

The Story of a WW2 Prisoner of War

Alan McDonald Cochrane JP

7th April 1941 to 22nd April 1945



2nd NZEF

20th Battalion and Armoured Regiment

Diary of

Private Alan McDonald Cochrane

New Zealand Army No: 16899



POW No: 13977

Diary and summary of events

7 April 1941 to 22 April 1945



Photo at Emmanuel Church, Sawyers Bay

Contents	Page
Forward	4
Section 1 7 April 1941 - 10 November 1941	5
Section 2 12 November 1941 - 21 July 1942	45
Section 3 18 August 1942 - 22 April 1945	113
Medals earned	140
Members of No 3 Section - 16 Platoon	141
Army Service Dates	141
Prisoner of War Italy	141
Prisoner of War Germany	142
Notes - people in story	142
Location of Prisoner of War Camps	143
WW11 German Prisoner of War Camps	144
Series of war experiences published by Alan	146
Information from Red Cross via Geneva	158
Newspaper cutting Christmas 1941	160
War Record	161
Prisoner of War Record	163
Service and Casualty Form	165
War Services Gratuity Assessment	166
Telegram received	167
Alan McDonald Cochrane JP 11/5/1919 - 23/3/1996	168



*Alan with his parents
Robert & Jessie Cochrane*



*Alan, mother Jessie, Mary and sisters
Iris (left) and Sylvia*

FORWARD

This history is a record of the three diaries kept by Alan during his time in various Prisoner of War Camps in both Italy and Germany. They have been printed as originally written, only spelling corrected where necessary.

The first diary Alan sent home to New Zealand with the Padre, Rev. D Spence. The other diaries he kept and wrote in them wherever possible, recording their day's activities and the news they received from the outside world, via newspapers and new prisoners to the camps.

Prior to Alan's death in March 1997, Neil Cochrane, his son, transcribed the diaries as he read them to his father. Sometimes it was necessary to use a magnifying glass as the writing was so small and being in pencil made for very hard reading.

They have now been compiled here for future family use.

Alison, Jennifer and Neil Cochrane
March 2012



Burnham Military Camp 1941

Section One

Diary from

7 April 1941 to 10 November 1941

12 May 1940

I volunteered on the 12 May 1940. I then attended the Dunedin Medical School for a check-up and was accepted. I got notice to go into camp at Burnham on 7 January 1941.

NEW ZEALAND MILITARY FORCES. WAR. (N.Z.—317.)
Notice to Attend for Preliminary Medical Examination.
DEFENCE OFFICE,

Date : _____

You are hereby warned to attend for preliminary medical examination at Dental school, King St. (Place.) on 23 JUL 1940 (Date.), at 4 AM. (Time.)

* A travelling-warrant is enclosed.

Signature : _____
Rank : _____
Appointment : _____

REGISTRATION OFFICE, AREA XI, DUNEDIN

Delete when not required. [40,000/9/38-



Burnham Military Training Camp

Diary from 7 April 1941

We went into camp on the 7 January 1941 and had final leave from the 28 February until the 8 March. Just the usual drill in camp. I was in hospital for a week after final leave with the flu. I left camp on Saturday the 5 April for Wellington. We crossed in the "Rangatira" and arrived in Wellington on Sunday morning and then changed over to the "Mauritania" where we got breakfast. We are waiting here for the rest of the boys who arrive tonight. I had leave on Sunday and went looking for Marion¹ but she was out. Posted a letter home.

SS Mauritania



H.T. "MAURETANIA"

Meal Card

TROOP MESS ROOM **No. 2.** **THIRD SITTING**

SITUATED "B" DECK - AFT

MESS TABLE **18**

No.

BREAKFAST ... 8-30 a.m.
DINNER ... 1-15 p.m.
TEA ... 6-30 p.m.

We left Wellington wharf at 12 o'clock and anchored in the stream till 4 o'clock. We have our boat and the "Nieuw Amsterdam" convoyed by the "Achilles", "Perth" and "Hobart" but we don't know where we are going as yet but we will know in a day or two. Sent two postcards.

Tuesday 8 April 1941

We had lifeboat drill for an hour. The sea is very rough with a lot of chaps sick but so far I've been alright. The cigarettes are very cheap, 3 packets of tobacco 8 shillings, 2 ozs of oranges 12 shillings. Have done no work as yet.

Wednesday 9 April 1941

We had a lecture by Mr Ross on ships. It was lovely tonight on deck with chaps singing and there was a lovely moon.

Thursday 10 April 1941

Time 6.30 a.m: The convoy has not gone to their day stations as usual this morning. At night they come right in close beside us and during the day they are just on the horizon.

8 a.m: There are 7 destroyers around us now and there has been two planes flying about. We will be sighting Australia soon. We arrived in Sydney at 9.30 a.m. and are anchored in the harbour just before the bridge. It is a wonderful sight. There is no leave here as we will sail again in the morning.

Time 4 p.m. and the Governor General has been aboard just now but I never saw him as I am Battalion runner today and was in the orderly room when he came. I have been on deck and had a look around Sydney with a pair of binoculars belonging to the Corporal.

Time 8 p.m: I have just been on deck again and it's a great sight Sydney all lit up. There are boats coming out to ours all the time. We were vaccinated today but it won't take effect for about a week. It didn't hurt as much as the injection in camp. Some of the chaps are getting the medics to take letters back to shore thinking they will not be censored. I saw one chap throw a letter over in a tobacco tin just now but it hit the side of the boat and bounced into the sea. The boatmen tried to get it but before they could it sank to the bottom. I've had my hair cut short today but not right off like some of the boys. I look like a real convict. I finished work at 8.30 p.m. Wrote a letter home.

Sydney Harbour



Friday 11 April 1941 - Good Friday

We pulled out of Sydney Harbour at 8 a.m. and are making for Perth and Fremantle. The "Queen Elizabeth" and the "Ille De France" have joined the convoy here and we are to pick up the "Queen Mary" about Melbourne. We had a hot cross bun for breakfast besides porridge & fish etc. It would have been nice to have had leave in Sydney but we will see it on our way home. There is a Church Service at 9.30 a.m. this morning. The church was very good. Subject - Forgiveness of Sin: Text: Luke 23, 13-26 and 32-45. There was a big crowd there although they didn't need to go. We have been issued with leather sandals this afternoon. They are much better than gym shoes.

We have picked up the "Queen Mary" sooner than expected so there is in the convoy the "Queen Elizabeth", "Ille De France", "Nieuw Amsterdam" and the "Mauritania" and we still have to get the "Aquitania" in place of the "Nieuw Amsterdam". It is the largest convoy of its kind to leave Australia waters. The Sydney Patriotic Fund Board has given us a packet of cigarettes each. It is very hot now at 10 p.m. so some of the boys are sleeping on deck tonight. Mr Read has just been to see me, the service will be on deck on Sunday morning at 9.30 a.m. and a communion later at 10.30 a.m. and Bible Class will be discussed afterwards. There will be 1700 at the service.



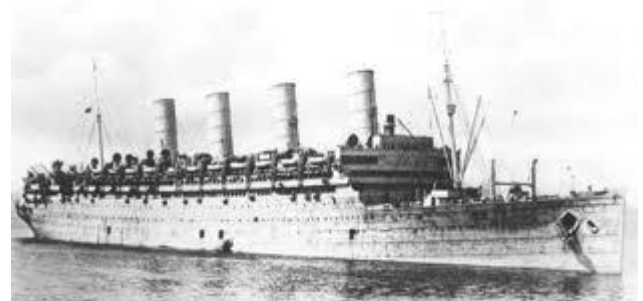
Ille De France



Queen Elizabeth (left) & Queen Mary



Nieuw Amsterdam



Aquitania

Saturday 12 April 1941

We were the company for duty today and we are all on guard. I went on at 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. and go on again at 8 p.m. till 10 p.m. then 2 a.m. till 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. tomorrow morning. I am guarding a staircase keeping chaps from smoking etc., in the passageways. We passed through Bass Strait this morning about 10.30 a.m. and are now getting into the Australian Bight. The sea is getting rougher now and will be worse in the morning.

Sunday 13 April 1941

Missed church this morning as I was on guard at the time, also Communion - I couldn't find the place where it was being held. This afternoon we had to take our kit bags down into the hold out of the road. It is very foggy outside today but it is not a rough sea yet. First general letter written today.

Monday 14 April 1941

We started this morning by having our vaccination examined to see whether it was positive or negative. Mine was positive and then we had physical drill and then a lecture. This afternoon we were to have had map reading but it was too windy to take maps outside so we didn't have it. Instead we had Morse code and were given the alphabet in dots and dashes. We have to learn it. Then we had action stations followed by boat drill (Action Stations) when the signal goes we have to go to our cabins, close portholes and put on life belts - it is in case planes attack us.

Tuesday 15 April 1941

Sea very rough in the morning so there was no parade on deck. We had a parade at 2 p.m. and then went to the pictures (Cary Grant in Trooper). It was very good and we were there for 2 hours and then we were paid one pound Australian and this is marked in our pay books at 17 shillings sterling. At 8.30 p.m. we had a lecture by the PMO along the usual lines and it lasted for 2 hours.

Wednesday 16 April 1941

We sighted land at 8 a.m. and have been moving slowly for the last 2 hours. We are the last boat in the convoy, the four others are ahead of us in a line and we are getting closer to them. Our boat tied up at mid-day and we caught the train to Perth at 2.45 p.m. We arrived in Perth at 3.45 p.m. We crossed the Swan River just after leaving Fremantle travelling in the old style carriages (dog boxes). Fremantle itself looked a very old and dirty town not very big but nearer Perth the houses are more modern looking. In Perth I had my pen and signet ring fixed at a jeweller named

INTERNATIONAL MORSE CODE

1. A dash is equal to three dots.
2. The space between parts of the same letter is equal to one dot.
3. The space between two letters is equal to three dots.
4. The space between two words is equal to five dots.

A	• —	U	• • • —
B	— • • •	V	• • • — —
C	— • — •	W	— • • —
D	— • • •	X	— • • — •
E	•	Y	— • — — —
F	• • • •	Z	— — • • •
G	— • • •		
H	• • • •		
I	• •		
J	• — — —		
K	• • —	1	• — — — —
L	• — • •	2	• • — — —
M	— —	3	• • • — —
N	— •	4	• • • • —
O	— — —	5	• • • • •
P	• — — •	6	— • • • •
Q	— • — •	7	— — • • •
R	• • • •	8	— — — — •
S	• • •	9	— — — — •
T	—	0	— — — — —

Levinsons and I also bought a leather watch guard and souvenir spoon of Western Australia. I got them to post it and my watch strap home to Mary. The boys on the streets pestered us for souvenirs or New Zealand coins. Perth is a very well laid out town and is very clean. Grapes are very cheap 4 shillings a pound. There was no charge for the train fare or tram fare and meals were supplied at various places for us free of charge. We had tea at the YWCA and after tea we had a long ride on a tram and the conductor talked to us a bit about the town after which we visited a dance held in the hall at St Mary's Cathedral, then one at St Andrews Presbyterian Church Hall. Harry Campbell and I attended a prayer meeting in the church and signed the visitor's book. We then went to Anzac House where there was a dance and we had supper. On leaving there we made our way to the train and back to the boat arriving there at 11.15 p.m. Altogether a very enjoyable day and the people were very kind to us going out of their way to help us leave happy.

