

# THE FORGOTTEN WINNER



The Notorious  
**Vancouver  
Marathon**  
1954

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Empire and Commonwealth Marathon Champion 1954  
Scottish Marathon Champion and  
Record-holder 1954, 55 & 56

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# Contents

Foreword by Dennis Canavan MSP . . . . .	9
With Thanks . . . . .	11
Acknowledgements . . . . .	11
Preface . . . . .	13
<b>PART A:</b> The 1954 British Empire and Commonwealth Games Marathon and its Aftermath 1953–1960 . . . . .	19
1. Striving for Selection: 1953–1954 . . . . .	21
2. Canada: The Build-up to the Race. . . . .	47
3. The British Empire and Commonwealth Marathon Race. . . . .	58
4. Why Did Jim Peters Fail? . . . . .	66
5. Welcome Home . . . . .	73
6. A Hectic Three Months . . . . .	79
7. Changing Careers . . . . .	96
8. 1955 – A Year of Success. . . . .	101
9. 1956 – A Year of Disappointment . . . . .	124
10. Post-1956: Successes Despite Injuries . . . . .	138
<b>PART B:</b> The Joys of Running – Then and Now . .	143
11. Five ‘Inspirers’ . . . . .	145
12. Getting Lost . . . . .	169
13. Danger to Life and Limb . . . . .	183
14. The Perils of Speaking Engagements . . . . .	191
15. Then and Now . . . . .	199
16. Advice for Aspiring Marathon Runners . . . . .	227
17. Per Ardua Ad? . . . . .	232
Postscript . . . . .	245
PPS: The Myths Continue . . . . .	249
Bibliography . . . . .	251

*PART A*

*The 1954 British Empire and  
Commonwealth Games Marathon  
and its Aftermath*

*1953–1960*

## Chapter 1

# Striving for Selection: 1953–1954

*(First Scottish Title and Record)*

IT WAS not until late in 1953, the year before the Empire and Commonwealth Games, that I began to think that I might have a chance of selection for the Scottish team. On the Scottish road-racing circuit, I had won several of the shorter road races, usually about 13 or 15 miles. The most significant of these was the ‘Round Dundee 15 Miles’ in which I defeated for the first time Charlie Robertson of Dundee Thistle Harriers, the previous year’s Scottish Marathon Champion. Two memories of that race have remained with me. As I ran round the last lap in Dens Park, I was greeted with a chorus of boos from small boys who had been expecting their local hero to win and then I was presented with the huge and truly magnificent Coronation trophy (which, incidentally, they did not put on offer the following year at the opening of the Caird Park Stadium when I again defeated Charlie, this time over the half-marathon distance, the week after my first record-breaking win in the Scottish Marathon Championship).

The problem at this time, however, was that the only full-distance marathon in Scotland was the Scottish Championship from Falkirk to Edinburgh in June 1953,

and I had a bad race that day. Although I finished in third place, my best championship performance up till then, I really should have done much better. Anglo-Scot J. Duffy, Greenock man Alec MacLean and I, running together, had broken the field by the time we had reached 15 miles. Then, at 18 miles, approaching the Maybury junction at the city boundary, I had a bad spell. By 20 miles, just beyond Barnton, the first two were already almost out of sight and I was struggling on completely alone. With  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 miles to go, someone shouted that I was  $3\frac{1}{2}$  minutes behind. From then on, I plodded on without hope through Leith until I reached Meadowbank Stadium and was astonished to see the leaders still running round the track. Unbelievably, I had made up over three minutes on the last  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles! I at once spurred but, of course, it was far too late then and I finished third behind Duffy, the new champion, and MacLean.

I learned two valuable lessons that day that were to stand me in good stead in the years following. The first was that a race is never over until the tape is broken, as no matter how bad I might think I was, the other competitors were probably feeling much worse. The second was the vital importance of receiving information about my time in relation to other competitors during the progress of a race. That first lesson certainly stood me in good stead on that torrid day in Vancouver the following year. The second was to govern my tactics in all my following races in Scotland. My dad would start the watch as I ran past him at various places throughout the race and then stop it as the next runner ran past him. He would then shout the time-gap as he passed me in the car on his way to the next point. I must stress that at no time here was I interested in setting record times; my concern was solely in beating the other competitors. To be informed that a one-minute gap

at 15 miles had grown to three minutes at 19 miles and then to five at 21 miles was a tremendous fillip, especially if I had been tiring. The man behind was obviously worse!

My problem now, if I were to prove my marathon credentials, was that I would have to compete in the British Championship less than a month later as the only road races throughout the remainder of the summer in Scotland were below the full marathon distance. I must admit that I was reluctant to enter as I considered the interval between the Scottish and the AAA (Amateur Athletics Association) marathons far too short to allow for proper recovery. You might think that you were fully fit, but, when the crunch came in those last six miles, you would then begin to think about how much you had taken out of yourself in the previous marathon. Really, it was a psychological problem as much as a physical one. Nevertheless, I had little choice but to travel to Cardiff for the AAA Championship.

