

## Jack Trevallon Mathewson

My memories of my Great Uncle Jack were limited. I remember meeting him at a family gathering when I was about twelve years of age. I remember this man with intense blue eyes who took an immediate interest in a kid who would much have preferred to be somewhere else. As all the adults were off talking adult stuff Uncle Jack made the time to talk to me – not just talk but to make me feel as if I were the only one that mattered at that very moment. He was very interested in my cricket and wanted to know all about me and how I was going with it. I told him I'd made 25 runs for the season. (I wasn't much of a cricketer!) He mistakenly thought I meant that was my average score! I was in no hurry to correct him.

As a young boy growing up, my grandfather (Jack's brother) often stayed with our family for extended periods of time as he had no house of his own in which to live. Firstly, my Auntie Nancy in Annerley cared for him for many years after his wife died during the war years. He was a travelling salesman and often was away all over rural Queensland for extended periods of time. He played 'A' grade tennis into his 70's and had what was called a *killer instinct*. He was quite crippled up with arthritis, which forced him to retire from work and tennis. He then moved in with my Uncle Keith in Khartoum Street, Annerley and later, Broadbeach, at the Gold Coast and finally, I guess it was our turn. He was a difficult man but may have suffered an inferiority problem over the fact that he had failed in his haberdashery business in the city, while his older brother was a well renowned Brisbane doctor and his younger brother was a much-loved adventurer and missionary. Whenever the subject of Uncle Jack came up he was always proud to relate the story of how he had discovered Jack under his parent's house in the act of hanging himself. He recounted how he had cut him down and saved his life. I am not sure if this event occurred after the war or during Jack's teenage years. My memory tends to go with the latter.

Jack was born in Brisbane on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 1891. He lived in Caligule, 18 Aldridge Street, Auchenflower. He went to Petrie Terrace Primary School and later the Normal School (Later State High) He left school and worked in his Father's photographic business for around ten years. Thomas Mathewson was regarded as the *Father of Photography* in Queensland and travelled extensively within our state. *Mathewson and Co* photographers were leaders in this field and were responsible for training and equipping most of Queensland's early photographers. Jack would have learned the intricacies of the trade from his father.

During this time, Jack's main focus was centred around his faith in God. God was very real to him. He was very committed to activities associated with the Milton Congregational Church, particularly anything to do with youth.

He had an adventurous spirit and rode his Douglas motor-cycle fast and with little fear, often with his dog 'Digger' on the back.

Jack lived with his parents until he joined the AIF on the 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1916, aged 25. He arrived in England in April, 1917. He joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, Australian Flying Corps and trained mainly at Wendover in the U.K. He was sent to France in March, 1918 and then onto Belgium at Bailleul and Abeele. (which he hated according Harold Edwards) He was then moved to France. Firstly, to Poulainville and then to Bertangles, Villiers Bocage, Glisy, Proyard and Bouvincourt (Somme). As the front line moved, so did they. They remained about 8 to 10 miles behind the front lines and, as the line moved, so did they.

During this time he met up with two mates who remained close friends throughout the war, Harold Edwards and Jack Alexander. They went to church together at St Mary's Church, Ayelsbury Town 5

miles from Wendover. Talking with Harold (100 years old at the time) at Victoria Point, shortly before his death, he relayed that all three had a firm Christian faith. They read the Bible together and prayed. *'Every morning and evening they knelt to pray in a barracks full of 20 -30 men.'* What courage that must have taken! Harold went on, *'Jack didn't hesitate to show his love for the Lord,'* and that *'...he was never afraid to mention the Lord.'* The first time, Harold saw Jack he was serving behind the counter of a canteen during his off-duty time. Harold stated that he, *'...liked the way he did things, liked the look of him and felt he would like him as a friend.'* That friendship grew into what Harold likened to, *'... David and Jonathan of Biblical history.'*