Thursday 17 April 1941

We were paraded at 9.30a.m. this morning and were to have had a route march. We waited until 10.30 a.m. to start but they decided not to have it. They told us we were getting leave in the afternoon. We were off earlier than yesterday and were in Perth at 3 p.m. We had a look through a Bonds store. They sell everything you can think of. The store was started by a man who arrived here with 35 pounds in his pocket and now it is a four-storied building, a huge place. From there we were going up the street to look at Woolworth's when Harry stopped to talk to someone he knew. He was a New Zealand soldier and while talking to him a woman asked them if they were from Auckland. She asked them to have tea with her but the other chap had to meet someone else, however she took Harry and I to afternoon tea then showed us around and invited us to her place. We left her and crossed over the Swan River on the Ferry to South Perth and had a good look around the zoo. It was a great place well stocked with birds and animals. We left there and travelled back to Perth by tram instead of crossing the river. At one tram stop two small girls got us to sign their autograph books for them and they were very pleased. It took about half an hour to get into Perth. When we arrived we went to the Town Hall and had tea there free, and from there we went on to Government House where we had another tea. From there we went to Mrs Hampton's place. She was very pleased to have us. They were very good to us and they entertained us well and Mr Hampton drove us to the station to catch the train. If we could have stayed longer they would have taken us out in their car for a trip. Mrs Hampton was the lady who took us out to tea earlier in the day.

Friday 18 April 1941

We left the wharf at 9 a.m. and anchored in the stream beside the other boats. We had PT and were finished for the morning. At 2 p.m. we had a boat drill and Mr Ross got three chaps to give talks on their own experiences, one being about the earthquake at Murchison on the West Coast where he lived. It was in 1929. We are to have more of these talks some other time. I suppose we will be moving on in the morning.

Saturday 19 April 1941

We set sail at 9 a.m. and lost sight of land about 11 a.m. We won't see land for about another thirteen days they say. We had PT and a lecture this morning and PT and Morse code this afternoon. It is hot in the cabin tonight. I have just been up on deck having a look at the spray and wash made by the boat, it's a great sight and it looks very much like the stars.

Sunday 20 April 1941

I had to go on guard today again so I missed church and communion this morning. Tonight there was a singsong in the lounge. It was very good with all the old hymns, "Nearer My God to Thee" etc. After this Bob Weir, Alan Ward, Harry Campbell and I spent about 20 minutes in prayer on one of the weather decks. It helps to keep in touch and we will endeavour to have a few minutes every night. I have to go on guard again at 10 p.m. till 12 p.m. The clocks go back again tonight by 1 hour, which makes 5 hours altogether so far. I had to do an extra hour on guard as a result of this, which made three hours in total. I have shifted my quarters today from "B Deck" Cabin 52 to "A Deck", Cabin 46. I am in with some of our platoon boys now which is much better. It has been very hot all day.

Monday 21 April 1941

We spent most of the day on the sports deck - our day of sports. For a break we had a lecture on Anti-tank weapons this morning for about half an hour and this afternoon we had a kit inspection. We are getting into the tropics now. It has been very hot all day and still is. I saw some flying fish this morning for the first time; there are hundreds of them about.

Flying Fish



Tuesday 22 April 1941

We had a lecture, Morse code and PT in the morning and in the afternoon we had a pay parade and a lecture. It is very hot. The "Nieuw Amsterdam" left the convoy at 4 p.m. and is making her way to Singapore and will rejoin us later. We had Bible Class tonight with about 40 chaps there and it was very good. The reading was Philippians 3: 1- 15 - the subject - "Why pain and suffering?" Hymns: "The King of Love" and "What a Friend we have in Jesus".

Wednesday 23 April 1941

Paraded on the sports deck at 9 a.m. and had Morse code and then PT and then a lecture on guard duty. We have new hours as from today: 9 a.m. - 11 a.m., then 3.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. We had Action and Boat Drill at 3.30 p.m. and they fired the 6 inch gun on board also machine guns just for practice and then we had map reading. Wrote to Mary also Mum today. We crossed the date line at mid-day today.

Thursday 24 April 1941

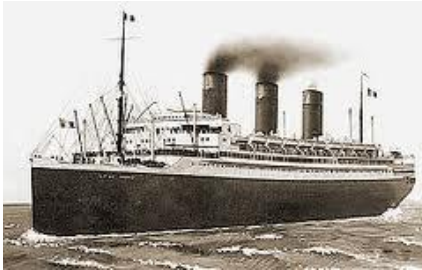
Paraded at 9 a.m. and then we went to watch the boxing. We had it all day, about 15 fights altogether. They were all for 3 minutes only. Have been to Bible Class tonight: Hymns: "God of Bethel" and "Soldiers of Christ Arise". Reading: Matthew 5: 1- 20. Subject "What is Christianity?"

Friday 25 April 1941 - Anzac Day

We paraded as usual at 9 a.m. and at 9.30 a.m. I went to choir practice about 20 were there. We sang the hymn at the Anzac Service at 10 a.m. The service lasted about 20 minutes. Some say there was a funeral on the "Queen Elizabeth". The "Queen Mary" and "Queen Elizabeth" left us about 2 p.m. where for we don't know. We think we are going to Colombo. We had a lecture on how to treat the natives there and in India. We were given 30 cigarettes each today as a gift. We had sports for about half an hour this afternoon. Wrote to Mr Peterson² today. The clocks went back another half an hour last night which makes 6½ hours' altogether that we are behind New Zealand time.

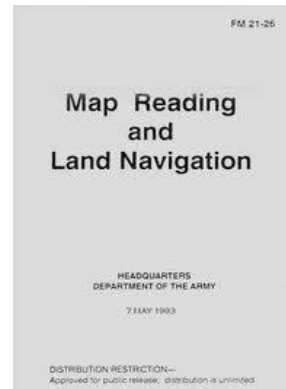
Saturday 26 April 1941

Paraded at 9 a.m. as usual, had Morse code and map reading. We sighted land about 11 a.m. and anchored in the harbour at 1 p.m. The harbour is full of big boats. They have been watering the boat from barges and the natives are begging for money. They got quite a lot of pennies and cigarettes. There have been boats out selling fruit and ornaments but they are fairly dear.



The "Ille De France" looks a great sight tonight all lit up.

We have just been paid 14 Rupes - is equal to 1 pound 1 shilling sterling, a lot of paper for 1 pound. We are getting 100% leave tomorrow and Monday. Reveille is very early in the morning. Two of the chaps bought a small elephant each from people in the small boats for 2 shillings each. I bought a coconut. It cost me sixpence and it wasn't much good. The boatmen throw a line up to you and send up a bag for the money and then send up the goods after. Very shrewd. There were two chaps diving for coins. Somebody threw over a penny wrapped in silver paper but they knew the difference and wouldn't dive for it. We were given our Identification Discs or (Meat tickets) as well as First Aid Field Dressings which consists of two pieces of gauze and bandages and safety pins in a waterproof cover. Our discs have our name, number, blood group and religion on them and we wear one on our neck and one on our wrist just in case we get divided up at all, in pieces I mean!



Echelon Barracks

Sunday 27 April 1941: We were paraded at 9.30 a.m. and went ashore. From the wharf we were marched to Echelon Barracks where we were dismissed at 11 a.m. Harry and I went to Anzac House where we had soft drinks and ice cream. From there we were going to the Post Office to meet Alf Jones when we were stopped by a taxi. They said get in, free ride etc. but when we were in we found out different, so we were soon out again. From there we



went back to Anzac House where we got on a bus. These buses are free to us. We left about 1 p.m. and went first to a Buddhist Temple and were shown all around



Hindu Temple

inside. The pictures on the walls were relating to him from the time of birth till he became a Buddha. We had to remove our boots and hats. It cost me 10 cents as a tip there. From there we went to a Hindu Temple and before we went in we had to remove boots and hats and then had a mark put on our foreheads, first white powder then a red paste on top before we were allowed inside. We only saw a God - what name, I don't know, but

it was a devil God! From there we went to Mount Lavinia - there wasn't much to see there so we left and went home by way of the race course and Town Hall which was a beautiful building. We arrived back at Anzac House at 3 p.m. We had more ice cream and Harry had to go back on board earlier than the rest of us as he was a mess orderly. I had a look around on my own into one of two shops - I bought some ink also an opal necklet and 4 small white elephants. The natives can nearly all speak English and are always annoying you for money. The rickshaw men annoy you too. There is a terrible evidence of poverty everywhere especially in the native quarters. We were back on the ship at 7.15 p.m. and had a cold tea. They are still pumping water into the boat. We are getting leave again tomorrow when we will visit the European shops that were not open today being Sunday.

Monday 28 April 1941

We went ashore at 10 a.m. and were dismissed at the wharf. It was raining heavily and we got soaked but soon dried out in the sun. We went to a shop and I bought a scarf each for Iris and Sylvia from there we went to the Post Office to post them. We had morning tea at the Troop Canteen then Harry bought some postcards, after which we went to tearooms and had bacon and eggs and ice cream for dinner. From

there we looked in at the Telegraph Office and then the YMCA where we had a game of table tennis. From there we went to Anzac House where we met Fred Fuller and George Downs and had soft drinks and sandwiches. We spent the rest of the day looking around the better class of shops, which are very nice. I bought another necklet and got two small elephants thrown in with it. I saw the changing of the native guard at the Barracks. They look very good in khaki uniforms. They make good soldiers. A lot of them have red teeth from eating beetle nut but on the whole have beautiful white teeth. How on earth they all live beats me! There are 4000 Europeans mostly Dutch, French, English and goodness knows how many natives and the Europeans pay most of the taxes. I have seen enough of Colombo - if the rest of the Island is the same I don't want to see it. Filth and disease everywhere. There weren't so many annoying us today as there was yesterday but just the same I was glad to get back to the boat.

Tuesday 29 April 1941

We had had no leave today or parade as we are the Company on duty. We go on guard tonight at midnight till 2 a.m. and then 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. The other Battalions have been ashore on route marches, one this morning and one this afternoon. We go tomorrow morning and may get an hour off. We are getting paid again 7 rupees or 10 shillings sterling. The mess orderlies have had leave today. Harry went in. We were given a pineapple each at breakfast and a mango each tonight at tea. The mangoes aren't much good. There is quite a lot of shipping in the harbour. There is a Japanese boat here - it came in the day after us. They follow us into every port. One came into Sydney and one into Fremantle. We were warned on leaving against talking about military matters in case they got to know about it.



Five Rupees

Wednesday 30 April 1941

There was no parade this morning - we paraded at 1.30 p.m. and went ashore for a route march. We marched for about one and a half hours altogether then we had three quarters of an hour off at Echelon Barracks for a rest and arrived back at 6 p.m. We have been paid again tonight 7 Rupees. We have leave tomorrow.

Thursday 1 May 1941

We went on leave today at 10 a.m. and Harry, George, Fred and I went to the Galle Face Hotel baths. They were salt water but we got fresh water showers before and after we were in. We weren't in the hotel itself but they say it is a beautiful place. From there we went to the Elephant house where they make cakes, bread and ice cream. They gave us two blocks between us for free and we went in one of their trucks to their cordial factory and were given 3 bottles of fruit drink each, also we saw into their ice room where they had meat, rabbits, turkeys etc. belonging to the navy stored there. From there we went to the Salvation Army where we had tea and cakes also free. From there we went to the Lipton's tea warehouse which was

interesting and we also saw some rubber in sheets ready for export. The chap told us we would go to Kardy and beyond about 100 miles away to see the tea being dried and cut up. The tea that goes to New Zealand is a special blend as it has to suit the water. Other blends won't mix very well with the New Zealand water. It is a tea with body in it and is a good blend. We had no more time to spend at Slave Island where these places are so we went back to the Fort and had a cup of tea at the Troop Canteen then had eggs and chips at Sardae Tearooms and were back on the boat at 7 p.m. The "Aquitania" arrived this morning at 8 a.m. with the Divisional Commanders on board. They transhipped at Singapore from the "Nieuw Amsterdam" which is being made into a hospital ship. Our boat is being painted grey and there are dozens of natives climbing all over it.