Alec Kidd of Garscube Harriers, a cross-country internationalist, who had finished behind me in the Scottish Marathon Championship, went down with me to Wales. To our surprise, neither Duffy, the Scottish champion, nor MacLean, the runner-up were there. It was a nightmare of a race for me, however. Jim Peters set a furious pace – and a new world record! Alec passed me near the end and we finished, I think, in sixth and seventh positions. I was past caring by that time!

Again, I had learned another valuable lesson. Up till then, I had never drunk any liquid in the course of a race. This time, however, I handed in two tiny bottles containing water and glucose to be handed to me at 19 and then 22 miles. After drinking the first at 19 miles, I immediately lost interest in the race and was concerned only with arriving at 22 miles for the second bottle. It certainly did not revive and refresh me. Thereafter, in

subsequent races, I abstained completely from drinking any fluids. After all, I had to do so in my long solitary training runs where I had no opportunity of a toilet 'pit-stop' even if I were desperate for one!

The marathon results this year were now posing quite a problem for the officials of the Scottish AAA, who had decided to institute an award, 'The D. McNab Robertson Memorial Trophy', for the best Scottish long-distance road runner anywhere in the world. Eventually, we were told that the leading contenders were Alec Kidd and I, and that the Perth to Dundee race at the end of the season (a distance of 22 miles) would decide the issue.

I led the race for 20 miles and managed to pull away from all the other competitors except the Englishman, Eric Smith. As we approached the Ninewells junction before forking right downhill to the shore road, he asked me how far we had to go. I then proceeded to describe to him at length the last two miles. 'Thanks,' he grunted and completely surprised me by immediately putting in a fast burst and opening up a gap of about 30 yards, which he managed to maintain to the end. It was another salutary lesson for me. I never again wasted unnecessary breath during a race! Both of us, however, had broken last year's Scottish champion Charlie Robertson's record for the course and I had done enough to be awarded, for the first time, the D. McNab Robertson Memorial Trophy, which I was afterwards to win for the next three seasons.

The Scottish Marathon Club's social evening in Glasgow at the end of that summer's season, at which I was presented with the trophy, was to prove an eventful one for me. The guest speaker was the President of the SAAA, Willie Carmichael, who was to be the Scottish Team Manager at the next summer's Empire and Commonwealth Games in Vancouver. An Edinburgh man



(head of the city's Lighting and Cleansing Department), Willie issued a couple of challenges to us. There were two longstanding road records, he informed us, the 44 miles Glasgow to Edinburgh and the 23¼ miles from the North Berwick Post Office to the Edinburgh General Post Office. I mentally reserved an attempt on the Glasgow to Edinburgh record until a few years in the future. Alas, injury was later to deny me an opportunity to try it. More immediately, however, I was very interested in the North Berwick to Edinburgh record. This record – 2hrs 38mins 15secs – had stood in the name of J. Morrow since 1929 (the year I was born!) and I knew that it was well within my capabilities. If I could break it convincingly, it would be good publicity for my being considered for selection for next year's Empire and Commonwealth Games when lack of money would again ensure that only a very small team representing all sports would be selected. Accordingly, I contacted Willie Carmichael and set about organising an attempt on the record. I decided that it was not going to be a race against other runners but a solo attempt against the clock – something I had never done before.

My commanding officer at RAF Turnhouse was very co-operative and laid on a truck, driven by one of my fellow officers and our physical training corporal. They made room for my dad and Mr D.A. Jamieson, an official SAAA timekeeper, in the truck. The presidents of both the SAAA (Willie himself) and the National Cross-Country Union of Scotland also acted as recorders. The entourage was completed by press reporters and photographers who had been invited to attend.

After all the arrangements were made for Tuesday, 1 December, disaster struck! Early that morning, the Met Office at Turnhouse informed me that I would be running into a gale-force headwind all the way along the coast from

North Berwick to Edinburgh. I made frantic efforts to contact everyone involved and was exceedingly fortunate to be able to postpone the run till the following Tuesday, 8 December. Then I started praying for good weather as there was no way that I could postpone it a second time. Even if there were a blizzard raging the following week, I would have to go ahead with it!

Fortunately, the weather was almost perfect as I started out at noon from the Post Office in the centre of North Berwick – bright but cold. There was a slight facing wind and later a scattering of raindrops. I started fast and ran at a very even pace. Though my breathing was smooth, my calf muscles began to feel sore at five miles. Perhaps foolishly, I had capped off my previous week's training with a decidedly long, fairly easy 27-mile run on the Saturday (2hrs 56mins 52secs), and on the Sunday and Monday my legs were still rather sore. However, I maintained my pace and the stiffness gradually wore off.

The route hugged the coast through Dirleton, Gullane, Aberlady, Port Seton, Prestonpans, Levenhall, Musselburgh and Joppa and then right along Portobello High Street. My time for the 20-plus miles to Portobello – 1hr 49mins 5secs – was fast. Indeed, my fastest stretch was from 16 to 20 miles. The hills over the last three miles, however, slowed my speed a little – especially from Meadowbank Stadium up London Road and along the left side of Calton Hill with the roofs of Holyrood Palace away below me to the left. The last quarter of a mile, thankfully, was downhill past the Scottish Office to Princes Street, and I put on a spurt, finishing fast – and fresh with something still in hand – in a time of 2hrs 5mins 19secs. I had succeeded far beyond my expectations, having knocked almost 33 minutes off the previous record! I had achieved, too, my main aim in attracting publicity. One of the newspapers, indeed, quoted

Willie Carmichael referring to me at the finishing point as 'a future Dunky Wright' (Scotland's previous Empire Games Marathon winner).

