

The war years, 1939–46



he roots of World War II were in World War I. Germany's unwillingness to accept the terms imposed on it by the victors in 1919 combined with irresistible social forces sweeping the world, particularly Europe, after the Russian Revolution to lead inexorably to further conflict.

On 3 September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, told the Commonwealth Parliament that "as a result, Australia is also at war" and announced that a volunteer division of 20,000 men would be established immediately and a 78,000-strong militia would begin training. Late that year the 6th Division of the Second Australian Imperial Force steamed out of Sydney Harbour on its way to Palestine, where it would train before proceeding to France.

RL, not to mention many of his former fellow combatants in the earlier conflict, must have viewed these events with a growing sense of *déjà vu* and some foreboding. Not only had he been through this kind of thing before, but he must also have been keenly aware of the effects of total war on local economies. But though the war was to change significantly the way CM developed, its effects were not all bad.

One of its first impacts came in the form of prompt legislation to govern both imports and exports. Controls were imposed on the movement of hides and leather, putting the nation's needs ahead of the company's. Nevertheless, CM was to maintain its exports of leather to the UK throughout the war. Another of CM's export products affected by the war was tallow, which became a controlled commodity because the glycerine extracted from it in the soap manufacturing process was used in nitroglycerine, an explosive.

And, of course, there was the war's impact on company staff. Among the first to volunteer for military service was Ross Easdown, who joined the militia before hostilities broke out. Subsequently, a gradual exodus of men of military age was to result in the company being staffed predominantly by women by the end of the war.

Through 1939, CM had been continuing its course of growth and progress. In August it had moved from the third floor of 29 Reiby

Place to premises on the sixth floor that had been a wool broker's office and smelt like a shearing shed for months afterwards. Despite the smell, however, the company was to remain there for almost 20 years. On 23 July Jack Mobbs had left the staff of CM's auditors, C.W. Stirling & Co., to become secretary of Craig Mostyn & Growers Packing Co. Pty Ltd. At the end of October, another of George Craig's sons, Gordon Wilson Craig, joined the company straight from school. And in mid-November Joan Hann came aboard – and would stay for 18 years. Perhaps as a sign of its optimism in the face of the gathering storm, the company extended its "Buck-jumper" trademark to cover foodstuffs on 9 November.

George Craig's sudden death from a heart attack at the age of 41 on 6 January 1940 brought to an end the company's founding partnership. Bob Harrison was on holiday at his family's property at the time and was helping to load vegetables onto a truck when Burt Lawson's father arrived, having hurried down the hill from the Lawson property. To say that Harrison and Craig had never seen eye to eye was probably an understatement; in fact Harrison had disliked him so much that he had decided not to return to CM after his holidays.

"You must go back," Lawson Sr told him that day. "Craig has just died."

"Is that right?" Harrison replied.

It didn't take him long to make up his mind to go back.

RL moved quickly to plug any gaps created by his partner's demise. He bought out Craig's share of the partnership and took over his larger office. On 8 January he had Craig Mostyn & Co.'s registered particulars changed under the Business Names Act of 1934 to make it a sole-trader business. The single sentence on the official statement of change said simply: "On 6th January, 1940, George McKenzie Craig died and the business will from now on be carried on by Robert Long Mostyn solely." The document was signed in the presence of Edward Jacobs, JP.

After Craig's death, Bob Harrison became shipping clerk under Peter Wing, who was becoming more involved in the tannery business, which RL was gradually handing over to him. George Craig Jr was also handling tanneries and eventually married an heiress to the Bailey tanning enterprise. At about that time Harrison heard of a plan to send him to South Australia to become CM's man in Adelaide, initially working out of the offices of T. Paltridge and Sons. Lee Paltridge, who could see that the move would eventually lead to loss of business for his company, was understandably reluctant and put up a number of objections, among them that Harrison was too young and inexperienced and that he would be called up.