Friday 2 May 1941

No leave. We had Morse and a lecture in the morning and a lecture and PT in the afternoon.

Saturday 3 May 1941

We paraded at 8.45 a.m. to go on a 2 hour route march but it was 10.45 a.m. before we got on shore. Mr Ross marched us to the Barracks and broke us off for leave and he told us if anybody asked we had had our route march. If it had been anyone else we would have got the route march. We were back at the ship at 4.30 p.m. We didn't have much time to go anywhere so we had a swim and roamed around the town the rest of the time. The "HMS Leander" arrived in port today. There is also another boat the same size here ready to escort us.

HMS Leander



Sunday 4 May 1941

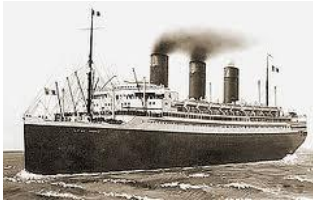
I have been mess orderly today so as to let the one on the job go on leave. I was on from 6.30 a.m. till 9.15 a.m. 11.30 a.m. till 1.15 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. till 6.56 p.m. I missed getting to church again but I went to the singsong tonight. It was very good.

Monday 5 May 1941

Just the usual drill today also lectures and Morse. Tonight there was a concert on deck. A Mr Stewart of the Maori Officers sang "Rose Marie" and "Tell me tonight" and three chaps played a violin trio and we had a community sing. It lasted 2 hours and would have gone longer if it hadn't rained.

Tuesday 6 May 1941

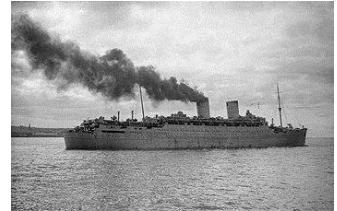
We left Colombo at 10 a.m. this morning, the "Ille De France", Aquatania" and "Mauritania" and we were sailing west north west. We have PT, Morse and lectures today and Bible Class tonight. The reading was Matthew 5: 17-30: Subject was Sin. The hymns were "Tell me the old old story" and "Jesus Calls us".



Ille De France



RMS Aquatania



SS Mauritania

Wednesday 7 May 1941

We had PT and Morse and a pay parade but I didn't draw all of it, only 10 shillings. We went on guard at 2 p.m. I have a post outside this time and it is very nice. It is a beautiful moonlight night. We got our copies of the ship's magazines today they cost us a shilling each. Today a bigger boat joined us to replace the "Leander." The crew of the "Leander" sent us New Zealanders a message of good luck.

Thursday 8 May 1941

I went on guard for my last shift at 8 a.m. and was relieved at 8.15 a.m. for breakfast which I didn't get till 8.45 a.m. as they had to pick out bad eggs. They told us there was one in every five that was good. I finished at 10 a.m. and lay on deck reading till 11.30 a.m. We went to the pictures at 1.45 p.m. It was called "Public Nuisance No. 1" and was pretty silly. There was a travel talk on the supports on Chile and it was very good. I was at Bible Class tonight the last time on board. The hymns were "Oh God of Bethel" and "Sun of my Soul" - the reading was Psalm 51: Verses 1-19: Acts 20 - 24. Clocks went back half an hour last night and again tonight half an hour.

Friday 9 May 1941

We got our big kit bags out of the hold this morning and had a lecture. This afternoon we had a lecture and then action stations and then we were issued with 60 cigarettes each. They say the "Leander" sank a raider since she left us.

Saturday 10 May 1941

The "Queen Mary" passed us this morning on her way back. They say she has Italian prisoners aboard taking them to prison camps in Ceylon. We had lectures and PT this morning. This afternoon we greased our boots with dubbin and had Morse. The "Queen Elizabeth" passed us tonight also two or three steamers. We are now passing



through the narrowest part of the Red Sea. The land is quite close on both sides. There is a lighthouse on one side. They have taken precautions on board with one lifeboat already over the side and sand buckets etc. placed all round the decks just in case we are bombed. We will probably see some action before we land. It is a beautiful night a full moon and it is hard to realise we are in danger. Clocks went back another half an hour tonight.

Sunday 11 May 1941

It's hard to realise I am 22 now. I never thought I would celebrate a birthday at sea. I was at the church service this morning also communion service. We handed in our sandals today and now we have to wear our gym shoes for the next two days till we get off the boat. I repacked my kit bags this afternoon. Tonight I had my hair cut right off just to celebrate my birthday. It feels very comfortable without it. It may make my hair thicker and clear the dandruff out of it. I was talking to Dave Hogg, Don Hogg's brother. They are both Sergeants in the ASC, also Ray Bachop is in the ASC.

Monday 12 May 1941

We had a lecture and PT from 10.30 a.m. until 11.30 a.m. Before that we had to pack out kits and clean the cabins out. This afternoon we paraded at 3.30 p.m. and had a lecture on embarkation and what to do on the train etc. It lasted until 4 p.m. and then we were finished for the day. Reveille is at 5 a.m. in the morning and breakfast is an hour earlier than usual. We will be having dry rations for the other two meals as we will be on the train or in the main camp.

Tuesday 13 May 1941

We were up at 5 a.m., breakfast at 7 a.m. and were anchored about 8 a.m. We were all ready to go off and we waited till they told us we were not going off today. We hung around till 3.30 p.m. doing nothing and then they came and made us open all our kit bags for an inspection. At 9 p.m. we had pay parade. We were given one pound Egyptian or one pound seven pence NZ. After that we paid our spare money into our pay books which took till 11.30 p.m.

Wednesday 14 May 1941

Up at 6 a.m. as usual and we watched 600 ASC going ashore in the lighters. They go to a different camp to us. We paraded at 2.15 p.m. and were on the lighters ready to go ashore at 4.30 p.m. We waited on the Port Tufic wharf from 5 p.m. till 11.45 p.m. waiting in the train. Third class carriages on the train and I got about 2 hours sleep all night. We were in Cairo for a while about 8 a.m. Thursday and arrived in Maadi camp at 9 a.m. We had breakfast, the first meal since leaving the boat except for a cup of tea and a bag lunch at Tufic.



"Lighter boat" to off load troops.

Arrival in Egypt—marching in to Maadi Camp



Maadi Camp in a dust storm

From Wikipedia:

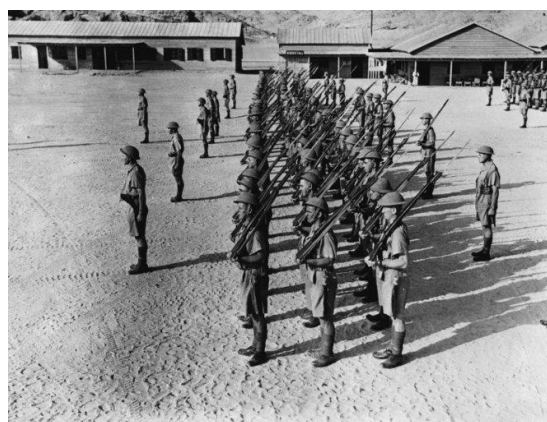
During the period between 1940 and 1946, Maadi had an important role in the [Military history of New Zealand during World War II](#); around 76,000 members of the First Echelon, 2 NZEF (Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force) main body trained at a camp near Maadi at the base of the desert slopes of Wadi Degla and Tel al-Maadi. During that time this area belonged to the Delta Land Company which created Maadi in 1907. The rocky plateau was leased to the New Zealand Forces, and for the next six years became [New Zealand's](#) main overseas base.

Thursday 15 May 1941

I received letter No. 2 from Mary the first one since leaving New Zealand. We are in isolation on account of flu in the ranks. We are in a camp of our own but are in huts, 22 men in each. They are very strict about health precautions etc. We did no drill today. We start in earnest on Monday.

Friday 16 May 1941

Up at 6 a.m. Parade before breakfast. Breakfast at 6.30 a.m. on parade again at 7.30 a.m. and went for a walk and then we were issued with a pair of shorts that can be made into longs, also a shirt and two pairs of short pants. We were paid another one pound seven pence today and we will be paid every week from now on. We were also issued with web gear today and also had a lecture. It is a strict blackout at night here. The Sergeants, Corporals and Lance Corporals here all lost a stripe. Wrote a letter to Mary.



2nd NZEF 20th Battalion at parade
in Maadi

Saturday 17 May 1941

Had a march for an hour and then a medical parade and were finished for the day. I got a letter from Mary, No. 3 and one from Mum.

Sunday 18 May 1941

There was no church parade today but we had a small march and were issued with rifles and spats. We spent most of the afternoon cleaning the rifles as they were covered in grease.

Monday 19 May 1941

Up at 4.50 a.m. and started work at 5 a.m. on a fatigue in the Officer's cookhouse. We had about 2 hours off this morning and about 4 hours off this afternoon. We finished at 8.30 p.m. Their food is much the same as ours.

Tuesday 20 May 1941

Up at 4.45 a.m. Parade before breakfast at 5.15 a.m. Breakfast at 5.30 a.m. and on company parade at 6.15 a.m. Had tests on general knowledge and training till 9.45 a.m. Morning tea from 10 a.m. till 10.30 a.m. then drill and Battalion parade and march past till 12.30 p.m. Lunch from 1 p.m. till 2 p.m. and a rest from 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. We had an issue of puttees and 50 rounds of ammunition then a lecture until 6 p.m. Dinner was at 6.30 p.m. and then we were finished for the day. Received a wire from Mary.

Wednesday 21 May 1941

We had a route march. Battalion parade and bayonet drill in the morning and in the afternoon we went to a lookout post where Mr Dunn showed us points of interest around the camp and the Nile Valley. Had letter No. 4 from Mary also one from Gilbert Gow.³

Thursday 22 May 1941

Paraded at 6 a.m. and handed in our rifles. We then had a route march and then another parade at 8.45 a.m. for a re-shuffle of Companies. I have been put in "E" Company, the first one. I was mess orderly for tea tonight and will be again in the morning. We were issued with rifles again tonight and we are going shooting in the morning.

Friday 23 May 1941

Up at 4.45 a.m. and worked till 7.30 a.m. in the mess and had off till 10.30 a.m. when we paraded for Battalion parade. We paraded at 4 p.m. for pay and were issued with tin hats and 50 cigarettes and 2 boxes of matches free. We get them every week free. I also had a period on the Bren gun this morning.

Saturday 24 May 1941

I was on the 30 yard firing range this morning zeroing my rifle and I had morning tea there and was given oranges. I had the afternoon off.

Sunday 25 May 1941

Church parade at 9 a.m. and communion afterwards. We paraded at 1.45 p.m. and some of the chaps got leave for the first time since we came. We are out of quarantine from today and some of the chaps went to Maadi tent. We are to get 15% leave every day which means we will get leave at least once a week. I met Bill Duncan tonight in the YMCA with Harry.

Monday 26 May 1941

Some of us had Bren gun this morning and this afternoon we were shifted round into platoons in huts instead of being mixed up. Les Fagg⁴ and I went down to help Jack Dever⁵ clean the Bren gun after tea and when we got back the rest of the Company was out on a route march. I had eggs and potatoes in the Naafi for supper and it cost me 2½ shillings.

Tuesday 27 May 1941

We were shooting out of the Bren gun this morning. I scored 32 out of 50 which wasn't bad. Battalion parade and then our last lessons on the Bren gun in the afternoon followed by a route march at night from 8 p.m. till 9.30 p.m. Wrote to Mary and Mum.