I knew now that I was marathon-fit and that I had a real chance of the Scottish Marathon title if I could maintain and improve my training and, above all, stay injury-free during the next five months. The key date for me in the 1954 season was Saturday, 29 May. The SAAA Marathon Championship had been brought forward this year to give as long an interval as possible before the Empire and Commonwealth Games began at the end of July.

I faced one major problem, however: within the next three months, I would have to compete in a fairly hectic programme of important cross-country races for both the RAF and my club, Shettleston Harriers. These would include the Scottish Inter-District race and International Trial, the Midland District Championship, the RAF Northern Area Championship, the RAF Finals Championship, the Inter-Services Championship, the Scottish NCCU Championship and possibly the International (12 Nations) Championship. My training, however, would need to be all on the road and over much longer distances. The obvious drawbacks would be the constant interruption to my marathon preparation before each of these races, the psychological reaction after being keyed-up each time and the very real danger of injury over the different terrain.

The obvious and sensible course would have been to avoid the cross-country programme completely and to concentrate single-mindedly on my road training. However, my loyalty and duty to the RAF and my club – and my own ambition – effectively precluded that option. Indeed, I really wanted to win a third-in-a-row Inter-Services Championship medal and also my first Scottish

international cross-country vest, which the exigencies of my RAF service had prevented me from competing for during the previous two seasons.

It would be best if I described these vital five months before my marathon test under three headings: Training, Cross-Country Races and Injury Problems.

## **Training**

I took the risk and compromised. I decided to maintain my full programme of marathon training and treat each cross-country race not as an objective in itself but simply as part of my mileage programme, with no pre-race easing-off days and trying not to become emotionally keyed-up prior to nor disappointed perhaps after each race. If injury or health problems arose, I would as far as possible ignore them, easing off, perhaps, the speed and distance of my runs but trying to maintain my daily stint. For example, at the end of that year, 1953, I injured my back running 12 miles on Christmas Day, but, despite the soreness, I ran 18½ miles next day, rested on the Sunday, managed 12 miles on the Monday, rested again on the Tuesday, and then tackled a double run on the Wednesday, 12 miles in the morning and 10½ in the afternoon. On Hogmanay, I again ran 12 miles and then, on New Year's Day, I managed over 30 miles. Next day, I ran 5½ in the morning and still managed a fierce ten miles in fast bursts over the country with Eddie Bannon, the Scottish cross-country champion, in the afternoon. Thus, in spite of injury forcing two rest-days that week, I nevertheless managed a total of 92 miles for the remainder of the week and my recovery was complete. Incidentally, my 30-plus miler on New Year's Day became a tradition with me. I felt that, if I were able to run over 30 miles then in the middle of winter, I would be able to race the marathon distance in the summer.

Influenced to some extent by Arthur Newton, the famous South African professional, I was a firm believer in the value of long easy runs. My marathon predecessors in Scotland used to walk 30-odd miles on a Sunday, but that took them all day! I really did not have the time to spare, so I decided to run long distances instead. I was a section commander in the RAF and had to fit my training into my work pattern. I therefore tried to manage a very long run on the Sunday and another on the Wednesday sports afternoon. By cutting out lunch in the officers' mess I was able to run 20-plus miles (at times even up to  $32\frac{1}{4}$ ) from Edinburgh (Turnhouse) back to my home in Falkirk and still have the better part of the afternoon free, having saved both time and bus fare! On other days, I tried to fit in 15 miles during my extended lunch breaks. Locking myself into my office afterwards, sandwich in hand and often clad only in a towel, I would answer the phone, safe in the knowledge that, as my section-office was on the perimeter of the airfield, my superiors would not drop in unannounced!

In these five months, therefore, I ran 12 times over 25 miles (twice  $32\frac{1}{4}$  miles) as well as several 20-plus milers. Sometimes, I also did  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles in the morning and 20-plus in the afternoon or evening of the same day. My weekly mileage was certainly boosted by these long runs: for example, for the third week of March (the most hectic month for cross-country championships) I clocked 121 miles, for the second week in April 112 miles and for the third week in May (the week before my vital marathon championship)  $117\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

### **Cross-Country Races**

My results in the cross-country championships in these first three months of this year were mixed but I succeeded in my

main aims and was relatively pleased with my success. On Saturday, 9 January, I finished second to Eddie Bannon in the Seven Miles International Trial and Inter-District race run over a three-lap course at Shettleston. Last at the start, I speeded up too fast into fifth place at the end of the first lap and suffered stomach pains on my slow second lap, but, surprisingly, in view of the heavy ploughs and two burns to jump, I managed a storming finish to record the fastest last lap of 10mins 52secs and an overall time of 32mins 38secs. I learned one vital lesson that day: I found that I was at a distinct disadvantage wearing cross-country shoes with rubber studs, which rapidly clogged up with mud and grass and, on the advice of Allan Scally, the Shettleston Harriers coach, I decided to wear spikes over the country from then on even when short stretches of road had to be negotiated!

