

ROY SAVAGE

INTERVIEWED JAN 1984 BY D.J. RUNNACLES.

When I was born we were living in the railway house just over the road from the Railway Hotel. It was the only house owned by the railway's and it had the railway station just behind the house. My father was a ganger for the railway's. I'm not sure whether I was born in Nelson Hospital or at home.

I was married in 1931. Our first home was in Appleby where we lived for a little while. Then we moved to Richmond and we've been here ever since. I was earning about £2 10s. per week working on an orchard at Redwood's Valley. Archie Brown owned the orchard which was later owned by his son Don Brown. Archie's father owned another orchard nearby that is now owned by McLiskies.

The church that our family went to was the Old Church of Christ in Queen Street. The Farmers use is now as a seed store. We used to go every week.

I went to Richmond School. On Friday afternoons we had the choice of gardening in our little plots at school, (about 1 metre wide by 3 metres long,) or going down to the bowling green and weeding the lawns. At the bowling green work they

So we, (Roy plus Les Wells and a few others,) chose the six-pence. At school we grew carrots and red-beet and what have you. The kids took the vegetables home.

I had a newspaper run from the Henley Store for Lusty's at first and later for Newports. Mrs Frank Lusty ran the papers side of it. I was about the only paper boy. There weren't many houses along Hill Street so I didn't come up this far. There were only Brights and Suttons and a couple of other houses up Hill Street and I think they used to get papers dropped off at the corner of Champions Road and then take turns picking them up. I used to go along Gladstone Road up to about the Hume Pipe Co., not quite to the Three Brothers corner, then back along Gladstone Road then down Queen Street to about Headingly Lane. I think it was just down to Best's, i.e. just before Headingly Lane as there were not many houses from there. It was mostly just farms the same as in Hill Street.

Then it was back again and up the hill to Hillcrest and back to the store. But in the morning when I did the milk round we covered the whole area. Mr Sanford started off with a horse and cart and later got a Harley Davidson and sidecar. Those were great days on the Harley. Of course in those days

there were no bottles. We had to ladle the milk out. It was a lot of fun. They were busy days but they had to be. I was the 11th of 13 brothers and sisters. Six of us boys (Ken, Morrie, Ern, Herbert, Oscar and Roy,) and 7 girls, 2 of whom were younger than myself ~~and Roy~~. (One of the brothers was wounded in World War I.)

I remember the annual blackberry picnic to Glenhope where they had lunch and then returned to the train.

On the weekends I used to play cricket in the summer and football in the winter. About the only other place there were any social events of a night time was the pictures which were held in the old catholic place in Oxford Street. The Odd-fellows Hall they called it. They played films there for years. For a while it was 2 nights a week, Saturday and one week day night, Tuesday or Thursday, I'm not sure which. They also used to have dances and concerts there. Old Billy Gibbs who used to drive the hearse for Wilkes, used to run it.

(Mrs Savage used to walk about 2½ miles to get to the pictures on Saturdays.)

On Sundays we went to Sunday School in the morning and in the afternoon we used to go out. We didn't go to Rabbit Island much because in those days there was no real road and you had to watch out for the tide. Sometimes you would get caught by the tide. Once we were caught by the tide and our rugs and picnic baskets were swept away in the water. It took quite a long time to get there too.

There was the old swimming hole down the end of the Beach Road with a raised duck walk about 20 metres long with a changing shed at the end. The swimming hole had a wooden fence around it.

The only fishing I used to do was when I rowed out to Rabbit Island with a friend and ran round the beach early in the day before the sun came up to see if we could find any 'frost fish' as we called them, also called 'ribbon fish.'

We'd go over Saturday evening and check the beach on Sunday morning. The fish were lovely to eat. They were about two metres long and lying on the beach they looked like aluminium which is how they got their name, glistening like the frost. You had to get them before the sun came up or

the seagulls would make a mess of them. They came up on the tide and got stranded. So we had to run round the whole beach, 7 miles, early before the gulls got them.

To eat they were like salmon, beautiful. If the pubs knew that you had one or two frost fish they'd be after you flat-out to get some. But the gulls usually beat you.

They were hard to get. You'd only find them once or twice in a year. Sometimes we'd do a bit of line fishing while we were over there.

