRUB HERB?"
WALLY AND IAN McPHEE CAME IN FOR A SPOT OF TROUT FISHING BUT STAG TELLS THEM TO TAKE HIS RIFLE, "THERE ARE SIGNS OF GAME BOY – BE READY!
THROUGH TALKING - THEY MISSED GETTING A SHOT AT A COUPLE OF PIGS, BUT THEY WOKE UP TO THREE GOATS ON THE BIG FLAT. WE HEARD THE QUICK FIRING. B.B.B.
CLIFF SAID THEY SOUNDED LIKE MISSES, BUT I BET THEY WERE HITS, AND SURE ENOUGH WALLY HAD KNOCKED THREE NANNYS OVER. WE WILL HAVE SOME HOT MILK ON THE STRENGTH OF IT.

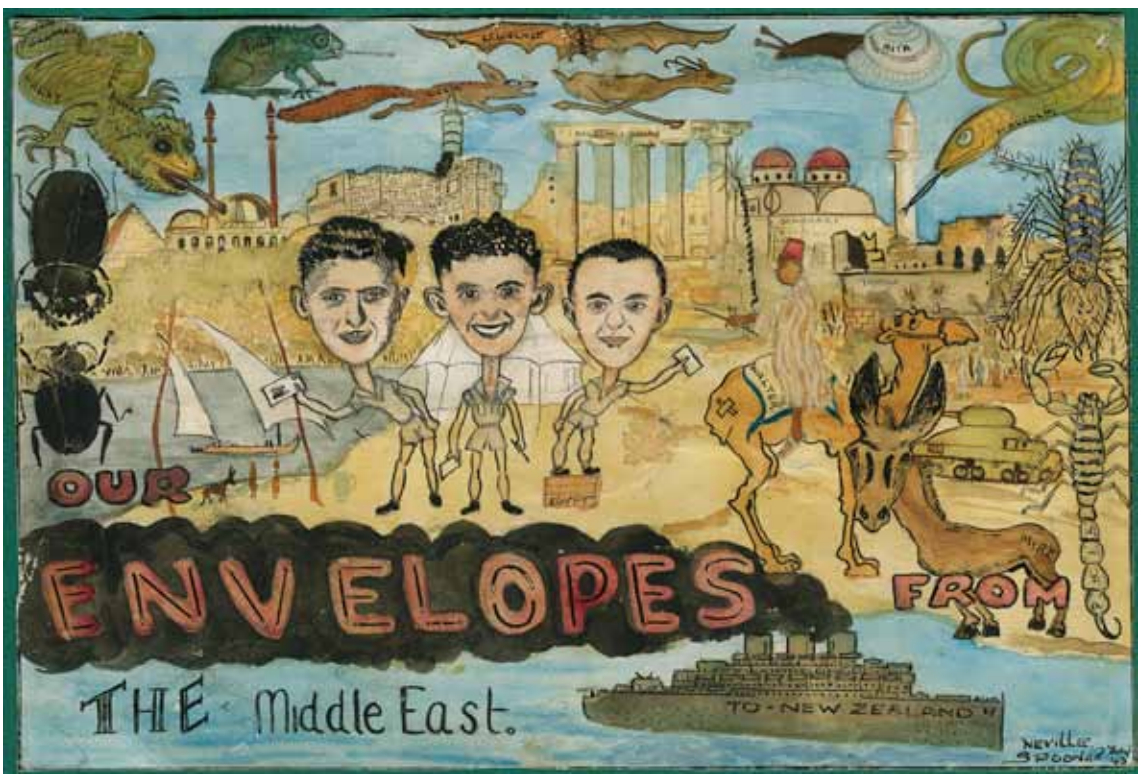

WHILE HAVING LUNCH THAT DAY A HIND CAME OUT ON A SMALL SLIP AND SHORTY GRABBED STAGS RIFLE AND LET FLY. BUT GOT NO RESULTS, A BAD SHOW
IN THE MEANTIME WALLY AND IAN HAD A LASH IN THE DEVIL RIVER "WAIOHINE" BUT THEY NEVER SET THEIR MINDS TO REAL FISHING, THEY WANTED TO GET BACK TO (L.R)
BUT YOU MUST ALWAYS VISIT THAT OLD SLAB HUT OF MYSTERY, THE HANG OUT OF THE MOST LIKED SAYERS GANG ? BUT IF SIX GUNS WERE ALLOWED - WHAT HO!
THE BOY'S BID FAREWELL TO STAG IN AMONG THE GIANT MATAI'S THEY HAD WITH THEM A WHOLE CARCAS, TWO SKINS AND A HEAD BUT NO FISH. BE SEEING YOU.