My next race, on 6 February, the Midland District Championship at Lenzie, was a setback. I finished fourth behind runners (Harry Fenion and Tommy Tracey) whom I had beaten in my last race. No doubt, I was still suffering from the debilitating effect of a bout of severe sickness brought on by a stomach chill after drinking a pint of milk with my sandwiches on the Monday of this week. Nevertheless, I had again started too slowly and never made contact with the leaders over a very heavy, muddy course. I was very bad, too, at negotiating the fences, cutting my knee when I tried to hurdle one and my spikes caught on the wire as I tried to imitate Bellahouston's Bob Climie, a six-foot Glasgow policeman and a steeplechaser of note running beside me. Equally disastrous was my attempt to go under another fence when I had to rip myself off the barbed wire, tearing my singlet and scarring my back in the process. Oh the joys of cross-country running!

I redeemed myself, however, on the following Wednesday, 10 February, when I won the RAF Northern

Area Seven Miles Championship at Dishforth in Yorkshire. This race should have been run the previous week, Wednesday, 3 February, when I was so sick the night before travelling, but, fortunately for me, it was postponed on account of snowstorms. The conditions, however, were equally appalling this week also (six inches of snow) and the event was about to be postponed for a second time. Meeting the organisers in the officers' mess, however, I suggested putting a bulldozer round the airfield perimeter track and holding the race over two laps. Frank Scally, my Shettleston Harriers clubmate, and I then decided to follow his dad's advice and wear spikes on the resulting hard-packed snow and ice-covered road. The start was very fast and I ran well back before taking the lead after approximately  $2\frac{3}{4}$  miles. Thereafter, I was out on my own and, though the going was extremely slippery, I won by almost 300 yards. Frank ran his best-ever race to finish second, ahead of Pat Ranger, the RAF champion and English internationalist, who was to finish third in the International Cross-Country Championship.

My next race, the RAF Finals at RAF Benson, near Reading, the following Wednesday, 17 February, was especially important for me. If I were to achieve my hopes for three successive Inter-Services Championship medals, I had to finish in the first eight to be selected for the RAF team. This race stands out in my mind as it involved one of the most bizarre incidents I ever encountered in my running career.

As should be clear by now, I was not naturally a fast starter and I frequently suffered in the mad, jostling rush at the start of the big cross-country events. In my earlier years, I had discovered to my cost the folly of attempting to run at my own even pace from the gun and ignoring the leaders who always set out at sprinting speed to get clear

of the melee before settling down. Time and again I had been left so far behind that, by the time I had won through the mob of slower runners, the fast men had established an uncatchable lead. I had, therefore, evolved my own technique of starting as evenly as possible, letting myself be carried along in the pack and avoiding trouble for the first half-mile; then I would suddenly explode into my own sprint at the very moment that the others had expended their initial surge. I had found to my gratification that this burst usually took me right through the throng and on to the heels of the leaders. Then I was able to hang on to their pace, simply ignoring the distance ahead until my breathing gradually settled down into the rhythm of my own racing speed. On some occasions, indeed, my gamble had been so successful that I had found myself sustaining my burst right past the leaders and establishing a clear gap, which I had managed not only to keep but even to increase to the finish – notably my win from a big field in the Midland Area RAF Championship at Cranwell in the spring of 1952.

Today, as usual, I was left very badly at the start. My thighs were sore and stiff over the first heavy fields and I had a very tough fight to get through the mob. Still, I began my fast burst. Ahead of me, two six-footers were running together along a narrow lane before the top of a ploughed field. The gap between them was narrow and, just as I headed for it, it narrowed still further. I burst between them like a cork out of a bottle, gasping an apology as I bumped them. A yelled expletive came in reply from behind me as I continued my burst. Then suddenly I felt my shoulders gripped and the next thing I knew I was hurtling downhill into the muddy plough. The taller, a redhead, had stopped after expending his remaining energies to catch me up. I jumped up, fists raised



instinctively, but, before I could do anything disastrous, I heard a warning shout, 'Sir, sir, forget it!' It was a sergeant in the Medical Branch in London, who had represented the RAF with me in previous Inter-Services Championships. I came to my senses. We had gone about a mile and a half and I had still five miles to try to win my place in the RAF team. It was a gruelling battle. I disliked intensely the very heavy going, but I managed to finish in seventh place, easing up and looking round, my place in the team secured for the third time.

Afterwards, as I walked through the milling crowds of competitors back to the changing rooms, I suddenly spotted my attacker. I immediately walked up to him and said, 'I've never encountered such behaviour in our sport!' Covered in mud as I was, something in my tone, however, must have alerted him that I carried rank, for he only muttered back in a broad Glasgow accent (though he was representing a Welsh team, RAF St Athan) that it was the last b... time he would run cross-country.

