

**Molly
Mallone**



Molly put the hairbrush down on the dresser and took a last look at her hair. It looked acceptable enough for her interview at the Red Cross Canteen. She soon would walk down to Bolsover Street and report to the American girl who was in charge of volunteers.

At 5' 4" tall, and weighing 102 pounds, Molly was slim and trim, and had a pleasant face that betrayed her Irish heritage. Her hair was a light brown and her sparkling eyes were a light blue. There was no slouch in her posture and her voice had a pleasant lilt to it.

As she picked up her purse and smoothed her dress, she wondered what she was getting into with a whole lot of American soldiers she had seen streaming into the Canteen every afternoon and night since the end of October in 1942. This group of Yanks was billeted in the Botanical Gardens, and seemed to consist mostly of sergeants. They were all dressed neatly, and most of them worked in the City Hall which had been taken over by the military.

The officers of the unit were quartered in the Criterion Hotel down by the Fitzroy bridge, and went about in cars and jeeps. This was reported to be the vanguard of a much larger group of soldiers now setting up a camp at Nerimbera, about 11 km from North Rockhampton along the Yepoon road.

At the Servicemen's Club, Marion Scott was easy to find - she wore a neat uniform that was almost military, but still allowed a certain amount of femininity to come through. It was

not at all like the uniform worn by the WAAAF's which was drab and not at all feminine. As she walked towards Molly, it was obvious that this was the woman in charge.

Marion took Molly into an office adjacent to the kitchen, stopping on the way to get a cup of coffee for herself and a cup of tea for Molly. After filling out some very official looking forms, Molly sat back and sipped her tea while Marion Scott reviewed the form and made a few notations of her own.

"You know, Molly, riding herd on these soldiers will be a lot like teaching in Grammar School" she said.

"These soldiers are used to discipline and like your students, need 'mothering' more than anything else". While Molly had a world of experience in mothering her sister Pat, as a consequence, she had very little experience with men her own age.

As she walked home she wondered how things would go when she reported for duty on Saturday midday. Perhaps she shouldn't have been so quick to volunteer to work until the club closed at Midnight. She reviewed the instructions about dress while on duty, and the admonition that no dates with soldiers were to be entered into, or even contemplated! It was also pointed out that the food available at the club was for the servicemen, and not the volunteers. Of course, she was told, at a dance upstairs in the club, it was acceptable to have a hamburger and a coke, but never downstairs in the dining room.

It wasn't so much a desire to help the War Effort that Molly decided to volunteer, as it was her desire to get out of the house and meet some new people. Since her mother died when she was 17, she had been tied to the house and the care of her younger sister Pat. Now, with her teaching position, and her fathers declining health her social life was very limited. She looked at herself as a premature "old Maid", with no hope of ever breaking free. Now that her sister was beginning to take some responsibilities for the house, she saw an opportunity to think a bit about herself.

Well, Saturday came and was a whirlwind of experiences for Molly as she tried to cope with the Yank's own peculiar way of talking. She soon got into the swing of things and realised that the main thing was to bring food quickly, and tell the Yanks that "No - you can't get a beer here." She had to adjust to the Yank way, even though she could not understand why the Yanks put tomato sauce on their meat sandwiches and their chips. Some of the soldiers still needed help in paying for their food. Pounds, shillings and pence seemed beyond ordinary comprehension to some Yanks who just held out a handful of coins for her to pick out the right amount. It was apparent that these servicemen had much more money than they were able to cope with.

There was not any time to talk to the Yanks except when taking orders or giving change, but it was obvious that some of them were well educated and were well versed in the social graces. Others, however, were crude in their conversations, and made it necessary for Molly to become adept at squirming away from a bit of pinch and tickle.

When the evening finally ended for Molly, she was tired from her physical and emotional experiences and fell into bed at home with a feeling of satisfaction about a job well done, and a bit of anticipation about her next session at the club.

Weeks later Molly had become used to the routine at the club, and even found time to talk to some of the Yanks as she served them. Some of the other girls at the club confessed that they had indeed gone out with the soldiers and found them to be quite delightful. Aside from the fact that money was never lacking, it was generally observed that the Yanks were sometimes polite to a fault. They were solicitous of their date's needs, and even helped them on the bus when the date was finished.

Molly had frequently served, and talked to, a young soldier who was involved with the entertainment of the troops and on the staff of a newspaper distributed to the soldiers. He seemed to be well read, and was able to talk about poetry and films with equal facility. He, like all the others, confessed to a "sort of" girlfriend back home, and a desire to take Molly on

a date. As long as the date did not involve meeting at the RC Club, this was acceptable according to the rules.