Harold was an instrument fitter and a watchmaker by trade, but sometimes, due to lack of work, was given other tasks like the guarding of the Red Baron's plane and body after he was shot down over Australian lines at Hamel. I don't think he did a very good job as the plane was stripped quite quickly and even the Red Baron's flying boots were souvenired! In discussion with Harold, he pointed out a chronometer on his shelf that he had mounted from the red wood of a propeller. *'That was the Red Baron's,'* he mentioned in passing! I'd like to know where it is now.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron was a reconnaissance group responsible for taking aerial photographs of the German defences, especially their big guns. The Australian forces, under Monash (based at Bertangles) were in the vanguard of the attacks through Villers-Brettoneaux, Hamel, the Battle of Amiens, Peronne, Mont St Quentin and finally, the Hindenburg Line. Jack was involved with around eight others in the processing of photographs taken by the crew of the R8s. Their job was to piece together a series of photographs into a giant mosaic of the battlefields. They had to draw on circles to give distances from an identifiable centre point. The planes also helped direct fire onto exact locations as the battle progressed.

By 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918, the war was over. Their unit was moved to Belgium. After various leaves in Brussels, Paris and the Riviera they were on their way home. They returned on the *Kaiser a Hinde*, arriving back in Australia on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1919.

He returned to his Father's photographic studio after the war. A collection of photographs, no doubt developed by Jack, were displayed in the Mathewson studio in Brisbane during July, 1919. These photos included Bullecourt, Hamel, Peronne, Mont St Quentin and the Hindenburg Line, all battlefields where Monash and his Australian troops were at the vanguard of every battle. Monash used these aerial photographs to model massive sand replicas of the battle fields and were instrumental in his coordinated attacks of tank, aircraft, artillery and of course, men.

After persevering in the studio for a few years he obeyed the call of God and in 1922 enrolled at the Melbourne Bible Institute with the idea of going on the mission field. Jack was part of the *Push For 200* a program to enlist 200 young men to serve as missionaries in China. Upon completion of his studies, he was accepted by the China Inland Mission and left Australia in October, 1923, for Shanghai.

He did language studies for six months in a school near Anking (Anchung). He had come to China in troubled times, politically as civil war loomed between the nationalist and the communists. Europeans were universally under suspicion because of western imperialism. Hatred of foreigners and anti-western feeling was simmering during this time and provided a backdrop that would later launch Jack on his incredible journey across Tibet.

Jack remained within this walled compound of two to three acres. He didn't like language study very much and I assume he wasn't an avid student. He seemed much more a man of action and keen to

get on with the real job of his calling. There were students from Australia, the U.S.A., Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland and Scotland.

Part of the program was also time devoted to sport. As a Mathewson, I think Jack would have been much more keen on this aspect of study! He was noted as a *'vigorous basketball player'*. The real purpose of this activity was to allow the college's overseers to assess their students' attitudes, temperaments and reactions under pressure.

D.E. Hoste, one of the *Cambridge Seven*, made the recommendations and placements where the students would be sent and soon Jack was on his way to be part of a pioneering work in Sining Fu (Xining) in the province of Kansu, on the north-western frontier of China. This location was very near the Tibetan border. He journeyed on a fine train, the Pekin Blue Express to Nanking and then to Kaifung. The further west he travelled the worse the transport became. From trains with open wagons to horse drawn carts, to mule carts, rickshaws and then donkeys and finally, as Jack states, *two legged donkeys*, referring to themselves! The journey stopped each night in an inn where he got a chance to observe life in China, close at hand. He was continually enthralled with the visions he was observing each day, of landscapes, flowers, religious worship, agriculture and habitations, which were all so different to colonial Brisbane. Above all was Jack's passionate interest in the people he was meeting and the lives they were living.

Finally, the journey was completed as he reached the destination where he was to serve as a missionary. He had to live on his own amongst the Chinese people for six to seven months to force him to develop his basic language skills. He was under a senior missionary's guidance and supervision during this time.

Jack was taken to task by Hudson Taylor Howard, (the son of the founder of the C.I.M.) who carried on his father's work. His wife was particularly upset by Jack doing his own thing and, *'not following the rules.'* Unfortunately, this tends to be a family trait! The Mathewson family motto on our official crest is, *Fac et Spera* which means *Do and Hope*. Maybe he was in trouble for what many of us in the Mathewson clan are guilty of, taking the initiative and doing something that needs to be done and then seeking permission afterwards! Doing things 'by the book' is just not the Mathewson way!