The incident was not finished, however. The Medical Branch sergeant then caught me and asked what further action I was proposing to take. I told him that the matter was ended as far as I was concerned. I didn't even know who the man was. He replied that he did. He had stopped during the race and noted the man's number! I finally had to go to the Air Commodore, the officer in charge of the race, and tell him that, if any complaint was made on my behalf, I wanted the matter dropped.

Three days later, I had recovered sufficiently to finish second to Eddie Bannon in the Shettleston Harriers Championship, but two weeks afterwards (6 March) came my most important test if I were to be selected for the national team – namely the Nine Miles Scottish National Championship on Hamilton racecourse. Finishing

seventh, I did in fact win my international vest, but I was still somewhat disappointed. Though I had been suffering from a bad chesty cold and though the going was heavy on the turf and the very muddy loops into the surrounding countryside, I should still have done better as Tracey, Fenion, Kane and McKenzie, all of whom I had beaten in January, finished ahead of me. One consolation, however, was that we (Shettleston Harriers) won the team championship.

The Scottish team travelled down to Birmingham on Thursday, 25 March. My back stiffened badly on the train en route, but that evening I joined in a six-mile training run from Birchfield Harriers' ground, paced by Bobby Reid of Birchfield. The following day, we jogged slowly over two laps of the international course at Bromford Bridge racecourse and, though my stiffness had now subsided, my back was massaged that evening by the trainer.

The Nine Miles International Championship, run over four laps of the racecourse, however, turned out to be a bad race for me. I finished 50th, seventh Scot, and nearly all of the Scots ahead of me I had beaten earlier in the season. I blundered badly by ignoring my usual plan for starting. Carried away by the excitement of the occasion, I started very fast and, with three other Scots, I was in the first six when we turned off the racecourse after 350 yards. I soon fell back rapidly, my stomach troubling and, though running more strongly towards the end, I could only recover from ninth place in the team to seventh. Even more than in previous cross-country races, I found that I was running very uncomfortably over the very rough, uneven grassland and I was forced to conclude that my road training was really very unsuitable for such heavy going.

One disappointing feature of this, my first international trip, was the ignoring of the athletes by the Scots team

official party when it came to the entertainment laid on by the Birmingham organisers. The main item was a tour to Stratford-on-Avon. When I asked our officials why we had not been told of it, I was informed that they did not think that we would be interested in Shakespeare! I pointed out that I was a qualified English teacher (MA Hons. English Language and Literature) but it was all too late. Similar treatment of the athletes was to occur on my later cross-country international trips to Spain and Portugal.

To make matters worse for me, after returning to Scotland from this rather exhausting race, I had, only two days later, to travel to Portsmouth for the Six Miles Inter-Services Cross-Country Championship at HMS *Dryad*, Southwick. However, I was much better pleased with my performance here. Despite the going underfoot being heavy and muddy, I finished eighth and, in the sixth counting position for the RAF, I had won my third Inter-Services Championship medal in a row after all! I started slowly this time and gradually worked my way through the field but went off the course twice (not an unknown happening for me!), losing over 50 yards and two places to the Army and Navy. Though I passed them again a quarter of a mile from the end, Humphries, the Navy champion, passed me once more on the last 80 yards but I hauled out my best-ever finish to catch him 20 yards from the tape. I must say I felt much better and easier than on the previous Saturday in Birmingham! A hat-trick of wins for the RAF was certainly a great achievement. That these championship races against the other services were occasions of great rivalry had been brought home to me on my first competing in them in 1952 at the Army camp at Blandford in Dorset. I was jogging down a grassy slope towards the start when one of the spectators called out peremptorily, 'McGhee!' Turning, I saw from his raincoat

that he was an RAF officer. Then I recognised him – Group Captain Don Finlay, the famous Olympic hurdler! ‘Get back uphill again,’ he ordered, ‘and collect the RAF boys. Wait until the Army and Navy runners are on the starting line. Then come down smartly as a team.’

My last race of that winter season before my marathon test at the end of May 1954 meant another trip to London with Shettleston Harriers the following week (10 April). The London to Brighton Road Relay was much more to my liking. Running the third lap (5 miles 1,416 yards) from Mitcham to Purley Rise (past Croydon Airport), I recorded a time of 29mins 9secs, one of the fastest for this lap. Taking over in eighth place, I was passed just after the handover by Peter Pirie (brother of the more famous Gordon) but managed to haul in another two places before handing over the baton in seventh position. Unfortunately, Frank Scally collapsed on the ninth lap and the team was disqualified. I was pleased, however, that I had survived the winter cross-country season without too much serious interruption to my marathon preparation.

### **Injury Problems**

There still remained the fear of injury, however. In discussing my training earlier, I said that my policy was as far as possible to ignore injuries or illness by easing off the speed and distance of my runs and attempting to run off the problem. I threw off, for example, my back injury at Christmas and its reoccurrence just prior to the Birmingham International in March, my Achilles tendon trouble in the third week of January and my knee injury at the end of that month, though each of them were to recur with greater severity in later years; indeed, the back and finally the knee problems eventually put an end to my athletic career.

