

Tom Baker

By George Petersen

ON the morning of the 18th April, 1951, just before Hotel Kosciusko was destroyed by fire, I re-entered the building for the last time with Arthur Rixon to save some of the money in my office safe, and afterwards only had time to take a few pictures from the wall before we were forced out, among these was a photograph of Tom Baker, who for many years was one of the most colourful characters associated with the life of the Hotel.

Tom was an Englishman and when a young man, married, joined the British Army and saw service in India, Burma and Africa.

He had several sons and daughters and at intervals returned to England and re-joined his family at Newcastle on Tyne.

However, he did not stay long and came to Australia at the beginning of the first World War. Eventually he arrived at Hotel Kosciusko in 1916 carrying his "bluey," for he had been humping it from Sydney to the Monaro.

First, he worked as a useful, and, as Mr. Speet says, "In those days he was somewhat unsettled and went on periodical walkabouts, but always seemed to turn up again, and with his happy disposition was always welcome." His first appointment as porter was given to him by Mr. Lambie shortly before he left Kosciusko. Later he became head porter, this job he filled until he died in 1943. He was known to many as "Tom the Tapper."

Tom was one of the old school—English butler type, and made a study of people and their habits. He wore a dark green coat with brass buttons and before going off duty at midnight he regularly polished his buttons on a military-type button stick according to military discipline to which he had been accustomed. He was always bright and shining when he came on duty.

Many will remember the years when school children came to the Hotel. Tom would go around the corridors early with his gong, calling, "Rise and Shine"—"Beautiful Girls and Lovely Boys," much to the amusement of the small fry.

I again refer to Mr. Speet, who said, "The children all loved Tom for his good humour and quaint sayings and I feel that a write-



up was richly deserved by him as he was an unforgettable character."

Tom was in great demand by the Ski Club of Australia and the Alpine Club in the early days when their headquarters were situated in "B" sitting room and the Chalet had not been built. He had many friends, particularly among elderly people, and could frequently be heard during the winter time endeavouring to entice them out on to the snow and, when he did, his favourite spot was the golf links. He would say, "Come over here, lady, there are some nice flat slopes here." Many quaint stories about Tom were frequently told at the old Hotel.

One old lady came to Tom and asked for a key to her room. However, Tom informed her that there was no key. She was quite upset and said that she could not sleep if the door was not locked. Tom's answer was, "Lady, I've been here twenty years, have

always left my bedroom door open and I've had no luck yet." The old lady smiled and said no more.

When the pneumonic influenza was raging some year ago, a man died at the Hotel. A coffin was ordered and when it arrived Tom was given the job of arranging for the body to be placed in the casket for delivery to Cooma. However, it was found that the casket was too short, so Tom obtained the services of two carpenters who were working nearby to assist him. They tried all ways, until at last Tom was seated on the lid to press it down whilst the carpenters screwed it down. When they had completed the job they had had enough and rushed out of the room leaving Tom sitting on top. They were under the impression that Tom had followed them. However, when the door closed it locked and could not be opened from inside. Tom tried to get out, but without success, eventually, he began to call out loudly.

Just then one of the staff passed by outside, but he was under the impression that the dead man had come to life and he fled.

A group of people assembled some distance away, but were afraid to do anything. The yells grew louder. Some time elapsed before the Manager arrived and by then Tom was in a state of despair. The Manager's retort was, "So this is where you have been wasting your time."

In my early wanderings on horseback around the Ranges, Tom often accompanied me and many trips were through wild and trackless country. Tom enjoyed this immensely. In the most rugged country he would at times imagine he was back in the Army, deploying his forces to attack an impossible position.

One of our last rides together took us from the Hotel to the junction of the Thredbo and Snowy Rivers, up the Snowy Valley to Long Corner and Diggers Creek, 25 miles mainly of rough country, a long day for Tom. During the day he was particularly interested in an outcrop of rock overlooking the river and was eager that it should be called after Colonel Newman, who was then Secretary for Railways. Later he was glad to learn that it had been acknowledged officially.

Although he was absent from his home and family in England for many years, he continued to care for them. He wrote every

fortnight and sent them most of his wages.

A few years before his death, much against his wishes, he was sent to Cooma Hospital, where he underwent an operation.

It was a difficult job to keep Tom in bed. He wanted to return to duty. The doctor compromised by allowing him to go and stay at the Creel. However, Tom came up regularly by the bus for the day, to see if his relieving man was carrying out his duties correctly.

The Hotel was closed in June, 1942. Tom was allowed to stay on to carry out maintenance work, but died on the job in 1943 after 27 years of faithful service. He was buried at Jindabyne just below the mountains he loved so well.

Lost and Found

(Or, at least, Lost)

FROM "south of the border" comes an enquiry for a lost trophy; what form the trophy takes is not made clear, but presumably its loss cannot be ascribed to the Hotel Fire—in which inferno many fine trophies merged back into mother earth. Perchance it rests in some long forgotten corner; perhaps still glistening among an array of fellow trophies. Would anyone knowing of its whereabouts kindly communicate with T. W. Mitchell, Esq., M.L.A. (Parliament House, Melbourne), whose letter of enquiry we quote:

"My Dear Ted,

"There is a bit of a flap on about the trophy for the men's Inter-Dominion race.

"The Ski Council of New Zealand has just accepted one from Brian Todd, but one was given for this event in 1936 by Freddie Vosseler. It would seem to have vanished somewhere or other during the war years. We had a similar trouble with the women's trophy, but after much beating of bosoms it turned up.

Someone or other has Freddie Vosseler's trophy so could you possibly help us locate it by putting a small paragraph in the Year Book.

"Ski Heil!

Tom."

Competitors near top of Downhill Course on Coronet Peak.

Photo. R. Arnott.