Ernest Mansfield, a fellow missionary who served in China with Jack described him as being , *Unorthodox. He didn't need a pulpit to preach. He was unfettered by what we think is necessary. He shone when speaking one to one. He didn't fit the mould and wasn't a team player. He was bored with the day-to-day grind of life. He had a sense of fun and enjoyed the moment. He had a warm, friendly personality. He was outgoing. Children in particular were attracted to him. They were drawn to him. He was outgoing, open, with a friendly smile, and was noted for his love of youth and young people.*

He served under a Mr and Mrs Learner who were the missionaries in charge in Sining Fu. Jack retells the story of the time the Learners took two weeks' leave and left him in charge of the mission. *Beyond a set of dental instruments that I had brought with me, I could lay no claims to being a dentist and the very morning of their departure, I had my first victim. Poor chap! I don't suppose you heard his groans but I certainly gave him something to groan about. The next time I pull my first tooth I'm not going to attempt 'an old veteran' fastened hard and fast into a man's head. But I didn't let go, except for ten minutes or so, to give the man a rest and finally out came the old tusk. This first success brought me immediate and unsought for notoriety and I'd scarcely laid down the implements of war when there was another caller looking for trouble. Fortunately, for the man, this tooth almost*

*stepped out at the sight of the instrument and I found my fame established, for this man had brought his friends and relations with him to see the performance.*

Besides basic dental work, Jack took part on a variety of medical treatments including stabbing wounds and poisonings. He was appalled by some of the things he saw including the suicides of many Chinese young women, the abject poverty of the people, the physical torture of foot binding and child slavery and abuse. Despite this, his persistent cheerfulness and deep trust in a mighty God saw him through many of these distressing experiences and gave him the opportunity to share his deep and personal love of his saviour.

In April 1927, a telegram from the British authorities ordered all representatives of foreign countries in China to leave the country immediately. That meant that they had to make their way to a coastal port such as Shanghai so as to board a ship to leave the country. Unfortunately, for this group of missionaries on the Tibetan frontier, that was impossible.

It was at this very moment that Jack was given the opportunity to join a German explorer and scientist, Dr Wilhelm Filchner who was continuing his journey through Asia. Filchner was a noted German explorer who had gone on journeys of exploration through central Asia (Tajikistan), to Tibet and Nepal, (1903-05) , to Spitzbergen, in the Arctic Sea, (1908) to train for his journey to Antarctica in 1911-12, which was beset with problems. He spent a forced winter in Antarctica, after his ship, the *Deutschland* was trapped in pack ice in the Weddell Sea. He hiked overland to what is now known as the Filchner Ice Shelf after reaching 77° south. The outbreak of World War One put paid to any further Antarctic exploration. Filchner had trained as a German army officer and was then forced into military service on the Western Front. It really is quite strange to think that Filchner could have been standing on the Somme in France on one side of the front, as Jack Mathewson stood on the allies' side. As enemies they would soon become great friends who relied on each other for survival.

Filchner is a very interesting character. He had been born in Munich, was trained in a military academy from his youth, and was commissioned into the German Army. He was obviously very well connected with the highest levels of military government in Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II pleaded face-to-face with Filchner to postpone his Antarctic journey to allow Count Zeppelin to attempt an aerial journey over the Pole. Filchner stubbornly refused this request and proceeded with his journey of exploration. It was said that Filchner was, '*...capable of the most appalling misjudgement of authority figures, admiring the ridiculous and malevolent Kaiser Wilhelm II as a 'good and great man.'*' He was accused of negligently betraying German secrets and he was tried and acquitted. This left a stain on his reputation that he had to live with for the rest of his life. Before World War Two broke out, Filchner was personally awarded the *German National Prize for Art and Science* by Adolph Hitler in the Reich Chancellery. It was said that Filchner was, '*...able to get along with Hitler and the National Socialist Government.'*' During 1939 and 1940, Filchner was again in Nepal. He crossed over the border to India for medical assistance and was immediately interned for the duration of the war from 1941 to 1946. Filchner may have developed a resentment against Hitler by this time, as it was said about him that, '*...he never made it a secret concerning his anti-Nazi feelings.'*' This, however, may have been more a pragmatic statement, realising the circumstances he was in than a heart-felt belief, given what was said about him earlier.