This year, however, the really serious problem with my left Achilles tendon began on Tuesday, 13 April, only a couple of days after my return from the London to Brighton Relay race, but, as usual, I tried to run it off. I even ran a 25-miler on the Thursday of that week. I ran every day and even twice on the Saturday. My training notes commented that the pain was wearing off as I warmed up into my runs but, more ominously, that it was returning again after I finished. On the Sunday I was forced to rest and decided (wisely as it was to prove) not to risk travelling to Doncaster for the Doncaster to Sheffield Marathon on Easter Monday. On the Tuesday I ran a slow 12 miles in the morning but, when I tried to run slowly again in the evening, the ankle was very painful all the time and I could manage only two miles. Something drastic had to be done and the following day I succeeded in getting an appointment with T. McClurg Anderson at his private practice in the West End of Glasgow.

I had first met McClurg Anderson on a memorable trip to Ireland when I was 17 and in my first year at Glasgow University, where he acted as physiotherapist and coach to the athletics team. I had finished third in the mile in Belfast, managing to beat my older team-mate, the later world-famous psychiatrist, R.D. Laing. My first place in the last event of the evening, the three miles, at Trinity College, Dublin, ahead of my team-mate Major (later the Rev.) David Johnstone, had won the meeting for Glasgow by a single point. I was pretty certain that Tom Anderson would remember me now, seven years later.

He diagnosed a torn tendon, strapped up my ankle and advised immediate rest and the old-fashioned hot-salt treatment, which Allan Scally, my coach, was also to use on and off with me in the years ahead. It consisted of heating coarse rock salt crystals in a pan until they were

sparkling and pouring them into a sock, which was then moulded round the affected part. I followed his advice and, on Saturday, 24 April, he also gave me diathermy treatment. I rested the ankle all the following week (my longest spell without a run for quite some time) and was treated again at Anderson's house on Saturday, 1 May, when he advised me to attempt to run no more than one mile at a time in easy stages with my ankle strapped up on each occasion.

The Scottish Marathon Championship, however, was only four weeks away, so I decided to ignore most of Anderson's advice and next day I tried a slow 2½-mile run. On the Monday, I ran 3½, on Tuesday 5½, on Wednesday 5½ and 10 in the evening, on Thursday 10 and 5½ in the evening, 10 again on Friday and 5½ on Saturday morning. Every day I undertook heat treatment at RAF Turnhouse and then the hot-salt application at home in the evening. By the end of that week, I was running easily and only felt the ankle when walking upstairs in the evening. On the Saturday, I met Tom Anderson and his assistant, Mr Kinloch. They treated my leg again and were astonished that I had managed to run 58 miles that week. Afterwards, I went to the start of the Anniesland to Vale of Leven 15 Miles Road Race. Of course, there was no possibility of my being able to compete, but I decided to follow the progress of the race in the vehicle carrying the competitors' clothes. I soon realised that the winner, Willie Gallacher, now a clubmate of mine at Shettleston and King of Greenock, the runner-up, would be formidable contenders in the marathon in three weeks' time.

The following week, I threw caution to the winds and, despite my leg still troubling on and off, I put in nine training sessions totalling 98½ miles, including 21½ miles on my Wednesday afternoon run. I did another 21½

miles over a different route on the following Sunday and managed a 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ -miler on the next Wednesday with my tendon only slightly sore and weak at the end. This last full week before the marathon, I totalled 117 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles in nine sessions. I was reasonably sure that I had overcome this last bout of serious injury just in time!

### **The SAAA Marathon Championship 1954**

Saturday, 29 May, the SAAA Marathon Championship, was fast approaching. This year, it was to be run over an entirely new course – from the far side of the Cloch Lighthouse beyond Gourock and then right along the Clyde estuary through Gourock, Greenock and Renfrew to Rangers' Ibrox Stadium, where it would be a closing highlight of the Glasgow Highland Gathering.

I always believed in knowing just exactly what the last miles of any race were like, so on the Saturday before the race I decided to travel to Renfrew, where I changed at the King George V Playing Fields. I then ran over the closing miles of the marathon course to Ibrox and back and continued on to Inchinnan before returning to the changing rooms (11 $\frac{1}{4}$  miles in all). I saw clearly that all would depend on the weather conditions the following week. On such an open course, a wind would be an asset if it were blowing at our backs but a very serious disadvantage if it were in our faces – as, unfortunately, it was the following week!

Just before we started, Dunky Wright announced that he would do his best to ensure that the winner was selected for the Scottish team for the Vancouver Games. I estimated that my toughest rivals among the 29 starters would be Duffy, last year's champion, Gallacher (Vale of Leven), King (Greenock), the veteran Farrell (Maryhill), Campbell (Fort William), the Ben Nevis winner, and, above all, the dark horse, Laurence (Teviotdale). The latter and I had

never met, but he had been undefeated in road races in the Borders and the east earlier in the season.