Wednesday 28 May 1941

I received letters 5 - 6 and 7 from Mary and one from Mum. Up at 4 a.m. breakfast at 4.30 a.m. and then left for a shooting range at Abyssia. We fired 40 rounds each. I scored 119 out of 160. We went through the Dead City to get there and I came back through Cairo and Maadi Township. We were back at 1.15 p.m. We handed in our sea kits with battle dress, also winter singlets and shirts and one blanket. I went to the YMCA Bible Class and was speaking to Mr Dodd's also Bill Duncan

Thursday 29 May 1941

We were up at 4 a.m. and were supposed to move out at 6.30 a.m. but it was cancelled for 24 hours. We went for a route march for 4 hours around Maadi. We stopped at Maadi Tent. I got leave in the afternoon and went to Cairo with Jack Miller⁶ and we were back in camp at 9.30 p.m. and were told we were moving in the morning.

Friday 30 May 1941

We were up at 4 a.m. and left at 6.30 a.m. There were 3 trucks of us and we went to Wadi Natrun Coptic Monasteries. We arrived at 10 a.m. and the first one we saw was Jim Armstrong, he is our Corporal.



005API02130 [RM] © www.visualphotos.com

Inside Wadi Natrun Coptic Monastery



Alan at Wadi Natrun

Saturday 31 May 1941

I got letter No. 3 from Mum. Up at 5 a.m. breakfast at 6 a.m. and we paraded at 7 a.m. and had weapon training till 8 a.m. and then a route march till 10 a.m. then Bren gun till 11 a.m. We were then off till 4 p.m. when we had anti-tank rifle till 5 p.m. then trench mortar till 6 p.m. when we finished.

Sunday 1 June 1941

Up at 6 a.m. and paraded at 7.30 a.m. We were supposed to go to church but instead we went and had our teeth examined then had kit inspection at 10.30 a.m. and then we were finished. Wrote a letter to Mary and one to Mum. I am on picket duty tonight. I had a bath in an inch of water in the open and had my picture taken.

Monday 2 June 1941

We spent the morning digging trenches and had a lecture on parachutists and then dug trenches again in the afternoon.



Tuesday 3 June 1941

We had a route march in the morning and were on trenches in the afternoon and picket duty at night.

Wednesday 4 June 1941

Paraded at 7 a.m. and at 8.30 a.m. seven of us from our Platoon went to NCO weapon training school and had instruction on the Bren gun. In the afternoon we continued on the gun and then the trench mortar.

Thursday 5 June 1941

NCO class until 10 a.m. and then Bren gun till 1 a.m. In the afternoon we filled in the latrine trench with stones and then I was on picket for the aeroplane till 6 p.m. I received letter No. 7 from Mary and No. 4 from Mum. I go on picket duty from 9 p.m. until 11 p.m.

Friday 6 June 1941

NCO class till 10 a.m. and then Bren gun until 11 a.m. A rest period from then till 4 p.m. then we went for a route march or at least, a run at the pace we went, and it lasted 2 hours. I was talking to Finn Osbourne tonight for about an hour. I had a note from George Kirkham who works in Arthur Barnett's. On the route march we passed the salt and soda works and also the lakes.

Saturday 7 June 1941

NCO class and Bren training in the morning. Breakfast was half an hour late as the cooks slept in. At 4 p.m. we had a lecture by a Sergeant who was in Greece. He was very interesting and after that we had a competition on the Bren. We were paid in the morning and I only drew 10 shillings. I am on picket duty from 8.15 p.m. until 10.25 p.m. tonight. George Mitchell from Outram was our Company Sergeant Major at Maadi.

Sunday 8 June 1941

Paraded at 7.30 a.m. for church but the Padre didn't arrive so we had a march and were finished at 9 a.m. We cleaned out our tent and I wrote to Mary and Mum. Les Fagg took photos of me today.

Monday 9 June 1941

We had a route march and a class until 11.30 a.m. A rest period until 4 p.m. then we had Bren gun practice.



To get acclimatised in Egypt, troops spent many hours doing route marches.

Tuesday 10 June 1941

We had a route march and a class until 11.30 a.m. then a rest period until 4 p.m. and then we had a lecture on military law. I received letter No. 8 from Mary and one from Keith.⁷ We had night manoeuvres from 8 p.m. until 10 p.m.

Wednesday 11 June 1941

We had a route march and a class until 11 a.m. and then a rest until 4 p.m. then we had a shower in the mobile showers then Bren gun practice. At 8 p.m. we had night manoeuvres and mortar until 10 p.m. We got an issue of 50 cigarettes and two boxes of matches.

Thursday 12 June 1941

We had a route march and a mortar demonstration until 10.30 a.m. then gas mask drill until 11 a.m. We had a rest until 4 p.m. then we had a shower and the Bren gun until 6p.m.

Light weight gas mask WW2



Friday 13 June 1941

We paraded at 7 a.m. and were sent back to our tents to clean up our kits etc, then we cleaned up our lines, had morning tea and were finished for the morning. I was to act as guide for the Africans who were taking over the camp but I wasn't needed. We paraded at 4 p.m. and did some more cleaning up and then had a pay parade. I drew 10 shillings. I'm on guard picket tonight from 2.45 a.m. and the rest of the camp will be up at 4 a.m. We had tea tonight in the open as the mess tent will be used for sleeping in tonight.

Saturday 14 June 1941

I was up at 2.45 a.m. and had to go on picket duty on my own as Tom McKeinney was ill with dysentery. Quite a lot of chaps had it. I woke the rest of the platoon at 4 a.m. We had breakfast at 4.30 a.m. and left Wadi Natrun at 6.30 a.m. for Helwan. (Helwan is 30 km south of Cairo). Coming through camp at Nena our truck grazed alongside of an old taxi and took both wheels off. We didn't stop! We had South Africans driving our trucks. In Cairo I saw another army truck hit a dray and the mule just dropped flat. We arrived at Helwan at 10.30 p.m. and are in huts with 25 in each. We had showers tonight and are going to the baths tomorrow. Some of the chaps went to Cairo on leave. We are now in the 20th Battalion. We had supper in the Naafi.

Alan's photos of Helwan Camp:



Helwan Camp





Alan's photos of Helwan Camp



Sunday 15 June 1941

Up at 6.30 a.m. and I was put on mess orderly duty with 3 others for the day. Breakfast was at 7.30 a.m., lunch at 12.30 p.m. and tea at 6 p.m. I missed the church parade. I spent the afternoon cleaning my rifle and had a shower after tea.

Monday 16 June 1941

Up at 5.30 a.m. and on parade at 7.30 a.m. and we had a route march till 11 a.m., then foot inspection. We had Bren gun practice from 3 p.m. till 5 p.m. and then had tea at 5.30 p.m. Alan Docherty was here today seeing Jack. We had supper in the YMCA tonight.

Tuesday 17 June 1941

I am on cookhouse fatigues today, it isn't a bad job. I received six letters today, one dated 7 April from Mary and one from Mum. Mary's one had a photo in it. Two letters marked No. 9 from Mary and No. 5 from Mum. I finished work at 2.30 p.m. and started at 5 p.m. and worked until 7 p.m. I then had a shower and am now writing.

Platoon Company "D" (Otago)

Wednesday 18 June 1941 I sent letter No. 5 to Mum and Mary. We had a four hour route march in the morning and then paraded at 12.30 p.m. after lunch for a reshuffle of Companies. We were put into Companies according to provinces. We were drafted to "D" Company which is the Otago one. We made up the Company from the 1st Echelon. I had a shower at 2.30 p.m. then went and drew cigarettes and then I was



finished for the day. I went to the YMCA tonight and found out that the Bible Class was there. I went and found Mr Spence⁸ there and I had a talk with him. He was pleased to hear from the Bay.

Thursday 19 June 1941

We had a route march from 8 a.m. till 11 a.m. We went along the banks of a canal and bought some water melons off the native farmers. We had the afternoon off. I went to the Pall Mall pictures tonight. The picture was Shirley Temple in "Susannah of the Mounties". I went with Alf Rawlings and we had some popcorn and biscuits to eat there.

Friday 20 June 1941

We had a route march and in the afternoon we were paid. We went to the pictures "Calling Dr Kildare" - it was very good. We got 50 cigarettes from the National Patriotic Fund NZ.

Saturday 21 June 1941

We cleaned up around the huts in the morning and left at 12 o'clock for Cairo on leave. What a terrible place. Home at 10 p.m. I had my fortune told and bought two pairs of stockings and had them sent to Mary.

Sunday 22 June 1941

I was on cookhouse fatigue again today and I missed the church parade. I had a letter from Les Fagg from Maadi Hospital.

Monday 23 June 1941

We had bayonet and rifle drill in the morning until 11 a.m. then off until 7 p.m. when we had a lecture on night patrol and the grenade throwing. We were finished by 9 p.m. and then had supper at the YMCA. I wrote a green envelope letter to Mary No. 6.

Tuesday 24 June 1941

We had tommy gun practice from 8 a.m. till 9 a.m. then Bren gun until 10 a.m. then a route march until 11 a.m. Then at 7 p.m. we went to the YMCA for a lecture from the Colonel but we couldn't hear anything as we were at the back of the hut. Had letter 9 and 10 from Mary, the third one marked "9". We must have lost count!

Wednesday 25 June 1941

A route march, anti-tank rifle and tommy gun practice in the morning. I had leave in the afternoon and went to see Les Fagg in Maadi Hospital and then saw Mrs Spence at Helwan. After I came back I went to the pictures. The picture was called "The Buccaneer" and it was quite good. We got an issue of 50 cigarettes and I got some photos from Les taken at Wadi Natrun. Frank Giles broadcasted over the air today and sent a message to Sawyers Bay for us. They will hear it in a months' time.

Thursday 26 June 1941

We had a Battalion parade at 7.30a.m. and then the Officers and NCO's went to a lecture so the Lance Corporal took us for a march just around the hill out of sight, then we sat down until 10 a.m. then marched back and were finished. Paraded again at 7 p.m. and then had bayonet drill until 8 p.m. then field craft till 9 p.m. and then we were finished. We went and had supper at the YMCA.

Friday 27 June 1941

We had a Battalion Parade at 7.30 a.m. then a march past the Colonel then had bayonet drill, then a route march till 11.30 p.m. We had a pay parade at 3 p.m. I only drew one pound. The boys that were in Crete got a parcel each today from the people of Otago. They shared cake, lollies etc with us. We went to Dingles pictures tonight. They were very good for an amateur. They showed a Charlie Chase comedy and a film of Egypt, Greece and Crete. It was very good and was shown in the mess room. It only lasted an hour.

Saturday 28 June 1941

We had a company parade at 7.30 a.m. then we broke off to clean up round the hut then were finished for the day. We went to the pictures - it was called "Andy Hardy gets Spring Fever" and it was very good. I had supper at the YMCA and then wrote letters to Mary and mum. Jack Dever received word today of his mother's death, it was a big shock to him.

Sunday 29 June 1941

Up at 6.45 a.m. and church parade at 8.45 a.m. and it was very good. It was just a song service and Mr Spence told us the origin of the hymns we sung. They were "Abide with me", "Silent Night" and others. I spoke to him afterwards and told him about Jack's mother. I had a cup of tea with him and then he came to the hut to see Jack. Mr Spence gave me "The Sign of the Triangle" by Joseph Hocking to read. He spoke highly of Mary and Myra⁹ and their singing. Jack Miller and I went to a singsong tonight in the YMCA and had tea after, which was free.

Monday 30 June 1941

Battalion parade and then march past, then a route march, followed by tommy gun and Bren gun practice till 11 a.m. We paraded again at 7 p.m. and had bayonet drill till 8 p.m. then judging distances and firing orders till 8.30 p.m. and we were then finished for the night.