Finally Molly gave in and a date for a movie at the Wintergarden was arranged. It was with some trepidation that Molly prepared for an evening with Sergeant Charles Reinhard.

She had not had a date in a long time and in spite of her months of service at the ARC club, was not sure if she was up to the social challenge of meeting with a foreign man with God knows what demands he might make of her.

So Molly walked down to Town and met Charlie outside the Library and they walked over to the Wintergarden theatre where a Salvation Army band concert was in progress. The street was crowded with civilians and soldiers as all waited for it to become dark enough for the theatre to open.

The Wintergarden was the more elegant of the two main theatres in town, even though it was open to the air it was cooled by some strategically placed fans. Chips and milkshakes could be purchased in the lobby and seating in the stalls was for the most part reserved.

As the concert wound down and the crowd moved in to the theatre, Molly was glad to see many other girls she knew were also dating Americans.

Before she left the house that night she had cautioned her sister Pat to stay at home, and assured her Dad that the young man she was meeting was a good sort, and would do her no harm. Soon the lights dimmed, and everyone stood up to sing "God Save the King" before the newsreel started with war reports from all over the world.

The movie, "Springtime in the Rockies" was a new release from America, and engrossing enough that she hardly noticed when Charlie put his arm over the back of her seat. At first Molly tensed, and then she relaxed a bit, waiting for the arm to drop to her shoulder. She felt

a little shiver when this finally happened, and could not help a barely audible sigh of contentment at the warmth of his touch.

When interval came, it seemed quite natural that Charlie took her hand as they walked out to have a smoke, and when they returned, it was just as natural to accept his arm again around her shoulder.

All too soon the movie ended, and Molly found herself walking home arm in arm with Charlie. Their goodnight at the gate to Molly's house was punctuated by a kiss and embrace, and when Molly finally broke loose and went inside the house, she was grateful that the light outside had been so dim that Charlie could not see how flushed her face was. After a cup of tea Molly undressed and went to bed reflecting on her first date since coming to Rockhampton.

Technically, Molly was not a virgin, having had an encounter with a male student during her senior year in Brisbane. A group of students went, during a warm weekend evening, to a beach near the College, and had a bathe, a sing sing, and ended up the evening with a huge bon-fire. One pair after the other faded into the shadows, and Molly found herself left with a rather handsome young man that she hardly knew who had a very persuasive manner.

Caught up in the spirit of the evening, and occasional glimpses of other couples near her, Molly followed the lead of the young man and soon found herself in a situation where she had to either give in or flee.

She didn't flee, and then found out that sex was mildly pleasant even though she had none of the passion that she expected to have. When it was over, they both took a dip in the ocean and went back to the fire to join the other couples that were drifting back.

On the way back to the dormitories, the boys went in one group and the girls in another. The next morning Molly felt a vague disappointment that she had no pleasant memories of the night before, but rather a feeling that it had all happened to someone else.

Molly lay in bed after her date with Charlie and thought on the difference between the two dates. The first one had no anticipation and no warm feelings after, while the date with Charlie had left her with a physical and mental glow that seemed to persist even now when the evening was over. The warm glow lingered as she waited for sleep to come and she found herself wishing that he would ask her out again very soon.

Charlie did ask her the next time he came to the service club, and soon Molly found herself with a regular date at least once a week. She and Charlie went to dances and shows, and even to some events in the Army camp in the Botanical Gardens. Occasionally they would take her sister Pat along when her Dad felt well enough to be left alone. Her social life now became as important to her as her teaching job.

Molly became more conscious of the war effort, and kept up with the latest moves up north in New Guinea. She read the *Australasian* every week, and looked for names of units that she had heard mentioned in the Club. From the changes in soldiers coming to the Club, it was noticeable that troop movements were becoming more frequent, as more and more new equipment was seen on the roads outside of town.

Some of the girls who lived in North Rockhampton reported large warehouses being built near the railroad, and even the group that lived in the Gardens was taking up more and more space in town.

Civilian entertainers from the States held concerts in town, and the Public Baths had a huge spectacular water show that included many of the town girls as well as the servicemen. A popular band leader, Artie Shaw, held a street dance that drew audiences from as far away as Yepoon and Mt. Morgan. Because Charlie was involved in some way with each of these events, Molly was assured a good seat or vantage point at each affair.