THAT SAME EVENING ON THE WAY BACK UP THE CREEK, THE BLOKES WERE SURPRISED TO SEE FOUR DEER OUT FEEDING, HERE WAS A CHANCE FOR
CLIFF TO BAG A TARARUA BEAST, SOMETHING HE HAD FAILED TO DO — BUT STAG DECIDED THIS WAS NO TIME TO PLAY ABOUT - SO HE FIRES TWO SHOTS FOR 2.
A LAST CHANCE TO TRY THOSE BIG HUNGRY FISH IN THE "WAIOHINE" WHICH WOULD BE SOMETHING GOOD TO TAKE OUT THE NEXT DAY. STAG BAITS UP
WITH GLOW-WORMS, BUT FOUND WHEN HE REACHED THE RIVER, A RIFLE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE IDEAL ARTICLE TO DEAL WITH WILD PIGS. ON THE LANCEWOOD ROD

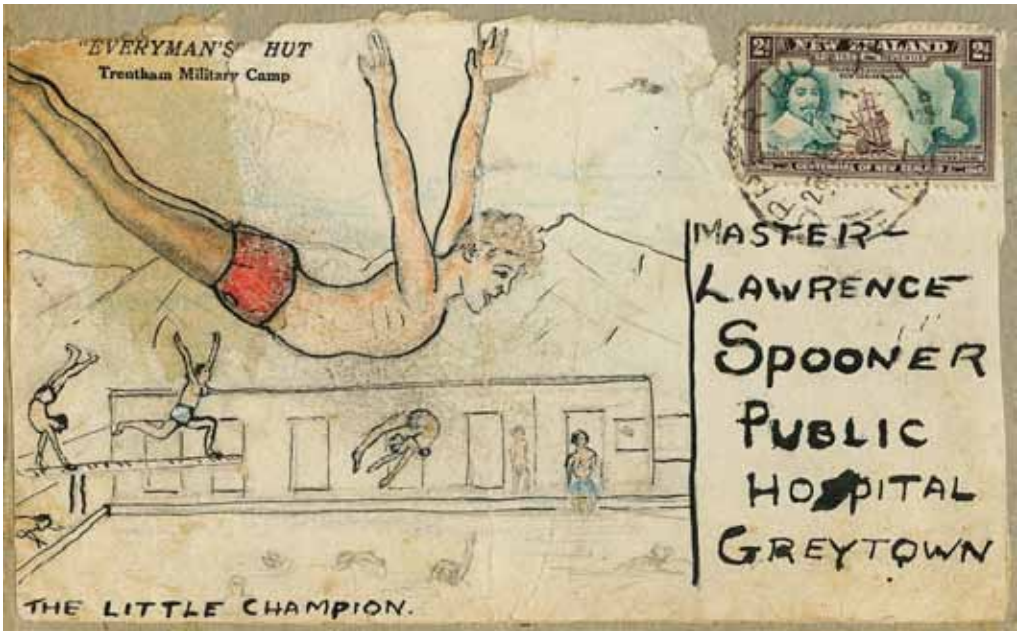

HE HAULED IN SIX GOODISH SIZED EELS THE TROUT MUST HAVE BEEN ASLEEP.
THE NEXT MORNING THE TRACK CUTTERS LEFT FOR "DONNELLYS" THE JOB WAS OVER
IN THE TARARUAS. THE PACKMAN WAS TO SHIFT THE TENTING AND GEAR, SO THE GANG CARRIED OUT MUCH VENISON. — FROM THE BURN (GENTLE ANNE) STAG LOOKS DOWN ON WAIRARAPA
CROSSING OVER THE OLD SWING BRIDGE AND (MANGATARERE ITI WHAIKATU) OR IN SHORT "Little River" FIVE MINUTES WALK FROM BANNISTER HUT AND MT HOLDSWORTH CAMPING. G.
WHILE CLIFF AND STAG PILE THEIR GEAR INTO CLIFFS MORRIS, HANK CLARKE AND SHORTY GOODWILL SETTLE DOWN TO WAIT FOR CAPTAIN YEREX

