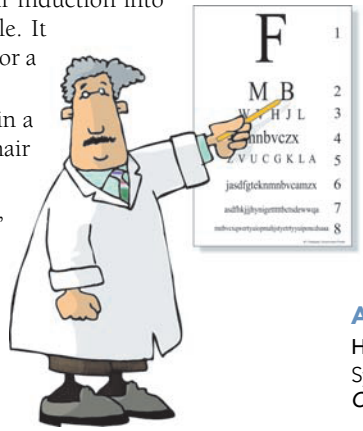
Super vision

Henry Kan

It was the mid 1950s in Newcastle, a time of world unrest from the expansion of communism, and balloted national conscription by birthday. To supplement the meagre income of a second-year resident (a princely sum of 12 pounds, 5 shillings for a 70–80 hour week), I would go and examine the "nashos" (national conscripts) for their induction into the army, when the work was available. It paid as much as two or three pounds for a couple of hours' work.



Towards the end of such a session, in a small break, I leaned back in the chair and stretched.

In came a gangly, sinewed youth, ambling slowly forward.

"Name?" I asked in a quiet voice.

"Kev Browwwn."

Hearing's OK — tick.

"Good health?"

"A'reckon."

A quick physical confirmed no flat feet, hernia or haemorrhoids. Grade A-1.

Coming to the last item —

"Stand on that line" I instructed, while filling in the form and pointing behind my back.

"Read the lowest line you can see on the chart on that wall."

It's 6/5, better than 6/6.

A long pause — did the chart fall off? — no.

I turned to have a closer look at the youth's face — crystal clear eyes in deep sockets, slowly squeezing into a line, reminding me of Gary Cooper in his Oscar-winning role as sharpshooter Sergeant York.

"Ahh — 'm gettin' it …"

Then in a great tumble: "W J Pettigrew, Government Printer."

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