

BRUCE BARCLAY

Bruce Barclay was born in Fifeshire, Scotland, in January 1897. Most of his early years were spent on the farm of Rosslyn Lea Asylum managed by his father, John Bruce Barclay, and on Gowkley Moss, the farm his father bought in Rosslyn, seven miles south of Edinburgh.

In his teenage years he and his elder brother, Archie, rode bicycles and taught themselves a range of cycling tricks, which Bruce kept alive and performed during the New Napier Carnivals which followed the Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931.

He was just 17 when war erupted, while working as a cadet with Midland and Scottish Railways. He volunteered as a Marconi wireless operator and was accepted for training in London.

So at 18, Bruce Barclay, found himself sailing out of Belfast as "sparks" on a merchantman. He sailed from Montevideo to Lemnos to deliver horses for the Gallipoli campaign in early 1915.

Bruce served as a Marconi operator on HM Transport NITONIAN EO1 in 1915 and the diary of his voyage in the period from July to November transporting troops to the Dardanelles is attached to his record.

He suffered the Arctic cold of the Barents Sea and White Sea as they delivered supplies into Archangel for the Russians before the revolution.

Twice within three weeks he was torpedoed in the Atlantic and each time spent four bitter days in the ships' boats. The first time they landed in a tiny fishing village on the Irish coast. (I still have a saucer he was given as a souvenir).

The second time they came ashore in the Outer Hebrides. (I still have a pair of rowlocks and two water canisters from that experience). My Mother told me his hair turned white after the second sinking. He was just 20. But there was no let-up. He was back to see within weeks and celebrated his 21st birthday at Basra, in the Persian Gulf. He sailed to South Africa, India, Australia, and the United States. In the words of the song "I've been Everywhere, Man".

Bruce returned from his service as a Marconi operator in World War 1, to manage the family farm in Scotland. He didn't enjoy this experience and in 1927 emigrated with his wife Clare and small daughter Wilma, to Napier, New Zealand. They had a son, Archie [*the author of this piece*], in 1929.

Although he retained his Scottish accent, Bruce quickly adapted to New Zealand ways and enjoyed the freedom of life here. He related quickly to people and found an interest in deer hunting which he enjoyed with Kiwi friends.

Throughout the depression of the 1930s he retained a job with a Napier firm, D.S.Laing and Co. as a storeman, and as the salesman/installer of their new Gulbrandsen radios. In this capacity he visited many Hawke's Bay homes of people affluent enough to buy the new machines.

He was to be part of a small team of radio "Hams" (amateur transmitters) who put Napier back in contact with the world after the devastating earthquake of February 3, 1931. Led by George Tyler, this group sent and received all messages to and from the Government for the next two weeks or more, until other communications were re-established.

In 1937 Bruce and Clare took a huge step in buying a small grocery business in Kennedy Rd, Napier. For three years they worked hoard to pay off their mortgage and in 1940 bought a tearooms nearby and converted it into a grocery and dairy opposite Nelson Park School.

His world-wide experience and knowledge of geography fired me from an early age. Dinner talk was always of world affairs and language. Hardly a meal went by without the Atlas and the Dictionary (a heavy Chambers volume) coming out on the table.

As a Marconi telegraphist, he was a highly-skilled Morse-key operator, sending and receiving at about 35 five-letter words a minute, a speed well up with the best. Through the 1930s and early war years he trained many young men as wireless operators, often in our home for evening lessons. In the evenings he would sit beside the radio on shortwave, and scan the dial for morse code signals, often ships off the coast of New Zealand.

With pencil poised he would copy out the text of news and private cablegrams in a flying string of neat capital letters. He was highly proficient. We had many a laugh at the "private" morse-coded telegrams transmitted ship to shore. Often very personal, we sometimes had a good laugh at the expense of someone unknown.

Bruce kept up his wireless telegraphy, as an Amateur Radio Operator, with the callsign ZL-2DK. I recall him on many a night calling up his "ham" friends with the Morse key; or, sitting by the radio switched to shortwave band, pad ready, pencil poised, taking down the morse-coded telegrams sent ship-to-shore or the reverse. They all appeared in a flying string of neat, legible, capital letters.

In World War II, Bruce joined the National Reserve, in 1940. a step up from the Home Guard but along the same part-time lines.

However, after about two years this became a full-time Army roll which led to a posting to the Signals Corps as a radio telegraphist. For a period he was assigned to Wellington Army HQ where he learned to take down Japanese morse code from the Pacific. This meant learning a huge number of additional characters to those he was already familiar with.

During this period he developed pneumonia and was discharged from the Army. He returned to Napier and with Clare, and took on yet another corner grocery/dairy.

In 1950 they exchanged this business for a small 4-acre farmlet in Taradale, growing apricots and asparagus.

But he had had his day in the sun, and was always extremely proud of his Marconi-man status, his years in the Merchant Marine, and his service in two World Wars.

He worked the land, but by then Bruce was suffering the first stages of stomach cancer and gradually declined until died a painful and lingering death in October 1954, aged just 57.