Getting back to the journey that we are more concerned with...From 1926 to 1928 Filchner was involved with determining terrestrial magnetism. He had journeyed from Moscow to Kansu Province, in China and was on the return journey to Kashgar when he met Jack. He had no money, and no help from the German embassy in Peking. His health was in a poor state, but through the care of Christian missionaries in Sining Fu, over a period of months, he had recovered sufficiently to

attempt his return. He still suffered from sciatica and had to be helped to mount his horse. He also suffered from kidney stone attacks at times. He continued with rib damage from a fall he had sustained when he fell from a mast on his ship during the *Deutschland Expedition* to Antarctica. To put it in a nut-shell he was not in a good place physically but must have been very tough to endure what was to come and survive.

I am suspicious that the funding of this return journey may have been partly through the generosity of Jack in return for Filchner's guiding him to safety. In a letter of gratitude to Jack, upon his safe return to Germany, Filchner had his attorney in Berlin send Jack a cheque for an amount of £150. This was a vast amount of money considering the average annual wage of the time was around £ 300. Putting that in context, it would be the equivalent of around \$45 000 in today's money.

Instead of attempting to make his way to the coast, Jack decided to join with a fellow missionary from America, V.G. Plymire and of course, Wilhelm Filchner and began the arduous journey through Tibet to Lhasa and then over the Himalayas to Kathmandu and then onto Calcutta, in India and theoretically, home. The plan sounded good but there were to be many twists before their successful return.

The other missionaries decided to attempt to head for the coast. Sad farewells were made and the epic journey had begun. Initially, three French travellers had joined them before heading north. A short time later, these men were murdered by Tibetan nomads and, unfortunately for Jack's family, this was the news sent to the authorities and thence to them. His mother spent nearly two years believing her son was dead while his fiancée, Gwen, who had waited five long years for him, never gave up hope that someday he would return. A memorial service was held for him in Brisbane, with almost 500 people attending... but they were all in for a big surprise!

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1927 the journey began with high hopes from Tangar a little west of Sining Fu, on the Tibetan frontier. It must have been quite a sight as a caravan of horses, dogs and carts and around thirty pack animals consisting of yaks, set out. Unfortunately, after discovering that the area was in the depths of a severe, three year drought and most of the waterways they were hoping to water their yaks from were dry, they decided to head on a more southerly route towards Lhasa.

Their journey is filled with incredible adventures, intrigue, privations, physical and mental exhaustion, threats of beheadings, imprisonment, starvation, precipitous mountain passes, being lost in deep snow up to their waists, having to walk barefoot through snow when their boots had worn out, altitude sickness, serious accidents, perilous river crossings in icy water, 'huge wolves' and black bears, frost bite and the ever present fear of the Tibetan robber bands known as the Ngolok (which literally means 'upside down' ). The Ngolok, in bands of 300 to 500 tribesmen, would regularly sweep down from the mountains and prey upon unsuspecting travellers and pilgrims. It certainly was a 'Boy's Own' adventure on steroids! Thankfully, I think through divine protection, they were spared from any number of death-defying incidents. Jack's main purpose was to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who had never heard of Him. He was the first white missionary to enter into this land of mystery. He carried tracts in Tibetan and always shared Jesus Christ with the people he met; especially the Buddhist Priests who he said always received it well because of their religious zeal for understanding.

They lived and dressed as Tibetans, which proved entirely sensible considering the conditions they faced. They were thankful for the warmth of their long sheepskin gowns, in temperatures, which reached -40° C. They ate the food of the Tibetans, i.e. barley flour (tsampa), dried milk and buttered

tea and journeyed in a caravan consisting of yak drawn carts and pack animals. They used the animal skin tents of the Tibetans and sometimes stayed in very basic village accommodation.