It was a warm bright day, but, alas, there was an adverse easterly wind that was to last all the way and, indeed, become stronger, especially over the last two or three miles. The start was fast, I immediately tucked in behind Laurence, using him as a shield when the wind gusted badly, and by two miles (covered in 11mins 3secs), the pattern of the race was set with Laurence, Duffy and I the leading group. We passed the five-mile mark in 27mins 11secs and at ten miles (56mins 27secs) I found myself momentarily in the lead, with Laurence a step behind. (Duffy and King were now 26 seconds behind.) The two of us ran elbow to elbow to 12 miles (66mins 34secs), with Gallacher now in third place, 52 seconds behind, but for a spell over the next mile I was 'hanging on' behind Laurence's shoulder. Indeed, I had never forced the pace at all in the race so far. I gradually recovered, however, and, seeing the photographers focusing on the 15-mile mark, which we passed in 1hr 24mins 21secs, vanity drove me past Laurence. It is strange how such a triviality could change the entire fortunes of the race. To my astonishment, I sensed a gap opening and was told a quarter of a mile later that he had retired. I was now completely on my own, though still slightly less than a minute ahead of Gallacher. Exhilaration that my closest rival had gone enabled me to increase my speed and I ran my fastest three miles to 18 miles.

I was still worried, however, about how far the others were behind but I dared not look back in case I gave encouragement to them. I was missing my dad for regular updates on the gap but, unfortunately, we had not been able to arrange transport for him that day. Then came a shout out of the blue. A friend and former Glasgow University



classmate of mine, Jack Gaskell, had unexpectedly appeared on a powerful motorcycle. My problem was solved: he could now provide me with the information I needed!

The wind was worsening, however, and I felt it bad at 20 miles, which I reached in 1hr 54mins 57secs. I was slowing but, to my relief, Gallacher was falling farther behind (over three minutes now) and, indeed, he retired at 21 miles. I was told that Duffy had dropped out at 17 miles, so with my closest rivals all gone and the others falling farther and farther behind, my battle was now with myself over the closing miles. I recovered and ran strongly to between 23 and 24 miles, where the wind again increased over the last two miles. The sight of the stadium, however, revived me completely and I finished very powerfully round the track for my first-ever full-distance marathon win. At the age of 24, too, I had become the youngest winner of the Scottish Marathon title.

The Chieftain of the Gathering then crowned me with the traditional laurel wreath – a small one, Nero-like round my brow, unlike the larger ones round my shoulders that I was to receive in subsequent years – and, thus attired, I ran another lap of honour round the Ibrox track. I was even more exhilarated when I learned that my time, despite the wind, was a new Scottish record – 2hrs 35mins 22secs. The second finisher was Emmet Farrell in 2hrs 43mins 8secs, with King third in 2hrs 47mins 4secs. Now I could only await the deliberations of the selection committee.

Next day, reaction set in: I had to force myself out into training again – despite my legs being very stiff and sore and stitching badly after two miles. Before I had completed my six-mile run, however, I was again running more easily and, indeed, that week I completed 94½ miles.

I had one major problem facing me, however: I had promised to compete in the Dundee half-marathon at

the inauguration of the new Caird Park Stadium at the end of the week and I knew that a bad performance could seriously jeopardise my chances of Empire Games selection. Indeed, I almost regretted my decision to risk competing when, as I was completing a half-mile warm-up, I saw Charlie Robertson on the starting line. The 1952 Scottish Marathon champion had not competed in last week's race and would be much fresher!

It was a dull, coldish day for June and a stiff easterly wind was blowing. Nevertheless, I decided on a very fast start and led throughout the initial two laps of the track. Out on the road, I rapidly increased my lead. My calf muscles were sore but I kept 'hammering it' over both road laps. In spite of the steep hill up to the Kingsway on each lap, I managed to keep up the pace and finished very fast on the track in 1hr 7mins 42secs. To my astonishment, I found that I was over a mile ahead of Charlie, who finished second in 1hr 13mins 2secs. My gamble had paid off. I felt that I was still on course for Empire Games selection.

On one matter, however, I was adamant. There was now no way in which I would be inveigled into a track race and risk messing up my legs. Running tracks in those days could not be compared with the beautifully smooth modern surfaces. They were either loose and ashy cinder tracks (often rutted into the bargain!) or simply grass (sometimes not too short and frequently very heavy indeed). The latter was the case at our previous year's RAF Turnhouse sports when the 440-yard track was simply measured out round the rugby pitch. I was ordered to represent Station Headquarters in the inter-section competition. Reluctantly I agreed to run but only in the three miles. Without risking spikes I decided just to wear my usual gym shoes, which I used in my training on the roads. Two runners from each section lined up and my team-mate, my corporal clerk,

volunteered to take the lead and asked me to tuck in behind him. The pace of that first lap, however, was so funereal that I lost patience. I was certainly not going to run at what I considered an easy jog for 11 laps as the field obviously intended and then risk a mad sprint for the last lap. I therefore shot into the lead and broke completely from the rest. I kept piling on the pace and, indeed, won by over half a mile, having lapped everyone twice. My time, especially in view of that very slow first lap, was quite respectable – 15mins 3secs. In fact, I then realised that I could quite easily have won the mile and probably the half-mile as well! The CO was so impressed that, at our next weekly section commanders' meeting, he instructed the physical fitness officer to send my time to Fighter Command's headquarters. Privately, however, I asked him to send my marathon time instead and, for weeks afterwards, the CO kept wondering why I was not hearing about my selection for the RAF representative track teams. I certainly had no ambitions in that direction and was only too glad that this, one of my rare track races, had not resulted in possible injury and damage to my marathon prospects.