Tuesday 1 July 1941

Battalion parade and march past, then a route march, then trench mortar practice and then we were finished until 7 p.m. when we had grenade practice and were then finished for the day. I wrote to Gilbert today and put a photo in with it.

Wednesday 2 July 1941

Paraded at 6.45 a.m. and had Battalion parade and a march past. Brigadier Patrick took the salute and after that we had a route march till 11 a.m. when we were

finished for the day. I went to Bible Class at the YMCA tonight. There were 15 of us there. I spent the afternoon fixing my rifle and sewing on buttons. There is a big POW camp between us and Helwan Township and there are a few thousand Italians and a few Germans there.

Thursday 3 July 1941

Battalion parade, route march and Bren gun practice in the morning. At 7 p.m. we had a lecture on patrols by Mr Baker, the second in command and then had an hour on describing ground etc. Had supper at the YMCA at 9 p.m. Received letters No. 10 from Mary and No. 6 from Mum.

Friday 4 July 1941

Battalion parade, route march, and then Bren gun practice in the morning and we were then finished. We had pay parade at 2.30 p.m. and had soft drinks at the YMCA. At night Jack Miller and I went to a concert in the South African enclosed area. It was given by the Sir Seymour concert party and was very good. A Miss Doreen Driscoll sang "Danny Boy" and "Somewhere over the Rainbow". A Mr Rowell sang, "There will always be an England" and "I'll walk beside you" and there were a lot of other items. We didn't get home till 11 p.m.

Saturday 5 July 1941

We had Company parade at 7.30 a.m. and then we were broken off to clean up huts and the surroundings and we were given linseed oil to put on the woodwork of our rifles. Jack Miller and I went on leave to Cairo and we went to "Gone with the Wind". It is the best picture I have ever seen. It lasted from 4 p.m. till 8 p.m. We arrived back in camp at 11.15.

Cairo



Alan's photos of Cairo



Sunday 6 July 1941

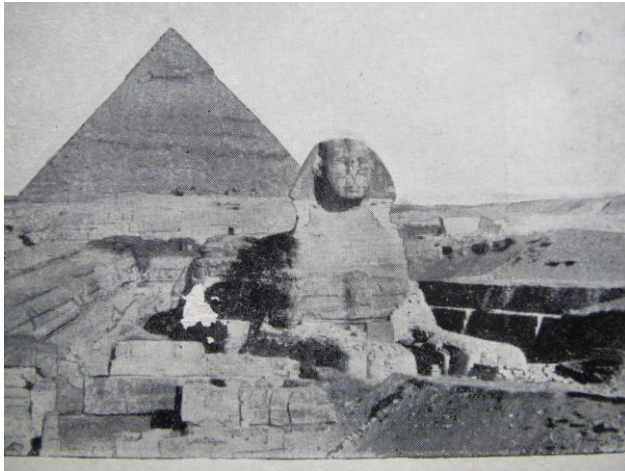
I missed church parade this morning as I'm going on guard this afternoon and I had to do some guard drill. I went on guard at 4.15 p.m. and my first shift was over at 8.30 p.m. I did an hour on the beat and then an hour guarding the four prisoners. My next shift was 2.30 a.m. till 4.30 a.m.

Monday 7 July 1941

My third shift was 8.30 a.m. till 10.30 a.m. but at 7 a.m. I took three of the prisoners away to clean out sump holes and to get our breakfast. My last shift was 2.30 p.m. till 4.30 p.m. when a new guard look over. We missed night drill because we were just off guard duty. We are now listening to the news. We have a wireless in our hut run off batteries. It belongs to the Company. Every Company in the Battalion has a wireless. They were bought with a grant the Battalion got from the Patriotic Fund some time ago.

Tuesday 8 July 1941:

Sphinx Egypt



Battalion parade, route march, Bren gun and a demonstration by the anti-tank squad in the morning and in the afternoon Jack Miller and I went on leave. We were in Cairo at 2 p.m. and I went to get some photos but the place was closed. We caught a tram about 3.30 p.m. and went to the Mena Pyramids. On the way we passed the Zoological Gardens which we are going to visit one day. We went

inside the biggest pyramid, the ancient entrance of which is closed with a keystone. Jack took a picture of me standing in front of the keystone. The entrance now is just below the keystone and it was blasted in. It goes in about 50 ft and at the end of the tunnel there is an entrance to the High Priest's chamber, which is closed off. There is a steep stone staircase then a tunnel about 4 ft high and 4 ft wide with a ramp which you climb up 125ft to the Queen's Chamber which is about 15ft square and about 25ft high and it is lined with slabs of red granite. There is also a recess in which a coffin is inserted. After coming out of there you start to climb another tunnel for another 125ft to the King's chamber, which is much bigger than the Queen's one. The case that held the King's coffin is still there. It is



Alan at the Sphinx

made out of a solid block of red granite and is all in one piece as there are no joins in it at all. In the walls in both chambers there are holes which are air vents which come from the outside. This Kings' chamber is right in the centre of the pyramid 250ft above the ground and the Queen's chamber is straight below it half way to the ground. In the tunnel leading to the King's chamber there are holes at each side where chocks were put in to hold the coffin when they were putting it in. Round the base of the pyramid there is a foundation about 50ft out made of huge slabs of stone and they are all dove-tailed into one another. From there we went round the second pyramid and we took photos of each other with some hieroglyphics on a wall behind us. From there we went to the third one and Jack climbed it and took two photos looking towards Cairo. The Ghazi pyramid was built about 2700BC and took 60,000 slaves 20 years to build and it is 473ft long and 456ft high and covers 12½ acres at the base and was built by the Phoenicians. From there we went down to the Sphinx which is just below the pyramid. You go down a roadway which is made of large stone blocks and about halfway down Jack took a photo of me standing beside a 20ft hole, also one of me

Alan's photo at the pyramids

standing under the head of the Sphinx. We went through the Temple which is floored with white alabaster and saw some tombs there also. There were also quite a few temples around about which we didn't get into. Jack took a photo of me on a camel with the Ghazi pyramid in the background. We were there about two hour's altogether. It took us about an hour to get there on a tram and cost us 1 Acker each way. We bought two tins of fruit in Cairo and had them when we got back home that was our tea. I bought a camera and it cost me 135 Ackers and a case for 25 Ackers. We also bought some New Zealand apples at the New Zealand Club, 2 for 1 Acker.



Wednesday 9 July 1941

Battalion parade, route march and an anti tank demonstration was all we did in the morning and I read all afternoon - getting lazy - drew 50 cigarettes issue today. Started a letter to Mary at night.



20th Battalion studying mock battle plans in Egypt

Thursday 10 July 1941

Battalion parade and on the route march we got some grapes and pomegranates. They were very nice. Had Bren gun when we came back. Finished a letter to Mary and one to Mum. Had a general knowledge test and bayonet drill at night then we went to the YMCA for supper.

Friday 11 July 1941

I've been hut picket today for the first time I've had the job in the army. I swept the hut and carried 6 buckets of water to fill the zephyr outside the hut. I went to the store to fill the lanterns. I got 5 letters, one from Mr Robertson, Gilbert, Mary and two from Mum. I had to stay in the hut while the rest of the chaps were having their meals and I went for mine, after Jack Miller and I went to the pictures. It was "Good Girls' to Paris" and was quite good. We were paid today and I drew 100 Ackers or one pound.

Alan



Saturday 12 July 1941

Company parade and then we dug slit trenches outside the mess till 10 a. m. and then had a shower parade, the first one here. We have always gone on our own accord before but there is a shortage of water and they put a picket on the showers. Jack and I went to the pictures at the Pall Mall Theatre. It was a Western and was quite good. Took the first photos on my camera today.

Sunday 13 July 1941

Up at 6.45 a.m. and paraded at 8.30 a.m. with web packs and kit bags ready to move. We marched over to our new area which took us half an hour then we went back for our beds and blankets. We only had bread and jam and an orange for dinner. Went to the YMCA with Jack, a singsong was on there and it was very good. We met Ralph Henderson, he is in the ASC.

Monday 14 July 1941

Company parade at 7.15 a.m. then we spent till 10.30 a.m. filling in the holes around the company lines. We paraded tonight at 6.15 p.m. and marched out towards the Nile where "B" Company and the 1st Section of the Battalion put on a mock attack display. It looked very much like the real thing with Bren carriers etc. Jack and I went to the YMCA for supper and I wrote letters to Mary and Mum.

Tuesday 15 July 1941

Battalion parade, route march and Bren gun in the morning. In the afternoon Jack Miller and I went on leave. We went to the Zoo. What a wonderful place - it's hard to realise that such a place exists over here. We were there for about 3½ hours. We bought some more apples from the New Zealand Club on the way home.



Camel in Cairo Zoo

Wednesday 16 July 1941

Battalion parade, lecture on laying mine fields and route march in the morning. In the afternoon Sid Underwood came to see Jack Docherty and I went with them to see Scotty Glen. He has been in Durban for a month and has only been back a fortnight. We also saw Jack Paris and Bill Potter.

Thursday 17 July 1941

Battalion parade, route march, Bren gun and two in mortar in the morning. At night we had a gas demonstration, then field craft. Had a letter from Mary and one from Keith.⁹

Friday 18 July 1941

Battalion parade, inspection by the Major, trench mortar and a route march in the morning. We had a pay parade at 2.30 p.m. and I got a haircut. I went to the pictures after. It was Sergeant Madden with Wallace Berry in it. It was good. Charlie McDonald came to see me this morning. He is a Sergeant in the Headquarters Carrier Platoon.

Saturday 19 July 1941

Company parade at 7.15 a.m. and then we filled in holes till 10 a.m. and were finished for the day. I spent the afternoon writing to Mary and Mum. Jack Miller and I went to the pictures. It was called "A Wonderful World" and was quite good.

Sunday 20 July 1941

Paraded for church at 8.30 a.m. and then went to communion. After I wrote letters to the Robertson's and Mary and Mum, and then Jim Miller and I went to Helwan in the afternoon to the Japanese gardens. They were very nice. At night we went to a sing-song at the YMCA and had New Zealand made fruit cake for supper.

Japanese Gardens Helwan





Japanese Gardens Helwan

Monday 21 July 1941

Battalion parade, then we went through a gas chamber. We were in for about 2 minutes. We then had mortar, rifle and bayonet drill then a route march and field craft at night for 2 hours. I got two spoonfuls of pudding tonight and we get no spuds as they are short at this time of the year so we get rice instead. Dingle started on the production of his picture called "Sons' Abroad" today. Scotty Glen was here this afternoon and I took a photo of him and Jack Docherty.

Tuesday 22 July 1941

I was on cookhouse fatigue at the Sergeant's mess today with Rod Cameron and what a dirty job - we were there from 7.30 a.m. till 7.30 p.m. I received a letter from Mum today with some magazines dated 27 June.

Wednesday 23 July 1941

Paraded at 7.15 a.m. Battalion parade, route march and a demonstration on patrol in village street and we were then finished for the day. I went to the Bible Class at the YMCA at night and the subject was Sin. We were there till 10 p.m.

Thursday 24 July 1941

Battalion parade, demonstration and route march, then Bren gun and we were finished for the morning. Padre Spence brought around parcels to the huts to divide amongst us. They were parcels that were sent to soldiers that have been killed in action. We are going out tonight at 7 p.m. in battle order and will be out till 11 a.m. tomorrow. We left at 7 p.m. and marched for 1½ hours then camped. They brought out tea and biscuits to us. I had to go on picket from 12 p.m. till 1 a.m.