They were a constant source of amusement for the locals. *'Everyone seemed greatly amused at the hair on our hands and wrists and they would draw each other's attention to it, as if it were an indisputable evidence of our ancestry. We learned that to them hair on the body was a sign of weakness and when it made its appearance they would weed it out with a pair of tweezers from a belt on their waists.'*

From the translation of Filchner's book of the journey, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, Filchner related how the Tibetans were very taken with the gold fillings in his teeth. This was reported and from then on he had to show to all the Tibetans he met his gold fillings. This increased his prestige amongst the Tibetans. However, when he became a little tired of the continued interest in his teeth he pointed out Jack who had false teeth. (I think this may have been a prerequisite of the mission service so that there would be no problems in remote areas dealing with dental issues). He states, *'It was worse for Jack. He had no peace. He had to take his false teeth out and put them back a dozen times! Then it was my turn. I was asked to do the same thing. Of course it was not possible. Only when an officer put his dirty fingers in my mouth was I believed!'*

Their journey from Tangar passed beside the mysterious salt lake of Koko Nor which, *'...disappeared to the horizon, azure blue like the Mediterranean'*. The deserts south of Koko Nor, with its rolling sand hills was where their party had encountered the effects of the severe drought. They were in desperate straits as their yaks died around them. They were forced to bury the loads of eighteen yaks, which perished during this time. There was literally no food or water for them as all the water sources had dried up. Filchner and the entire party, knowing of their desperate situation, knelt together in prayer and, being led by Jack, they poured out to God their need of His help. *'We halted in the darkness and bowed our heads in prayer. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the tinkling of camel bells. Men talk glibly about the hand of God, but there was an instance and instances occurred not twice or three times but again and again during our journey.'* Miraculously, Mongol pilgrims, who would not normally have been on this rarely used route, appeared on camels and saved them by providing food and water and assistance in carrying their provisions to an area where their stocks could be replenished. They then passed through the Tsaidam Swamp area where they were tortured by mosquitoes and had to pull their horses frantically from the sucking mud that threatened to engulf them. They crossed the Marco Polo Mountains and the headwaters of the Yangse Kiang. They crossed the Tangla Range which reached to over 5 000 metres.

Finally, they reached the outskirts of Nagchukha the only town of any size that they had encountered. There they were *greeted* by 700 soldiers sent to intercept them and prevent their entering the *Forbidden City* of Lhasa. An officious local officer was in control and held them up for two months as their fate was discussed and argued. He demanded their return from where they had come. If they failed to comply he threatened them with, *'Would you like your heads removed?'* when they continued to argue the point in frustration. A series of letters was sent to the Viceroy of India and the Dalai Lama requesting permission to enter India. This local officer had intercepted them and had failed to pass them on. The threat of death was taken very seriously as he had absolute power in the region and had carried out similar threats on others.

The officer put them under *tent* arrest and forced them to remain within their small compound. Jack cut a hole in the roof of Filchner's tent so as to allow him to continue to make his observations, during the night; a very dangerous pursuit. *'We were in constant danger during these measurements.'*

*If the Tibetans knew what we were doing they'd smash the instruments and beat us up.'* The officials had a deep suspicion of these instruments and were only too ready to act.

Fortuitously, Jack had managed to pass on a third letter to a passing merchant who eventually delivered the letter to the Viceroy who demanded that the Dalai Lama assist the travellers. After all this, he still refused to let them enter Lhasa. If he had done so, they would have passed over the Himalayas and on into Kathmandu and India within a month. He demanded that they travel west towards Leh. However, he did offer the travellers every assistance by providing a daily relay of fresh animals, guides for the entire route and letters instructing the inhabitants to supply them with food and tents at the travellers' expense of course. The big problem was that because of the hold up in their journey they were now forced to head westward in the depth of winter... the real challenges lay ahead.

They are overjoyed at the news that they would soon be on their way. Filchner states, *'I can hardly sleep for joy. Even the rats are behaving themselves. Next time I'll take a cat!'* Unfortunately, their initial joy was short lived. The enormity of what lay ahead became a reality. Four months of what they term, *desperate travelling* lay ahead and the team was keen to leave as soon as possible as they knew winter was coming and they did not want to be snowed in. They needed to be reprovisioned as things like Filchner's sleeping bag was in tatters.

They were on their way but the difficulties soon became apparent, as they had to trudge through waist deep snow in places. During this time, Jack also lost his trusted companion, a Belgian hound called Major, who began the journey with him. At one stage, Jack had rescued him on the journey by diving into a swollen, icy river to ferry him across the rapids. Unfortunately, one morning they awoke to find him dead, gored by a yak. Jack was devastated and together, Filchner and Jack buried him.