I was in the boat trade after I left school. I had the little shop (near Farmers) that is now a craft shop. I was there for 5 or 6 years and then I got the job on the orchard. I worked in the boot trade until I was about 20 (1927) and then worked on the orchard until I went to 'camp.' And then when I came out of there I more or less went to Bairds as a buyer at their fruit and produce place for about 30 years.

I got called up for the 2nd World War. I was married at the time. I was called up for the Home Defence Unit. I was down at the aerodrome. We were manning Lewis guns in the

in the aerodrome defence unit. They wouldn't work. We took them on the range a couple of times and after firing a couple of rounds they used to jam up so they wouldn't have been much good in an attack.

We had to stay in dugouts around the aerodrome at night, manning the Lewis guns that were set up on tripods. We worked in pairs and had to stay all night. We had pits with Lewis guns all the way round the perimeter in case the Japanese came. Huddled there, hoping an officer wouldn't come around. There were 4 or 5 pits around the airport but they wouldn't have been any use because of the inefficiency of the Lewis guns which were never any good. It was just a waste of time and money really. But that's one of those things really isn't it.

While Mr Savage was at the airport on Home Defence duty there was a spectacular mishap.

The commanding officer at the airport, Ike Cowens, was up in the aeroplane and the lads on the bofars gun were aiming at it for their target practise. They didn't usually use any shells at all, not even blanks.

One chap called out the elevation and range etc. and the fellows on the guns aimed the bofars or ack-ack guns at the plane. It was just practise at getting the aircraft in the sights really. All hell broke loose when the gun fired live rounds and tracers and all went streaming up into the air in the direction of the plane and the commanding officer. They missed the plane and one of the shells landed in the Wilkes yard in Richmond. Fortunately no-one was injured.

There had been a new fellow on the gun at the time, but it was the sargeant in charge who really got into trouble. Ike Cowens was furious.

After we left the airport when they'd decided it was no good as a defence, we moved out to Richmond Park where there was a mounted group encamped. One patrol every week went over to Rabbit Island and patrolled there. The men called that their 'overseas service!' This was the Home Defence Unit again. So they were taking the idea of invasion very seriously I suppose.

We weren't mounted. We were just marking time really. Then we were moved to 'the delta' near Renwicktown, Blenheim,

and then up to Papakura into an artillery unit. I was all prepared to go overseas, with the overseas kit issue and all, and the night before I was due to leave N.Z., I was called up to the orderlies office and told to report to Auckland Hospital and to hand my kit back in.

I had Conjunctivitis and they said that if I went with the troops up into the Islands where we were going, I would have gone sick in no time flat because of the heat. So my trip was gone.

'The Delta' was the name of the camp on the highway from Renwicktown to the lake. It was the name of the area there. They had an airbase as well as three army camps all within a few miles of each other. They played manoeuvres together.

When I was on the orchard I did general work, pruning, spraying etc. I stayed on the one orchard belonging to Archie Brown in Redwoods Valley. We used Bordeaux and Lime Sulphur sprays. We made our own Bordeaux with bluestone and lime, but we bought the lime sulphur spray in four gallon drums.



We didn't have tractors until the last 3 or 4 years, i.e. just before W.W.II, by which time I was also working as a share milker in Swamp Road. Before that we only had horses on the orchard.

We didn't have them on Archie's place earlier but his father had a caterpillar tractor. We used to drag the sprayer around with the horses. The sprayer was powered by an independent free-standing petrol motor. It worked adequately, though not brilliantly, spraying one tree at a time.

Afterwards we put pipes for spraying through the orchard driven by a stationary diesel motor in the shed. The big holes in the ground where we stored the water stayed there for many years. We put in pipes half a metre underground all through the orchard and then attached the hose and spray gun to the pipes; spraying 18 trees from each place.

We dug all the trenches for those by hand which was hard work through the clay soil. Of course the land rises and falls, so in the depressions we had to cut and sharpen Y-shaped stakes to peg the pipe down and stop it from springing back up into the air. It was killing work.

The spraying was hard work too. The hose kept catching up on trees as you walked out at an angle to the farthest tree; did another 9 trees and then came back to the tap and dragged the hose out the other side; do those 9 trees then back to the tap, undo the hose and go and attach it to the next tap on the pipes. It was hard work especially in the height of summer.

If the pump got some dirt in it you then had to go up to the shed and clean the pipe out. Sometimes by the time you got back to the spray outfit it was blocked up again.

It was also very expensive as each morning the spray in the pipes overnight had gone black and had to be pumped out as waste.