Nevertheless, I yet had to keep up a fairly strenuous road training schedule and do my RAF work at the same time. Despite having to travel to Nottinghamshire for a spell on Fighter Command's examination marking board, I managed over the next three weeks to fit in 119, 107 and 113 miles, including a 28<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-mile run and a 27-miler, each in just over three hours.

Then came the great news that I had been selected for the Scottish team. I was later told that it had been a close-run thing. Each sport's governing body had put up a tough fight for their nominees and I had been voted in last member of the 21! The athletics contingent, indeed, mustered only four men and one woman (Pat Devine, our

sprint champion). The clinching argument in my favour, apparently, seemed to have been based on the grounds of advertising rather than on realistic hopes of a medal: the comment was that, with me, the Scottish colours would be carried for over two hours round the streets of Vancouver, whereas a sprinter might be seen for only about ten seconds!

My elation, however, was soon dampened by fears about my fitness. On one of my training runs on the Newark to Leicester road during the marking board at RAF Newton, I had felt the first twinges of the Achilles tendon trouble that was later to worry me so much in Vancouver, but also, and more worryingly, pains in my lower right side, which, at the time, I put down to having to adhere to the service meal times (and menus!) and to fitting in my training at irregular hours. On my return to Edinburgh the following week, I ran a 25-miler on Sunday, 27 June, despite both intermittent ankle and side pains, but could manage only 5½ miles at Turnhouse on the Monday owing to the pains in my lower right side and groin. I ran no more that week but was then forced to seek medical advice. My fear, obviously, was of appendicitis. My GP, Dr Brannan, soon reassured me. 'If it had been appendicitis,' he grinned, as he tapped and prodded, 'when I hit you there, you would have hit the roof!' His diagnosis was simply indigestion plus a slight groin strain and he prescribed a bottle of stomach medicine, which I was to take for the next week. I shall never forget my overwhelming feeling of relief as I walked away from his surgery that evening. Then, despite slight pains on and off from both side and ankle, I immediately got back into training and managed to log 98 miles that following week and almost 108 the week after.

I had then only two days left before the flight to Canada and I ran 16 miles on both the Sunday and Monday. On the evening before departure, the Falkirk

Windsor Road Gala Day Committee invited me to their meeting in their 'Hut', where I was surprised to see so many of my friends and neighbours. My dad stood down as chairman for the evening and I was welcomed by Tom Aird, the acting chairman, Walter Murison, the treasurer, and Tommy Myles, the secretary. After Mrs G. McPhie presented me with a large iron horseshoe decked in tartan, our close neighbour, Mr J. Young, spoke glowingly about the progress of 'Our Joe'. Thanking them all for their best wishes, I promised to wear the tartan ribbon pinned to my shorts during the race, but obviously the horseshoe was too heavy to carry in my luggage! I was then rather embarrassed when they all escorted me home, led by piper Harry Treeby, to the tune of 'Scotland the Brave'. Little did I anticipate then, however, the scale of the welcome they were to give me on my return.

Next day, Tuesday, 20 July, the Scottish team departed at 2pm from Prestwick airport, where I was seen off by my closest supporters – my mum, dad and sister Louise, and my mentors, Joe Walker, who had started me running at St Modan's High School, Stirling, and Allan Scally, the Shettleston Harriers coach. Unfortunately, my brother Charlie was on RAF service in England and could not get leave. I was ignored, however, by the waiting press – unlike the morning of my return to Prestwick almost four weeks later.

The flight on the Trans-Canadian Airlines plane with the Welsh team and some of the English was in two stages. The first to Montreal was uneventful and wearisome and took 13 hours before we touched down at 3am our time (10pm Montreal). I slept rather fitfully that night in the somewhat cramped airport hotel, being awakened from time to time by the haunting and alien hooting of a train in the far distance. Next day, our flight left at 10am for

Vancouver. My seat was to the front of the plane and I have vivid memories of passing over the lakes and apparently limitless prairies until lowering clouds over the Rocky Mountains ahead presaged a storm, which duly hit us with some force. The sickening and sudden lurches and drops in height were, to say the least, alarming and I was certainly glad when we left the storm behind and touched down at Vancouver airport. The flight had taken us seven hours, but again we had to set our watches back as it was only 3pm there.

Our Canadian hosts gave us a hearty welcome but later expressed disappointment that we were indistinguishable in our white Panama hats, dark blue blazers and flannels from our fellow Britons. They had expected us in kilts! I remember, indeed, one of our enthusiastic Scots-Canadian hosts later asking me if we would have worn kilts supplied by them. My amused reply 'yes' was abruptly cut short by Willie Carmichael's irascible interjection: 'Certainly not! The kilt is not the dress of the Lowland Scot!' A cavalcade of cars, horns hooting, then paraded us through the city at rush hour to the Empire Village, a permanently hutted encampment, destined later for student accommodation, on the University of British Columbia campus.