Although their visit was not publicized in advance, General Mac Arthur and General Blamey made the townspeople aware that Rockhampton was a vital part of the war effort. When Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt visited the troops, everyone tried to get a glimpse of her as her motorcade wound its way around town.

Charlie was very busy during this period but did manage to see Molly frequently and give her an inside view of the various celebrities that came to town.

Molly was happy during these times; she had a fairly normal social life, and became aware that there was a bigger world than what she had seen only a year ago. She wanted desperately to join one of the Women's Service groups, but was listed as essential because of her teaching job, and was morally restrained because of her family responsibilities.

In New Guinea, Buna and Gona were finally secured, and the Kokoda Trail was cleared of the enemy, and soldiers from those campaigns were seen in the Service Club, and many of the regular troops were shipped north. It was obvious that Charlie's time in Rockhampton was limited.

Finally, one day word spread around the Service Club that the group from the Gardens was going to move out. The next week was marked by the Service Club girls and their families getting gifts of radios, stoves, and household items from the troops who were ordered to divest themselves of personal items.

There were a few tearful girls who were engaged to soldiers that now faced an uncertain future. The Chaplains office of the army was besieged from both sides with pleas for help that could not be answered.

Molly and Charlie parted with promises to write and vows of everlasting friendship. When Headquarters finally moved out there were few onlookers at the train depot, mainly because

of troop movements being secret operations, and also because the army was notorious for not keeping to a logical schedule in any of its moves.

Molly and the rest of the Red Cross volunteers were not very happy when they reported to the Service Club after I Corps Headquarters left. These men had been in Rockhampton since the Service Club opened, and had a great impact on the town and its people. The Gardens was not entirely deserted, a few men of a rear echelon still lived there, and the offices in town were still manned by a group of soldiers and officers who were scheduled to move out as soon as their duties in Rockhampton were finished.

The huge camp in North Rockhampton had been emptied of most of the troops, and were slowly being replaced by soldiers from the north who needed rest and recuperation. More and more Australian soldiers were seen in town, which changed the tone of the Service Club. The Australian soldiers had very little money compared to the Yanks, and had a less liberal leave policy than the Americans.

Molly and the other girls received letters from the forward areas which indicated that there was little chance of the Yanks coming back to Rockhampton again except for medical reasons. Wartime restrictions continued in force and gradually Rockhampton settled back into being the small town it was before the soldiers came.

Pat, Molly's sister, turned 18, and was now insistent that she be allowed more freedom in her social life. Molly's Father was doing poorly and required more and more of Molly's time. News from the battle zone was good, and more civilian goods were being earmarked for the increasing number of troops in the combat zone. Service troops, rather than combat troops were now seen more frequently in the Service Club and there were even some empty rooms available in the Criterion Hotel. The Air Raid shelter in town fell into disrepair as their only use now was a receptacle for empty bottles and cans.

All hope of joining one of the Women's services was lost to Molly as her father's condition deteriorated and Pat was available less and less to help with household chores. Molly's social life diminished as her sister's increased, and she spent more time keeping track of war news and affairs of the Grammar School.

On her 24th Birthday Molly despaired of ever again recapturing the lively feeling she had when the American troops first came to town. For a brief time she had left the monotony of her home life and became a young person again. She had felt a part of the war because of her association with Charlie and his friends, and missed the intellectual give and take that pervaded the men of the I Corps Headquarters. She had never been in Joe Fleets Pub, but she knew all about Joe and his barmaid Nessie from listening to Charlie and his friends talking.

She and Charlie had never been serious in their relationship, a fact that she regretted now that he was gone. He had brought to her a sense of excitement that would always remain with her in the years to come. She saw no future for herself except as an old-maid school marm, having secret dreams and desires that would never materialize. For the next year she worried equally about her father and her sister.

One night Pat brought home a recuperating soldier from Melbourne who had served on the Kokoda Trail and the battle for Gona. He was always talking about going back to the sheep station he worked on before the war. He, like Pat had never gone beyond Grammar school, and, although a good-hearted sort, had no interest in any of the finer things of life. Her father was failing rapidly and she was in constant conflict with Pat over sharing his care.

The War with Germany ended, and the Allied troops were moving further away from Australia as they drove toward Japan.

Charlie's letters became less frequent, and finally just stopped.

Shortly after the Atom bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered, Molly's father died. She and Pat were left the house on Campbell St., and several small insurance policies that amounted to a little over a thousand pounds. Molly continued her work at the Grammar school, and Pat announced that her boyfriend proposed marriage as soon as he was demobilized.