They described the difficulties of struggling through waist deep snow at times. It became so cold that Filchner's chronometer froze. The guides were becoming uncooperative and wanted to return to Nagchukha and the promised supply of fresh yaks failed to materialise sometimes. They had to cross a seemingly never ending series of very high mountain passes of up to 5 000 metres and battled temperatures as low as -40° C. Jack's false teeth again became an issue when they became lost in deep snow. Jack cried out, *'I've lost my false teeth!'* Everyone stopped, leapt from their horses and searched desperately. After half an hour spent floundering around in the snow, they suddenly made a miraculous reappearance! Filchner reported, *'Seldom have I seen such frightened faces. They believed that an evil demon had ripped the false teeth from Jack's mouth as a punishment for his yelling. I advised Jack from now on to tie his false teeth with a string to avoid similar problems!'*

The ability to make scientific measurements became almost impossible. Filchner worked for up to seven hours with bare hands to operate his instruments until he became, *'...as a block of ice.'* Their tents became frozen and, at times, Filchner chose to sleep in the open rather than the ice box of their tents. Filchner's broken right hand, a souvenir of a fall onto rocks, which had occurred earlier in the journey, ached terribly during this time. Animals became exhausted and horses collapsed. Filchner often lagged behind the main group completing his measurements and then catching up later on when the group had made camp. This usually worked well until once he became lost in pitch blackness and couldn't find his way back. *'Suffering from cold, I was nearly lost in icy water, alone in a snow and ice desert. I was at the end of my tether. My horse had collapsed and I lay beside the exhausted animal when I suddenly heard Jack's voice. What joy! We hugged each other and we shook hands.'*

Filchner also went on to describe the effects of the extreme cold as his horse slid from under him on an icy slope. They both slid towards a precipice. He realised his death was imminent and at the last moment dug his dagger into the ice to save himself. *'The horse realised that if it moved it would slip further. It lay as if it were dead. Minutes passed – still in danger. I had to get back. I stuck the dagger in the ice and slowly edged back. I grabbed the rope from the saddle bag, sweating and with pulse racing. Holding the rope, I was able to jerk the horse up and get back to firmer ground. Meanwhile Jack had returned and assisted me to saddle the horse again.'*

During this journey Jack had lost his saddlebag with his camera in it and reported it to the authorities. This was one of his prized possessions, without which the photographic record of the journey would be lost. That evening the honest offender returned it, thankfully.

They encountered extreme winds as they approached the Karakoram Mountains. Water ran from their eyes and instantly froze on their faces. It was the toughest section that they had yet encountered because of their poor physical condition. Their coats were in tatters and their spirits were low. They had endured snow storms that lasted up to eight days that confined them to their tents. It was said that they endured the heaviest snow in thirty years. Tibetans advised that the mountain pass that lay ahead was not passable and so they left the planned route, a decision that nearly cost them their lives.

The alternate route brought them into an area that was not under the authority of the Dalai Lama, but a rival, the Panchen Lama. That meant their letter of authority had no recognition. *Faced with the problem of disposing of these three white men who had reached the end of their resources and were now at his mercy, the Panchen Lama (who was a Ngolok Chief) had decided that the most expeditious method, in Mr Mathewson's words, '...would be to off with their heads'.* The chief was furious at their arrival and threatened that unless he was paid a sizable amount of gold their lives were at great risk. They were saved by the courage and resourcefulness of their Tibetan servant who threatened the Lama with the wrath of the great western powers. *'If,'* he said, *'you touch a hair of the heads of these three men, you will bring down upon you the wrath of the great British Raj, of the great Government of America and the martial nation of German. English bombers would come and bomb your village'.* The lama had heard enough. After holding them for two weeks he used a friendly chieftain to set the travellers on their path once more.

They headed off once more into a snowstorm which lasted three days.