CHAPTER FOUR

Stag Spooner's Decorated Envelopes

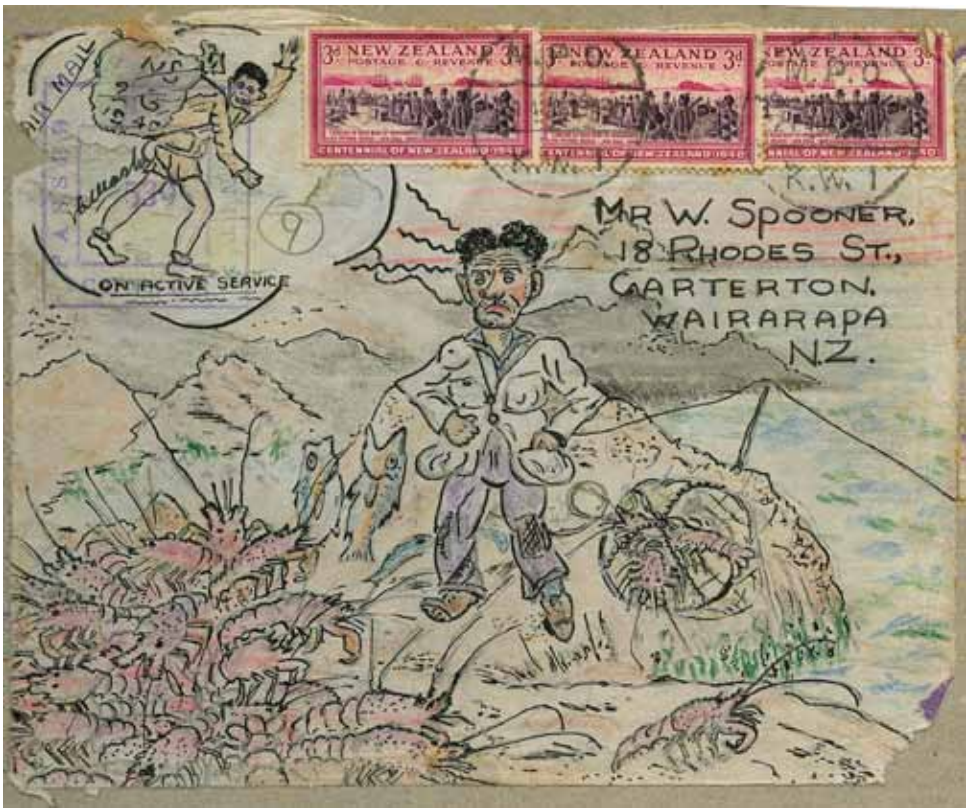



NEW ZEALAND
Mrs W. Skooner
18 Rhodes St
Carterton


"EVERYMAN'S" HUT
Trentham Military Camp
THE LITTLE CHAMPION.
MASTER
LAWRENCE
SPOONER
PUBLIC
HOSPITAL
GREYTOWN


AIR MAIL
ON ACTIVE SERVICE
MR W. SPOONER JNR.
18 RHODES STREET,
CARTERTON
WAIRARAPA
N.Z.
"NO TROUBLE TO HERB SPOONER."


NATIONAL PATRIOTIC FUND BOARD
MRS W. SPOONER,
18 RHODES ST. CARTERTON.


NEW ZEALAND 3d
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AIR MAIL
ON ACTIVE SERVICE
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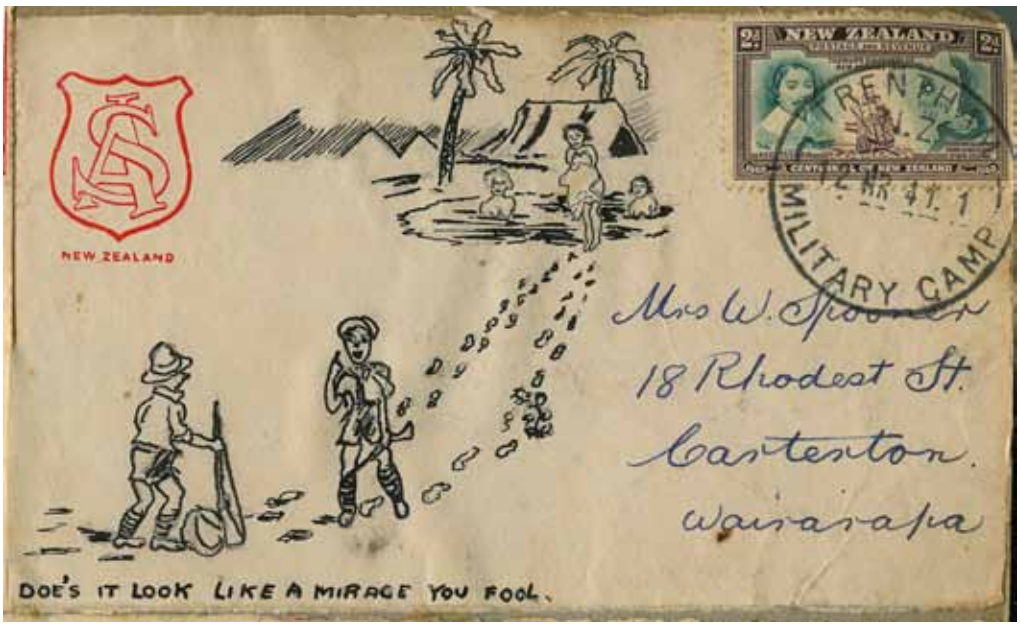
CARTERTON.
WAIRARAPA
N.Z.


NEW ZEALAND
NEW ZEALAND
MILITARY CAMP
Mrs W. Spooner
18 Rhodes St.
Carterton.
Wairarapa
DOE'S IT LOOK LIKE A MIRAGE YOU FOOL.