Pat was adamant, and insisted that this was the right thing to do. Her fiance, Mick, would get a pension as a result of his wound from the Gona campaign, and Mick had a job waiting for him back in Melbourne. A quiet wedding was planned at the Methodist Church, and letters sent back and forth between Mick's parents and Molly.

In the spring of 1946 Mick was demobilized and shortly after, he and Pat were married in a quiet ceremony. Molly ended up alone in the house, and for the first time since her mother died, free of any responsibilities except to herself. She had given Pat most of the money they inherited as a sort of dowry, and assured Pat that as soon as she was able she would travel to Melbourne to visit.

With the return of the demobilised servicemen, housing was in short supply, and Molly received many offers to rent her house if ever it was available. She was beginning to become bored with her job at the Grammar School, and felt a vague longing to recapture some of the excitement she had felt when the Americans were in town.

One day the Headmaster mentioned to her that the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) was going to start up some new schools in New Guinea, and was looking for qualified teachers to staff them. The terms of employment were quite liberal, and relocation expenses were offered for those signing a three year contract.

With some trepidation, Molly applied and attached a strong recommendation from the Headmaster who knew that she was seeking a change from her past way of life. Her

application was received favorably, and an offer was made for her to teach English on the secondary level at a newly opened school in Port Moresby.

Because of the military priorities on travel, air transport was out of question, and travel by sea was the only option open. Molly accepted the offer, and went on with plans to close out her connection with Rockhampton. She was assured that housing would be available in Moresby, and that a generous amount of personal belongings could be taken with her.

She rented her house, and arranged for a shipper to pack her belongings and get them to Townsville to meet a coastal steamer that would bring Molly to New Guinea.

She was advised by the Headmaster to procure a supply of reference books and personal supplies that would not be attainable in Moresby. The Church supplied her with the names of missionaries in that area, and the hospital put together a basic medical kit for her to take along.

Various returned servicemen advised her on clothing to wear, and it soon became almost a community project to get her ready for her new job. An army officer gave her several military manuals including a recently published dictionary of the Pidgin language.

Molly had never been as far north as Townsville, and had never been on a sea journey. The train ride to Townsville was long and hot, and when she finally arrived at the station she was glad to have some tea before searching for her Burns and Philip ship at the commercial wharf. Following the directions of the waitress in the snack bar, she soon found the *Madang Princess*, and made her way aboard.

During the war the ship had been used as both a troop transport and a cargo liner, but had recently been refurbished with a bright paint job and redecorating of the dozen passenger cabins and common rooms. Because she was a woman, the purser assigned her to a small cabin adjacent to the dining room on the upper deck.

After storing away her baggage and washing the grime of the train from her face, Molly went down to the main deck to find out if her larger crates had been delivered as promised by the shipping agent. She then took a walk around the deck, being careful not to get in the way of the seamen who were still loading cargo in preparation for an early morning departure.

At an informal buffet supper that night she met some of her fellow passengers and found that several of them were also headed for positions with the Colonial administration. It was quite warm in the dining room, so after eating she went out on the deck to watch the seamen, now working under floodlights, secure the hatch covers and get ready for casting off at high tide early the next morning.

When the deck lights were finally extinguished she looked up at the sky and saw countless bright stars that seemed to be very near. Finally, her busy day caught up with her and she went back to her cabin, cracked open the porthole, and settled down for some much needed sleep.

Now, she thought, the adventure was started!

For the next four days before landing in Port Moresby, she had no responsibilities except to enjoy herself. It was possible, she thought, that this was the same type of ship that the Charlie had sailed on when he was shipped out.

She wondered, "What ever happened to Charlie Reinhard?"

He had written to her after landing in the Islands about a storm that tossed the ship about like a cork, and confessed that he and many of his friends had become seasick. She hoped that it would not happen to her and spoil her chance to fully enjoy her first sea voyage.

Finally she dropped off into a deep sleep that lasted until the noise of the engines starting and the calls of the crew members as they cast off the lines to the wharf awakened her.

She got up, quickly dressed and went out to see what was happening. The ship was slowly drawing away from the wharf in the dim light of the early morning sky, and a rush of cool air enveloped her as she leaned on the rail for a better view. The ship was passing other ships anchored in the harbor, and making her way between two large islands almost straight ahead. As soon as she passed the islands, the water became less smooth, and the bow of the ship threw up a wave on either side that sparkled when the rising sun hit it.