Jack made Filchner a pair of shoes from animal skins as his had completely disintegrated and he was walking in bare feet. *'I was like a newborn having my feet protected.'*

By the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, they had reached the border of Tibet and India with great thankfulness. Nine more days and they would be in Leh, their destination. But their journey had one more twist left... They made the mistake of not crossing the Indus River at a safe place. Instead, they attempted to continue on the wrong side of the river, scrambling over first one and then a second avalanche which had blocked their path. Filchner managed to get his horse across but was unable to get Jack's across. It was trapped between the two avalanches. Filchner decided to chase after the caravan which had already crossed the river and return with help while Jack would continue to follow on frozen feet along the path towards the camp. Their initial belief was that the camp was only a few kilometres away and Jack would not have far to travel before Filchner would return. Unfortunately, it was much further than first thought – twenty kilometres further! Filchner left at three in the afternoon. *'The track was miserable but I forced my horse on. I have to cross the Indus and slide down almost to the river. Hour after hour goes by. I must have covered twenty kilometres. I finally*



*reached the stone houses of Ischmata. Immediately, I started the rescue for Jack if he hadn't collapsed in the snow from exhaustion. With two assistants and a fresh horse for Jack we headed back in the dark. We crossed the Indus. I started yelling out Jack's name with all the strength in my lungs. I recognised the place we had left Jack's horse. I yelled again and heard the reply in Jack's favourite song, 'I-la-tschiau' not from the valley but from above –on the rocky path. I'm soon with him and learn that in his despair with the last of his strength he had freed his horse. We shake hands. I would have liked to hug my friend when I knew he was safe. Jack, chattering from the cold was put on the fresh horse and we rode back as quickly as possible to our 'quarters. I'd forgotten my own pain and cares because of this happy event!'*

Jack had unfortunately, removed some of his excess clothing in the warmth of the afternoon. His boots were so worn out that they *just swallowed up the snow*. He attempted to rest with a stone for a pillow, almost giving up all hope of being saved. At 2:00 am he attempted and managed to rescue his horse. At that moment he heard Filchner's cries and he knew he would be saved. This adventure unfortunately had caused Jack to develop frostbite in both feet. He was so close to home, within a week of Leh, to have this happen at the very end of his ordeal. They continued to follow the Indus River, the country becoming more agreeable as they descended. Finally, they arrived in Leh and the incredible journey had technically come to an end. They had little money or food left and described themselves as looking like beggars. Spanning an incredible 5 000 kilometres and taking a very long fourteen months, instead of the estimated four months, they had survived and triumphed against the odds.

It was also in Leh that they heard the news that they had apparently been murdered! Jack states that his welcoming words in Leh were, *'You here! Why, you were all massacred long ago!'* This story was published by the AAP in the Courier Mail dated the 31 August, 1927. Apparently, the three French travellers who had journeyed north at the beginning of the journey were murdered by Tibetan tribesmen and their bodies mistaken for Jack and his party. Jack quickly wrote a lengthy letter to his parents to explain that he was very much alive to correct any misunderstanding. This was dated the 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1928. He started his letter with the words, *'My beloved Mother and Father, It's actually me! Your own adoring, loving baby Boy Jack! How long, how very long, I have kept you waiting for me...'* His mother died on the 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1928. I'm sure she would have died a contented woman knowing the constant worry and fears for her boy were over and he had arrived safely. Who knows what toll it had taken, attending her own child's funeral, grieving for him for fifteen months and then discovering he was alive?

Jack was forced to remain in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, to receive treatment for his frostbitten feet. Bishop Peter from the Herrenhuter (German Moravian) Mission and two Swiss female missionaries cared for Jack's frostbite over the next three months until he was well enough to continue his journey. He said farewell to Filchner and Plymire, his two travelling companions, who continued on their journey to their respective homes.

When he was fully recovered Jack continued along the Indus and then turned south west to reach Srinigar, the capital of Kashmir. He had to cross the Zogi Lah Pass to enter the entrancing world of Kashmir. He had left the snow behind and it was an entirely different world on the Kashmir side of the Zogi Pass, a land of lush rice fields and flowering trees, so different from the colourless and barren landscape of so much of Tibet. He continued onto the Khyber Pass and then by train he passed through Delhi, Agra and finally to Calcutta on the eastern side of the country. From here he travelled to Colombo, to Perth and then Melbourne. He then caught the train from Melbourne to home in good old Brisbane as fast as possible. He was in a big hurry to be home!