Friday 25 July 1941

We were up at 4 a.m. and were in positions for attack by 5 a.m. I carried the Bren gun. We roamed around there till 6.45 a.m. then marched back to the bivvy for breakfast, a shave and a rest until 8.45 a.m. then we set out for camp. We did a stint on the way back and arrived at 11 a.m. We were paid in the afternoon and at

night Jack and I went to the pictures. It was called "The man in the iron mask" and it was quite good.

Saturday 26 July 1941

Battalion parade and drill till 9.15 a.m. then we filled in holes till 10.30 a.m. and we were finished for the day. Jack D and I went to see "Merrily We Live" at the Pall Mall theatre and it was good. I spent the afternoon reading, writing and wrote a letter to Mary.

Sunday 27 July 1941

Church parade and communion. Church was taken by Padre McKenzie. I wrote letters to Mum and Keith. Jack M and I went to the YMCA singsong - we had "When I Survey" sung to the tune of Londonderry air and it was very nice.

Monday 28 July 1941

Battalion parade and a route march till 11.50 a.m. when we were finished for the morning. I played in the hockey team against "A" Company from 7 p.m. till 8 p.m. We were beaten 6 to 1.

Tuesday 29 July 1941

Battalion parade and a route march till 11.50 a.m. and at night I watched the pipe band play the retreat and it was wonderful. The retreat originated at the time of the Crusades when it was played as a prayer for those killed in action. Jack M and I went to see "The Hardy's Ride High" and it was very good.

Wednesday 30 July 1941

Battalion parade, squad drill and trench mortar in the morning and we are going out tonight at 7 p.m. for 24 hours. We left camp at 7 p.m. and marched till 11 p.m. with 10 minute spells each hour. Slept till 3 a.m. Thursday morning.

Thursday 31 July 1941

Up at 3 a.m. and in position by 4 a.m. I was Platoon runner. The show was washed out at 6.30 a.m. and we marched back to the bivvy where we shaved, had breakfast and rested till 10 a.m. We only had dry rations, 1 tin of bully, 1 of beans and packet of biscuits between two of us which had to do us for breakfast and dinner. We set out for home and marched till 12 noon. We stopped till 2 p.m. and then marched till 3 p.m. and then stopped till 4 p.m. and we were home at 5.15 p.m. Half the Battalion had blistered feet but mine were alright.

Friday 1 August 1941

We were supposed to have a picnic today but it was put off. We rested instead. We were paid in the afternoon. I received a letter from Mary and one from Mum today. We were also given a parcel each from the Patriotic funds. Mine came from Wanganui and it contained a cake, 1 tin of fruit, 1 tin of butterscotch, boot laces and a writing pad. It was very nice. Some of the chaps got different ones.

Saturday 2 August 1941

I was one of the escorts at a court martial this morning from 9 a.m. till 11 a.m. and in the afternoon Jack M and I went to Cairo. We spent the time looking through the big shops and we were home at 10 p.m. I met George Kirkham in the New Zealand Club.

Sunday 3 August 1941

We had a church parade then a hut inspection and afterwards I wrote a letter to Mary and Mum and sent 3 photos. Jack M and I went to the YMCA singsong and it was very nice. I received a letter from Mary.

Monday 4 August 1941

Battalion parade and trench mortar, tommy gun and compass reading all in the morning and at night we had a short lecture by the Medical Orderly on the care of feet etc. I received a letter from Mary and one from Myra today. It is 110 degrees in the shade.

Tuesday 5 August 1941

A holiday today, most of the chaps went to sports at the King's Stadium in Cairo. I spent the day writing letters. I went to the pictures - called "Little Old New York". I wrote 4 letters.

Wednesday 6 August 1941

Brigade parade this morning for 3 hours and then we were finished for the day.

Thursday 7 August 1941

Battalion parade and drill etc. in the morning and at night the Company went out for the night at 7 p.m. I didn't go as I'm on cookhouse fatigue tomorrow. Jack D and I went to see "Jamaican Inn". It was good but there was quite a lot cut out of it. I posted a parcel to Mary today.

Friday 8 August 1941

Jack D and I were on cookhouse fatigue today and we scrubbed pots for 1½ hours tonight. Jack M and I went to see "He Married His Wife" and the machine broke down twice and the picture was no good at all.

Saturday 9 August 1941

Paraded in battle order for inspection by the Company Commander, with masks and haversacks etc, then we were finished for the day. I went to see "Swanee River" tonight for the second time and it was very good.

Sunday 10 August 1941

Church parade at the Church of England. I didn't like it very much. Had a lecture when we came home. I went to Maadi to see some of the boys. I saw Gill Cummings and I looked for Les Fagg but couldn't find him so I just came home again. I got a letter from Mum.

Monday 11 August 1941

Just the usual drill in the morning and I spent part of the time putting blanco on our web for the Brigadier's inspection on Wednesday. We had a two hour route march at night.

Tuesday 12 August 1941

I was transferred to the 4th Brigade Headquarters for the protective platoon - it seems alright.

Wednesday 13 August 1941

Squad drill and a route march in the morning and I was on picket all day.

Thursday 14 August 1941

Went to Maadi with our base kits and I had a letter from Frank and Irene.¹⁰

Friday 15 August 1941

On line picket all day.

Saturday 16 August 1941

I was on a loading party at the railway station. We marched 3 miles to the train and we left the station at 7 p.m. Had a letter from Mum and one from Mary.

Sunday 17 August 1941

We arrived at Kabret at 6 a.m. this morning and were taken in trucks to the camp. We went down to a canal for a swim but we didn't go in as it was the wrong place.

Monday 18 August 1941

It is Mary's birthday today. She is 23. I am mess orderly and I also did some digging.



Tuesday 19 August 1941

We were digging in the morning. There was a raid on the canal 20 miles away last night.

Wednesday 20 August 1941

I went to Kabret Point this morning for practice on ALC boats or barges. We crossed over to the other side of the canal which is Arabia (Sinai desert) and had a swim while we were there. Went again tonight.

Thursday 21 August 1941

Had rifle inspection then digging for the rest of the day. I received a 4 pound 16 shillings chit from home.

Friday 22 August 1941

Went rowing on the canal and had a swim this morning and were rowing again tonight and got a ride back to camp.

Saturday 23 August 1941

We crossed over the canal in a speedboat and shifted boundary pegs of a dummy drome. Went to the 20th and got some snaps of Alexandria from Jack M also the first parcel from Mum. On picket again from 10 p.m. till 12 p.m.

Sunday 24 August 1941

On picket from 4 a.m. till 6 a.m. We had church parade at 9 a.m. and found we were late so we didn't go. Spent the afternoon reading and writing.

Monday 25 August 1941

Dug in the Officer's tent in the morning. Had a letter from Mum and Mary also one from Winnie.¹¹

Tuesday 26 August 1941

On picket from 12 p.m. till 2 a.m. then 1 hour off and 1 hour on all day.

Wednesday 27 August 1941

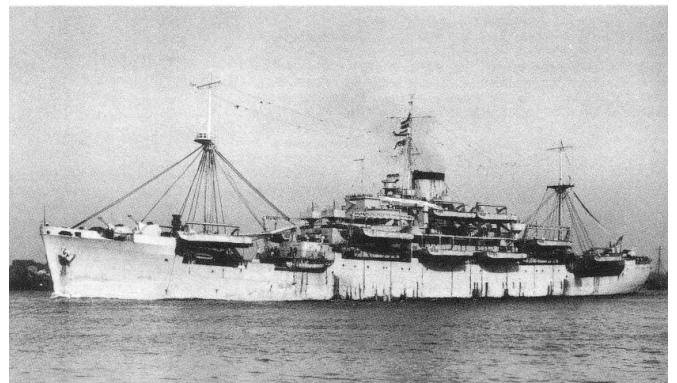
Rifle inspection, squad drill and Bren gun in the morning and we were then finished for the day.

Thursday 28 August 1941

On cookhouse duty all day and I finished at 6 p.m.

Friday 29 August 1941

Up at 5.15 a.m. and left camp at 6.30 a.m. Went out to the Glenroy on an ALC. On board at 10.30 a.m. We went back to shore at 3 p.m., had tea and at 6 p.m. we watched water polo. We had a concert at 8 p.m. until 10 p.m. given by sailors and a few New Zealander's.



HMS Glenroy

Saturday 30 August 1941

Up at 2.30 a.m. and had cocoa and were off ship by 3.15 a.m. landed at 5.15 a.m. on the Arabian side of the canal and then marched for one mile, rested and came back to this side at 7.45 a.m., had breakfast at 8.45 a.m. and had the rest of the day off. On picket duty tonight 8 p.m. till 10 p.m., and then 2 a.m. till 4 a.m.

Sunday 31 August 1941

Church parade 9 a.m. till 9.30 a.m. Went on leave to Suez arrived there 12 o'clock. It's not much of a place. We went to the pictures in the afternoon to fill in time. It was Lana Turner in "We who are young" and it was very good. Left for home at 10.30 p.m. and arrived in camp at 11.45 p.m. We saw ack-ack fire as there was a raid on. It cost us 5p to go to Suez on Army trucks. Had a letter from Mum.



Army trucks heading into Suez

Monday 1 September 1941

Physical drill at 6.30 a.m. till 7 a.m. Parade at 8 a.m. for inspection and drilled the Bren gun. Had a letter from Mary.

Tuesday 2 September 1941

Inspection parade, drill and Bren in the morning. Shower parade in the afternoon and then I was on picket 8 p.m. till 10 p.m. then 2 a.m. till 4 a.m.

Thursday 4 September 1941

Inspection parade then we went in a truck to see the swimming sports. Spent the afternoon writing.

Friday 5 September 1941

On picket duty from midnight till 2 a.m. then 1 hour on 1 hour off all day.

Saturday 6 September 1941

Inspection parade then kit inspection and then an hours' digging. Had a letter from Mary and one from Mum, also a note from Keith.

Sunday 7 September 1941

National Day of Prayer today. We had a church parade from 9 a.m. till 9.30 a.m. then we had to clean the Bren gun. On picket from 8 p.m. till 10 p.m.

Monday 8 September 1941

I attended my first sick parade today in Egypt with dysentery and was given 3 tablespoons of castor oil, then 3 spoonfuls of salts in the afternoon. I was excused duty. I watched a heavy bombing raid over Suez while on picket last night. I had nothing to eat until tea time.

Tuesday 9 September 1941

On light duty today. I cleaned the Bren gun in the morning and did 2 hours picket on the barbers shop in the afternoon. They had been shaving men with water out of the sewer!

Wednesday 10 September 1941

Practiced loading and unloading trucks today. I went to Bible Class and meet Vernon White, a cobbler of Ian Muir, also Ben Price, a nephew of the Polson's. I went with George Lohead our Sergeant.

Thursday 11 September 1941

We went to athletic sports including the whole Brigade. I entered in the 100 yards but did no good. I was on picket all night. George, Joe Martin and I went over to Vernon's tent to Bible Class. There were 15 of us there. We had a great night of study. Then we went to the YMCA for supper afterwards.

Saturday 13 September 1941

There were about 11 chaps in our tent last night. Eric and his cobblers had about 4 dozen bottles of beer. What a night! I got to sleep at 12.30 a.m. last night. We were up again at 4 a.m. and left Kabret at 7 a.m. We were comfortable enough with 16 of us in a 3 ton truck with our gear. We had a half hour break at 10 a.m. to stretch our legs and another at 2 p.m. We passed through Cairo and camped at Wadi Natrun at 3 p.m. We had our bivvy tents to put up. I did 4 hours picket.

Sunday 14 September 1941

Up at 6.30 a.m. and left Wadi Natrun at 8 a.m. We had a half hour stop at 12 a.m. then stopped at Daba camp for the night at 4 p.m. We had to dig our bivvy in. We managed to get some tinned fruit there at the Naafi.