The steward passed by and announced that breakfast was being served, and Molly reluctantly left her post at the rail to go into the dining room. Three other passengers were there for early breakfast; two were commercial travelers and one was a man going to an administrative job with the Colonial Government. Molly finished her breakfast quickly, and went back to her cabin to look for a map of the area that showed both Australia and New Guinea. Out on deck again, she looked up at the cloudless sky and the now deep blue water sparkling from the morning sun slanting across it. She drew deep breaths of the clean, cool air, and felt the warmth of the sun bathing her face.

The ship was now in the Whitsunday Passage through the Barrier Reef, and heading into the Coral Sea. As they sailed away from land, the ship started a slow rolling motion caused by the heavy swells of the deeper water. Sea birds were becoming less and less frequent and few clouds were visible on the horizon.

Looking back to the stern of the ship Molly could see the curve of the wake as the *Madang Princess* turned north-west heading for New Guinea. The steward found a deck chair for her and she settled down with her map and her books to learn as much as she could about the land she was going to.

There was very little up-to-date information, as wartime restrictions prevented publishing much information about current conditions on the island. She knew that Port Moresby had been the major base for military operations, and that it had been relatively untouched by bombing raids and enemy attack. There had been many pictures of Port Moresby in the *Australasian* magazine, and in the daily papers, so she could guess that it was a very large and well populated town.

When the noon meal was called, Molly met two couples who were going to join one of the missions on the North Coast. Both of the women had been teachers, and one had lost a son in the fighting at Lae.

The other couple had left their small station in the outback when their son returned from the war with a new bride. They turned the station over to the young couple and went into training to become missionary workers for the Methodist Church.

None of the group except one of the commercial travelers had any experience with New Guinea, and all wondered how it would be to live with the "boongs". The commercial traveler only dealt with planters and traders, and all had lived under the Australian Exclusionary Act so that their contact with blacks was only through the aborigines who mostly lived in the outback.

There were not many *Abos* in Rockhampton, and the ones that Molly did see were a somewhat scruffy lot. Generally they were dressed in tatters of clothing, and were viewed with suspicion by the shopkeepers.

There had been many pictures of the New Guinea natives in papers and magazines during the war, and they were generally depicted as fierce looking primitive men in loin cloths, usually without shoes or shirts. The women were either bare-breasted or dressed in a sort of shawl draped over one shoulder. Children were naked and always carried by their mothers.

Returning soldiers in Rockhampton all were of the opinion that the natives all smelled either from lack of cleanliness or something in their diet. Molly hoped that living near them and teaching them would not be too unpleasant an experience, but she mentally steeled herself to not be too affected by their close proximity. She wondered what conferences with parents of her students would be like, and whether she would ever have to visit any of their primitive homes.

After lunch Molly resumed her place on deck and continued her reading and relaxing to the slow roll of the ship. The crew of the ship included some black fellows that had the fuzzy-wuzzy hair that was described in stories and pictures of the carriers along the Kokoda Track. The rest of the crew appeared to be Dutch and Australian, while the Captain was typically English.

The rest of the voyage was delightfully pleasant with sunny days and balmy breezes. They spotted a whale sounding one day, and several small coastal steamers coming from the north the next. In the evening of the last day at sea before they landed, the captain had a reception for the passengers, and spent most of his time answering questions about the Island. He assured them that there was an adequate hotel in Moresby, and that the Administration offices were in a "quite civilised" area.

The next morning Molly was up early and after breakfast packed her valises and went out on deck to get a first glimpse of land. Finally the peaks of the Owen Stanley Range and its cloud cover was visible, and about an hour later, the entrance to Fairfax Harbor came into view.

Here it finally was: New Guinea!

A Harbor pilot was taken aboard and guided the ship at slow speed towards the wharf area. There were many other ships in the harbor, Army, navy, and merchant shipping lay at anchor and small boats darted back and forth among them.

A tug came out and helped the Madang Princess get to her spot at the main wharf, and with much whistle blowing and signaling, was finally moored to the dock. The Purser assured Molly that her shipping crates would be delivered to the custody of the shipping agent and would probably be sent to a warehouse for storage till she picked them up.

Port Officers came aboard and checked the manifests and the passenger lists, and a doctor met with the passengers in the dining room to assure himself that there were no contagious diseases aboard. A Custom official checked passports and then everyone was declared to be free to disembark.

As she walked down the gangway to the dock she saw hordes of soldiers, sailors and civilians mixed in with natives all watching to see who came off the ship. One of the civilians came up to her and identified himself as a member of the Colonial government and welcomed her to Port Moresby.