He arrived at Central Station, Brisbane on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1928 to a crowd of hundreds of well wishers, family and friends. The Brisbane Courier Mail stated, *'Seldom has such a tumultuous welcome been accorded to any young man in Brisbane as that which was accorded to Mr Jack Mathewson at the Central Railway Station last night.'* *'Immediately he appeared at the carriage door, the assembled gathering sang, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.'* *Then there was a chorus of 'Hello Jack!' followed by three hearty cheers, which was repeated as he drove away to his father's house in Auchenflower.* Jack was greeted by his brother, Herbert (my Grandfather) who was responsible for collecting and delivering him to the family gathering at Thomas Mathewson's house. This was the day before his Father, Thomas' 86<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, celebrations that Jack was very keen to be a part of. *His father asked him, 'And you did it? Jack smiled and linked his arm in his Father's arm. 'Just,' he said. 'the great day is tomorrow.'*

More importantly Jack's long suffering and very patient fiancée did not have to wait very long. They were both 37 years old when they were married two weeks after his arrival in Brisbane at the Albert Street Methodist Church. Jo Cribb and Annis Mathewson were the witnesses and seven nieces and two nephews were also participants in the ceremony. One of those nephews was my Father, Jack (who was named after his uncle. My own son is also called Jack). They honeymooned at *The Bluff* (Spring Bluff) near Toowoomba, a place Jack longed to come to even when he was in China. They never had children of their own and their age may have been one of those reasons.

Filchner wrote a letter of gratitude to Jack's Father on the 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1928. *'In every detail Jack looked after me like a brother... Without mentioning his thoughtfulness, his help was like 'Balm in Gilead'. Jack's heart and spirit were the life of the party and, as well, Jack was a good missionary and a fine Christian with no hypocrisy. He should marry soon and his bride should not worry either as she has worried enough already! I wish Jack, as my bosom friend, all luck and good wishes for his future life. I congratulate his parents, also the bride for her future brave husband.'*

After marriage, Jack and Gwen lived with Gwen's mother in Brisbane. In 1933, they moved to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains of NSW where they operated a holiday guest house called, 'The Christian Guest House' which overlooked Echo Point above the Three Sisters. He operated a photographic studio in the main street on a casual basis. I spoke to a gentleman in the old Katoomba Congregational Church who knew Jack as a youngster. He praised him for his youth work. He said that hundreds of young people would come to rallies organised by Jack and many came to know Jesus personally through his leadership, including himself. He spoke of Jack's sense of fun and how young people were just drawn to him. Jack remained in Katoomba until 1943 when they took up a post in Melbourne for some years with WEC, a missionary organisation. It could have been at this time that he may have had a nervous breakdown and was placed in a hostel at Prahran in Melbourne. I cannot confirm this but it has been mentioned to me by an old CIM colleague of Jack's in China named Mr Ernest Mansfield. Mental illness was a rather taboo subject in those times and considering what he had been through, I think this may have been entirely possible. He returned to Brisbane and worked in a photographic studio with Regent Studio. The men who operated this business had been trained by his father. He worked for WEC once again, based in Bay View Terrace, Clayfield. He played a leading role in the establishment of the Tambourine Mountain Christian Convention Centre, which still plays a major role in supporting missionaries all over the world in a variety of different mission organisations.

My own Dad, Jack Mathewson, had the following things to say about his uncle. *'He didn't preach very often. He couldn't ever imagine him ever working for a living on a long term basis. He never owned a car. He was always well dressed and groomed. He had soft skin like an Englishman. He wasn't practical with his hands.'*

His life came to an end on the 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1974 at the age of 83 years. His funeral was at the Albion Baptist Church. His eulogy was delivered by Les North, one of his nephews. He stated, *'He seemed to be a person who was never idle and always found something practical to occupy his time. He was energetic, enthusiastic and adventurous and possessed a zest for living. He took a great interest in youth affairs and through his character, was an influence for good through his Christian beliefs.'*

...and so an incredible life had come to an end, but a life whose influence continued long after he was gone in the lives he had touched. It is incredible to me that everyone he met had something positive to relate about his character – high praise. A remarkable life well lived.

*'Well done good and faithful servant!'* Matthew 25:23

Andrew Mathewson (23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2017)