Monday 15 September 1941

Up at 5.35 a.m. and left Daba at 7 a.m. and arrived at Buggush district at 10 a.m. There are a lot of dugouts here all sand bagged but they are full of fleas so Mac and I dug a pit for ourselves and used 2 bivvy tents to cover it. It's got sheets of tin up the sides. Went down for a swim in the afternoon in the Mediterranean and it was great. We are only about 500 yards from the beach. We are on 24 hour picket and sentry duty tonight and tomorrow, 2 hours on and 4 hours off tonight, then 1 hour on and 5 hours off tomorrow.

Tuesday 16 September 1941

On picket today and this afternoon. I had a swim and after tea we put up a tent for the Brigadier. The clocks went back an hour last night so it's dark now at 7 p.m. instead of 8 p.m.

Wednesday 17 September 1941

Had a parade at 8 a.m. for 10 minutes then we put up a tent for the Major. After that we carted sand bags on a ruck for our defence post. We had to do an hours' work in the afternoon so we got it over early so we could have a swim. We are on picket again tonight. We are still getting good food. I have just finished reading the book called "Rebecca". Mary and I saw the picture and it was great. I'm going to cart some water now for washing clothes.

Thursday 18 September 1941

Received a letter from Mary and also one from Mum last night. One of the dugouts got burnt out last night and one chap lost all his gear. On picket today from 10 a.m. till 11 a.m. and then 4 p.m. till 5 p.m. Had a swim then wrote to Mum and Mary.

Friday 19 September 1941

Inspection parade then sand bagging, had a swim, and then went to the YMCA. I am on picket tonight.

Saturday 20 September 1941

On picket today, had a swim and then I received 3 sports specials and a balaclava from Mary. I also got a letter from Mary and I wrote one to Myra.

Sunday 21 September 1941

A holiday today. We had a church parade at 5.45 p.m. but they don't allow a big gathering of men in this area so the parade was a washout. Spent most of the day writing letters. Three artillery chaps drowned today.

Monday 22 September 1941

On picket duty last night. We had the first rain since I've been in Egypt but it wasn't even enough to lay the dust. Our bivvy leaked so I spent time fixing it up.

Tuesday 23 September 1941

Paraded at 8 a.m. and then had drill till lunch, then map reading from 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. I'm not feeling too good, all shivery, went to bed at 3.15 p.m. and didn't get up till Wednesday morning.

Wednesday 24 September 1941

I am feeling a bit better but seeing it was my turn to have a day off picket, I spent all day in bed. I only got up for meals but after tea I went to Bible Class. It was held in the dark. 23rd Psalm was the reading. Mr Spence sent his car 6 miles to bring Vernon White and some other chaps from the 4th Field Ambulance group to come to Bible Class and took them back afterwards.

Thursday 25 September 1941

Parade and drill then I spent the rest of the morning cleaning the Bren gun. Had map reading from 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. and I am on picket duty from 8 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Friday 26 September 1941

On picket 2 a.m. till 4 a.m. then 9 a.m. till 10 a.m. and again 3 - 4 p.m. We were paid at 4 p.m. You should see everything - it is covered in sand. It is still blowing.

Saturday 27 September 1941

We put 2 tins of sand outside each dug out in case of fire and then we cleaned up the dug out. On picket 10 p.m. till 12 midnight.

Sunday 28 September 1941

On picket 4 a.m. till 6 a.m. then 11 a.m. till 12 noon, then 5 p.m. till to 6 p.m. I got to church just after the first hymn. It was taken by Padre Spence and it lasted about 20 minutes. We just formed a circle on the side of a sand hill. We had communion after. There were 8 there, 6 privates, 1 Sergeant and 1 Captain, quite a mixture. It was one of the best services I've ever been at. We had a picture show from 7 p.m. till 9 p.m. - a talkie run by the YMCA - it was called "Charlie Chan at the race track". They had a screen on the side of a truck and we just sat on the sand. While it was on we could hear some bombs dropping further up but they were miles away.

Monday 29 September 1941

Spent the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon building trenches. I am on picket tonight. Received letters from Mary and Mum today.

Tuesday 30 September 1941

On picket today. Went to the YMCA pictures at night. They showed travel talks of New Zealand and Australia, Canterbury Cathedral in England and then a play set around 304 AD Roman's time, centred on the 23rd Psalm.

Wednesday 1 October 1941

Went down to the beach at 7.30 a.m. to fire a rifle and also zero the Brens. We were there all day. I fired about 80 rounds and ruined a couple of tins. We each had a shot with the tommy gun. On picket 10 p.m. till 12 midnight. I went to Bible Class tonight at the YMCA. It was very good - the subject - Mark 1.

Thursday 2 October 1941

Out on manoeuvres all day with the trucks. We got a very rough ride except on the tar sealed road. We had apples last night for tea.

Friday 3 October 1941

Inspection drill, map reading then a pay parade. We get 2 bottles of beer each tonight to celebrate the 4th Brigade's 2 years in camp. I got a tin of fruit and a cake of chocolate in place of the beer.

Saturday 11 October 1941

Had an inspection this morning then a clean up. Alf and I sand bagged the entrance to the dug out. Went swimming at 2 p.m. Had letters from Mary and mum.

Sunday 12 October 1941

Church parade at 10 a.m in english and I didn't like it very much, after which I packed my gear ready to shift at 6 p.m. but had to go at 2.30 p.m. instead about 2 miles back to guard an ammunition dump. Our whole Section had to go. On guard tonight also.

Monday 13 October 1941

We do 4 hours at night and 2 hours during the day of guard duty and afterwards had a swim. We have to do our own cooking but they are sending us a cook. Fixed up the dugout.

Tuesday 14 October 1941

On guard from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and then finished for the day.

Wednesday 15 October 1941

Same as yesterday but it rained at night.

Thursday 16 October 1941

Same as yesterday. Very cold.

Friday 17 October 1941

On guard then I spent the rest of the day in the dug out, as there was a sandstorm on. Mr Abbott and Mr Baker came down at night and paid us.

Saturday 18 October 1941

On guard as usual. I watched the Libyan prisoners saying prayers - it's a great sight. Had a letter from Mum. We watched gun flashes and shells exploding all last night miles out to sea. They say there is a big battle on out there.

Sunday 19 October 1941

On guard as usual and left the camp at 4.30 p.m. for the Battalion. Had a letter from Gilbert tonight.

Monday 20 October 1941

We had an hour off parade to clean up our gear then had mortar and Bren practice. In the afternoon we had mortar again and went for a swim. I got a letter from Ivan Muir and one from J Harkness, one from Mum with a daily paper and a Digest, also a letter from Mary with a note from Mrs Hewitson.

Tuesday 21 October 1941

Had a route march - started at 8 a.m. stopped for a swim at 11 a.m. then dinner at 12.30 p.m., then back to the camp at 1.30 p.m. We then had a cup of tea then went to a band concert at the YMCA by South Africans. The General was there - it was the first time I had seen him.

Wednesday 22 October 1941

Parade inspection at 8 a.m., left camp at 10 a.m. on manoeuvres (24 hours). We marched till 2.30 p.m. then rested till 5.30 p.m. then we marched for an hour to our defence positions. Slept here - did one hour's picket.

Thursday 23 October 1941

Up at 5 a.m. waiting for an attack which didn't come as another Company got lost. We had breakfast brought out to us. We cooked our own tea last night on the primus. Had a letter from Mary and one from Mr Robertson, also a Bible Class Union letter. We watched a football match between our Platoon and No. 18. No. 18 won. Had a swim afterwards and came back this morning in trucks.

Friday 24 October 1941

We were to parade at 8 a.m. but it was washed out. I spent the morning reading. There is a football match between 17 and 18 Platoons. Received a letter from Mum dated 17 October.

Saturday 25 October 1941

Inspection at 8 a.m. then cleaned up the lines then went for a swim at 10.30 a.m. I played football for the rest against our Platoon No. 16 team. We lost 3 to nil. We went for swim afterwards. Had a daily paper dated July 26, also geographical magazine from Mum and a letter from Mrs Latta and from the church.

Sunday 26 October 1941

Church parade from 10 a.m. till 11 a.m. Four chaps sang and it was great. Had a swim in the afternoon and received a letter from Mary.

Monday 27 October 1941

We started a competition today in grenade throwing - a general knowledge test and then an assault course in which we did well. We had some drill in the afternoon and a swim which was great.

Tuesday 28 October 1941

Set out at 8.45 a.m. for a route march. We finished up at 12.30 p.m. It was for competitions. We had an AA alarm and a gas alarm on the road, then an attack to finish off with. I had a sleep and then cleaned my rifle gear for tomorrow.

Wednesday 29 October 1941

We paraded at 9 a.m. and were inspected by Major Mitchell for the Platoon and gear then we were finished for the morning. In the afternoon we had some rifle drill,

then squad drill. We came third in the Platoon competition so we get a tin of tobacco each. I went to Bible Class at the YMCA at night.

Thursday 30 October 1941

We had a 10 minute parade at 8 a.m. and were finished for the day. I fixed up my bed. There was a football match in the afternoon but it was blowing and there was sand flying everywhere so I didn't watch it.

Friday 31 October 1941

No parade so we shovelled sand out of the dugouts then went for a swim. I'm on picket tonight from 10 p.m. till 12 p.m.

Sunday 1 November 1941

I was put on cookhouse duty today and the job lasts for a week. We had a visit this afternoon from "D" Company of the 23rd Company and played two games of football against them. I went into the second half of the first game as a chap had to go off. Fin Osborne from Port was up, also a lot of the other chaps out of the old "C" Company from Burnham. It was quite a reunion.

Sunday 2 November 1941

I was on cookhouse duty all day so I missed the church parade. Had a letter from Mum and had a swim in the afternoon. We were each issued with an extra blanket today.

Monday 3 November 1941

On cookhouse and I had a swim in the afternoon. I received a parcel from Colin¹² yesterday.

Tuesday 4 November 1941

On cookhouse and had a swim in the afternoon. There was a presentation of the VC and DSO to Charles Upham by Sir Archibald Auchinleck today but I missed it. I received a parcel from Mary sent in June. Had some lemonade yesterday, the first in the Western Desert.

Wednesday 5 November 1941

On cookhouse duty as usual. I got a new pair of boots today. Went to the YMCA to see a picture, a talkie. It was Joel McCrea and Barbara Stanwyck in "Banjo on my knee". The show lasted about 2 hours and it wasn't too bad.