The Bordeaux and lime sulphur weren't very dangerous to humans unless you had knocked any skin off. If you had done so and had an open sore, then the lime sulphur would eat into it. Neither of these sprays were anywhere near as dangerous as the modern sprays but applying them was certainly a lot more work!

The underground pipe idea was very popular for a while and the pipes were installed on many orchards. But using the system showed up far too many weaknesses and inefficiencies. I don't know where they got the idea from but it was quite a general practice. Some of the farmers used other ways - e.g. Archie Brown's father had the spray set up on the back of his crawler tractor so he never bothered with the pipes.

The working days were long then. Unfortunately there was no such thing as a 40 hour week in those days.

I batched for a while but when I got married I used to bike to and from work on the gravel roads. We got a car in the later stages but that was after quite a few years.

There weren't many places to go for recreation in those days; unlike today. There was Jubilee Park of course, but it was pretty rough in those days. The Waimea Football Club was alongside it as it is now.

I remember old Harry Atmore. He was always a bit of a communist and I remember the chap Hunter who used to be in charge of the Alexander Home. He was always a National Party

supporter, or the Reform Party as it was then; and he made a standing offer to Harry Atmore at all the political meetings that Mr Hunter attended, of a one-way ticket to Russia. But he'd never accept. That was his stock phrase - a one-way ticket to Russia.

Harry Atmore was the independent member for Nelson and so he was in Richmond fairly often, because of course Richmond was a part of the Nelson Electorate.

I suppose the most celebrated Doctor of the time was Dr. Washbourne. He was a local identity. He imported the first pedigree bull here from the Jersey Islands. "Remarkable" it was called. The jersey milk was the richest, although the Holstein or Friesians produced more milk. The Hammonds brought in the Friesian cattle. A lot of people crossed them; well they had to really to meet the standard for the town milk supply otherwise there wasn't enough butterfat content. Roly Hammond had to do this to get it up to standard. His father, I think his name was Walter, was the one who started with the Friesians. He used to live down by the showgrounds.

There have been a lot of characters in Richmond over the

years, round about the place in the older days there. There was old Mr Crisp, a tailor, he came out from England.

Reg Proust, he looked after Dr. Washbourne's dairy herd in the old days. He was a real character.

Then there was a joker Lang, who used to run the egg circle. They'd take all their eggs in there from the farms and he'd buy them and then distribute them. The sort of thing that developed into the dairy board.

W R May had the dairy factory across the road from his shop where they made cheese and bacon.

Croucher's flour mills was called Phoenix Flour Mills in those days. It was a big three-storeyed place. Did you ever see a picture of the big wire running from the flour mill to the baker's shop at the front? They used to bring all the flour over on the wheels along the wire. Like a flying fox from the top storey of the flour mill down into the baker's shop.

The baker they had there at the time I remember started Warren's Garage (next to Richmond drapery); Jack Warren. He opened up a bike shop and he gradually worked up to the benzene pumps and then the garage. He ran the bike shop at the same time as being a baker.

I was on the orchard at the time of the Murchison earthquake. I was digging round some trees and I thought I must have caught it under the root. Then I heard a whoosh over in 'Allendale' That was the water in the concrete tank sloshing. It was then that I realised what was happening.

Bobby Ellis had a one cylinder Cadillac. He was into all those sorts of machinery which my brother bought off him and put a tray on the back when he went into business for himself as a carpenter. He had worked for Wilkes, doing his apprenticeship there. Before he left he was doing their finishing work on the houses they built. I think he was the only free-lancer in the early days.

Bobby Ellis came down from up Kohatu. He had had a water wheel electricity generation plant up there in his house. It was just for the electricity in his own house.

It stayed there for many years. My sister lived on the farm there sometime after him and it was still there then. The water wheel was still there with the old race. After that Bobby Ellis came down to just opposite the Dairy Factory at Brightwater.

The father of the chap on the corner up here worked with Ellis; Fred Williams, His son is the engineer down at the freezing works and he's fire chief now, as his father Fred was fire chief in his day.

The only other old cars I can remember was the one that Mr Peppin had. He was way up on the hill at the back near the nursing home, (upper end of Queen Street.)

In the old days when I was 16 or 17, the All Blacks were away on tour. We used to go down to the old Post Office in the morning at about 10 and they would put the score up on a blackboard.