

John Herbert Martin (1899-1977)

John Herbert (Jack) Martin (1899-1977) was born in one of the outlying mining districts of the Ballarat region on 19th June 1899. The third child to Gerald David and Bertha (Bridget) Martin, nee Coleman, Jack was one of the grand children of Bridget Carrucan and John Coleman.

His elder brother Ted served in the First World War but John was just tad too young. So he continued with his schooling at the Ballarat School of Mines where he undertake study for a Diploma of Analytical Chemistry, graduating at the end of 1918.

In 1919 Jack moved to Melbourne for his first employment as an analytical chemist at the Colonial Ammunition Company factory in Gordon Street, Footscray, a British company which was established in Australia for the manufacture of armnaments during the First World War. Within a few years – probably 1921 – this factory was taken over by the Commonwealth of Australia to form the basis of its manufacture of small arms. His work in the laboratory took him more and more into the field of non-ferrous metallurgy. He was concerned with the production of cartridges, which involved very complex metallurgy and highly refined machinery, which required a skilled labour force.

On 9th October 1926 he married Eileen Grant at the Presbyterian Church in Alma Road, St Kilda and soon two sons were born, James David in 1927 and John Stanley in 1933.

By the late 1930s, Jack's particular area had expanded to include the actual filling and final assembly of the cartridges with explosives. By this time he had been promoted as Assistant Manager, with special responsibility for the brass rolling mills.

The outbreak of the Second World War meant a drastic change and intensity of Jack's work. The plant at Footscray expanded at least 20 or 30 fold. He worked extremely long hours and often, his sons rarely saw him.

By 1943 the war in the Pacific Theatre had accelerated to that Australia had become a major supplier to the armed forces in that conflict. The Footscray factory was pressed beyond its capacity and it was decided to build a duplicate factory at Finsbury in Adelaide. Jack was sent across to manage this operation. His original appointment was for six months and he commuted back to Melbourne every six to eight weeks. For that reason the family did not relocate to Adelaide. The South Australian factory was just coming into production at the end of the war in 1945 when it instantly became redundant. The ammunition section was immediately dismantled, but the brass-rolling mill retained for a period. This produced a high-quality product, desperately needed in the post-war industrial expansion. Thus the government factory with its commercial production was the only government enterprise making a profit. Hence Jack stayed on at Finsbury until the end of 1948, returning to his old position at Footscray.

Jack's wartime pressures were extreme, carrying a high level of responsibility. His working day had been from about 8am to 9.30pm or 10pm six days a week. Throughout this period his health was good, but the cumulative effect was felt at the time of the Olympic Games in 1956 when he had a coronary thrombosis. It was difficult for such an energetic man suddenly to curtail his activities, but he accepted his limitations and soon returned to a nearly normal life. He retired on 19th July 1964.

Jack died on 28th May 1977 and Eileen died on 19th April 1979.



From left to right: Rita Waller, Jack and Eileen.