Friday 8 November 1941

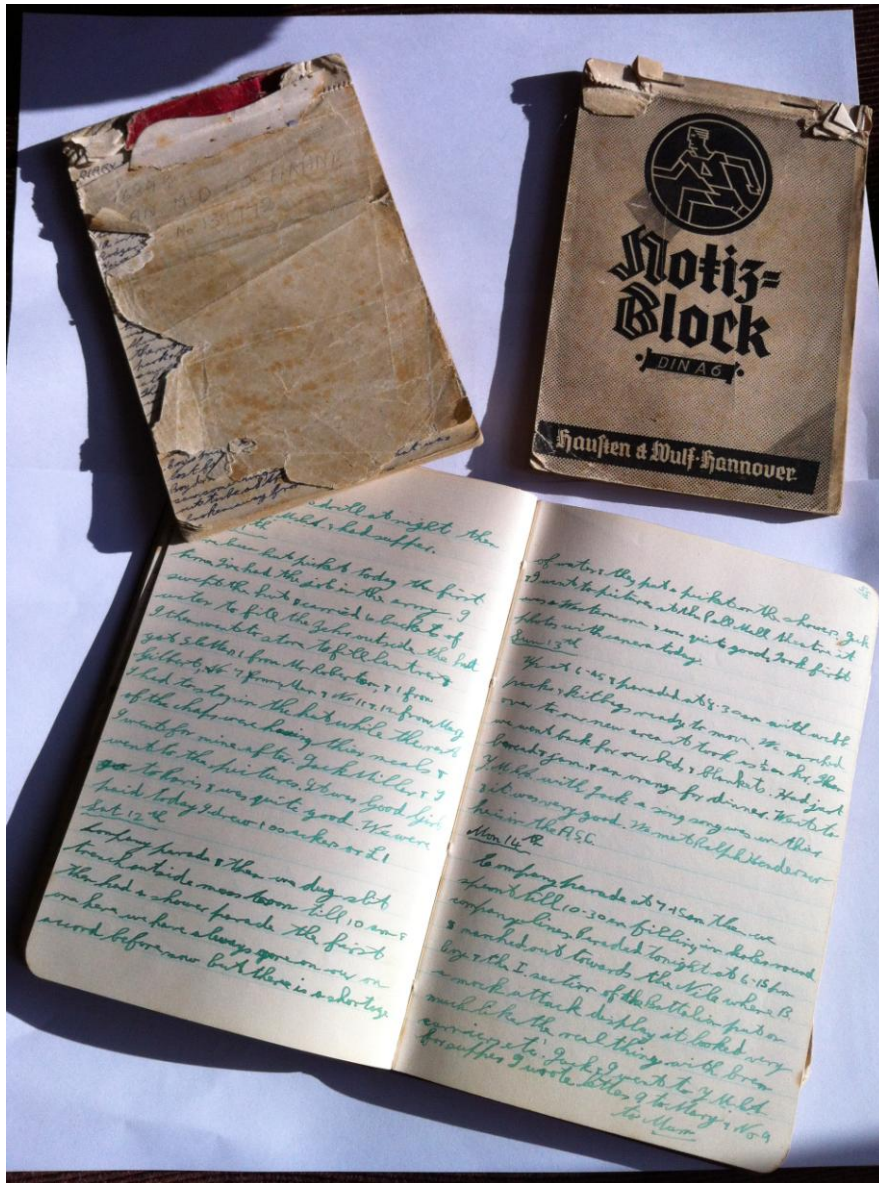
It is my last day in the cookhouse today. I watched a football match between 17 and 18 Platoons. Had a letter from Mary.

Saturday 9 November 1941

We handed in our khaki shirts and one pair of shorts and then cleaned up the lines. Had a letter from Mum and one from Winnie.

Sunday 10 November 1941

We had church parade and communion afterwards. Played football in the afternoon - No. 16 and 17 Platoons and it was a draw - 3 all. I'm going to the YMCA for a singsong and I'm taking this diary with me. Mr Spence is sending it to Mrs Spence to keep it for me as I have to get rid of it. We are moving up further and may be going into action soon.



Photograph of the actual diaries

Second Section

12 November 1941 - 24th July 1942

Diary and summary of events which happened in the second battle of Libya

From a newspaper cutting:

Members of the Otago Company, 20th Armoured Regiment pause for breakfast in the desert during the approach march from Egypt to Libya for Operation Crusader, the third biggest desert campaign in November 1941.



Alan

12th November 1941: We left Sidi Haneish at midday on 12-11-41 in glorious weather. No's 1 and 2 Sections in the front troop truck with Pat Abbott, No. 3 Section and Company in the second truck which was flying the "Jolly Rodger". We were all in good form and were singing Kai-ya yippie as we passed Mr Jordon and Brigadier Inglis at the road block. We stopped on the side of the road for lunch and had rough and tumble with the rugby and soccer balls we had with us. The traffic on the road was terribly congested but we got on fairly well passing Mersamatruh defences and onto the Siwi by-pass road heading in a southerly direction. Every two hours we had a ten minute spell and it was welcome as we were pretty cramped in the truck. About 5.30 p.m. we pulled off the road and dug in for the night. On the way we passed a transport park and there were trucks for miles around. We saw quite a number of big grey birds and we were all tempted to have a belt at them. The next few days were exciting - we were travelling most of the time in daylight only.

On Sunday the 16th, Padre Spence held a communion service and there were about twelve of us at it. At this stop we stayed for two days. The first night on picket, two of us were supposed to contact one of the other boy's pickets. I haven't seen them yet! We got lost for about half an hour just coming off picket when we saw something about 20 yards away. It turned out to be a South African water truck which had broken away from the truck that was towing it. We left it and went to bed. In the morning we went back and got a tin full of water and got it just in time as an African Officer arrived looking for it. Our Section all had a bath and we made tea with the rest. While here we played football and one night had a community sing in the moonlight. If you had been there you would have thought we were on a camping holiday or a picnic.

17 November 1941

We travelled most of the day and night and it was a great sight to see all the trucks everywhere for miles behind us. Our truck was the second from the front of the convoy and on the right hand edge of it. Travelling at night we were following a path marked out by various coloured lights and occasionally passed guides. Military Police and Don R's posted at pre-arranged places. We crossed the wire, the Italian defences on the border between Egypt and Libya. Our direction at this time seemed to be changed occasionally. On this night we saw a tremendous thunderstorm. It was a wonderful sight. We never see anything like it in New Zealand. The sky to the north was vividly lit up with continuous flashes of lightening and wild fire of amazing power, the sky being completely lit up on many occasions. Added to this was a marvellous assortment of thunder peals. In the middle of the night we passed through a Tommy encampment and they supported some of our claims that it was a big battle in progress. However we found out later that it was a storm. We also found out later that Jerry closed the wire after we passed through.

18 November 1941

We have had only an hour or so spell from travelling in the last 24 hours. At dawn we took up quite a good position where the digging was OK just by way of a change and we were just settling down for a good rest when we got orders to move back a mile and we struck work digging in a place with plenty of rock of a chalky nature which was continually falling and being blown in by a pig of a wind. However we covered our holes with groundsheets and blankets and spent a pretty uncomfortable day. The YMCA truck was in HQ Coy lines and by the time we got there we could only buy tins of boiled lollies. They sold tins of fruit and chocolate in large quantities to the first there. They should ration things out!

19 November 1941

Moving about by truck under cover of dark and we passed the time away by singing in the early hours and munching away at the inevitable biscuit of which there seems to be no end. We had a full tin on our truck. We were terribly cramped for the complete Section, a few of HQ men and a stretcher, picks, shovels, ration bag, biscuits and spare petrol and water etc. take up all the floor space, not to mention anything of the Bren, Anti tank, our own rifles and equipment. I think I slept for a wee while but spent most of the time sitting on the side of the truck or standing up to ease my aching joints which I got through sitting too long in the same position. During the day we were dug in but under half an hours' notice to move. Captain Manchester came around and visited our dugout, but we didn't take much notice of him. 5 MEF's flew over but our ack-ack was too slow. We saw some of our covered tanks in the afternoon in the vicinity.

20 November 1941

We moved off yesterday at 3.30 p.m. and dug in. We played a game of football this morning to warm ourselves up. Pat Abbott played even though we got told off for playing the day before. We saw two planes crash in the distance. The RAF was very active hosts of planes passing over all day. We had a couple of visits from a Jerry recon plane and our ack-ack stirred things up but with no luck. It was funny to see the shells bursting all round it to all of us on the ground cheering like madmen. Later in the morning we got a stir-up which sent us digging feverishly. Bluey broke a pick in his efforts and got told off. The message received informed us that 200 Jerry AFV's were nearby and moving in to attack us. I can tell you there were no spare tools anywhere. George had us all helping him make a bigger pit for Anti Tank rifle and Bill Bee had three sticky bombs. Pat Abbott had the thermos bomb. We stood too for a good while and were then told that the situation had eased and the Jerry forces had changed direction. We would have given them a hot reception as we had tanks, artillery, AFV's etc, in support.

21 November 1941

Same place. We did some bayonet drill in the morning. Spike Ewing took our Section and we quite enjoyed it. We also played football and made a special brew of morning tea from our small Section store of eats, sardine, oysters, cocoa etc. We were given a few minutes to scribble a line home. I wrote a letter card to Mary and a few days

later we heard that they hadn't got through. We moved off in the afternoon and passed a number of our tanks and gave some of the tommy crew cigarettes which they had been short of for days and were they pleased. They wanted to know if we were Canadians and when we said "no", did they go crook about them - the ones in England I mean. We travelled most of the night and what a picnic we had. In some places there were muddy ditches to cross and water lying round - the result of rain mentioned in the storm. The whole convoy was disorganised, frequently trucks being stuck and they had to use tanks to haul them out. We had to get out once and our cook's truck got lost and we never got our tea of bully stew till midnight and did we enjoy it. We also rammed the spout of an 18 pounder with the radiator of our truck - no danger.

22 November 1941

Daybreak found us on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the Tobruk Bandia road. We could hear firing ahead of us. "A" Coy was in action. Our artillery opened up behind us and it was the first time I had been under fire (I had never been on any manoeuvres where they had live shell practice). We were set down within sight of a Jerry encampment stretching from the top



New Zealand Bofors crew ready for action at dawn, 22 November 1941

of the escarpment down to the flat below. We (16 Platoon) were fortunate in not striking opposition, as we had to advance into dazzling rising sun through which we couldn't see. We passed through the encampment ripping open tents etc. with our bayonets and looking inside for things of importance such as maps etc. We were also on the lookout for booby traps for which Jerry is famous for leaving behind him. Ahead of us we could see Jerry escaping in trucks etc. and Gordon Farr opened up with his Bren without success. Bluey, George and Bill surrounded a Jerry in a tent and took him prisoner. No. 17 Platoon was following us and doing pretty well for themselves as far as booty went such as cameras, revolvers etc. We captured about 28 Jerries and the other platoons got a lot more. We worked our way down into the flats and were given a scare by a Jerry plane coming over; however our ack-ack chased him away. Monastir was the name of this place. "A" and "B" Companies actually cut the road. This was the job we had been told we had to do before we left Sadi Haneish and our job now was to stop any reinforcements from reaching Axis forces at Bordia.

The next force as far as we were told was that of Jerries and Italians around Tobruk. We were back at the trucks about midday and treated ourselves to chocolate, cigars, bread, jam and some of the lads had wine. All Jerry stuff of course. We had been told before we left not to eat enemy tinned stuff as it was causing ulcerated stomachs among them so to make sure, Charlie Bruce took a spoonful of jam. We all awaited results till next day. Among material captured were

trucks, motorcycles, a wireless truck, maps BM stores, MG's, also English boots that he had taken from our forces in the first push. Our Company supplied a typewriter for a truck with HQ Company. We surprised Jerry at his breakfast as we found cups of warm coffee in some tents. We also found single tins of sardines all tied up and addressed to Germany, also single cigarettes in letters. We think they must be short in Germany. The lads came back with all sorts of things. George and I went over to a store and got some pairs of braces out of packs. Most of our Platoon was without them.

It started to rain and we put the cover on the truck and had our breakfast and dinner in it. Porridge, sausages and biscuits and mug of tea. In the afternoon we moved a couple of miles along the top of the escarpment and dug in and then had a game of football, a feed and a look over the spoils.

23 November 1941

Still in the same place. We got some Jerry water containers and began washing ourselves and gear etc. I had a shave. I will mention here that Pat Abbott allowed us to go two days without shaving as we were living on one bottle of water a day. The second in command was pleased with the effort of 16 Platoon in saving water and filled the three sections primus with kerosene. Charlie had no ill effects from taking the jam yesterday so we had it this morning and it was great stuff on biscuits. Bill Lowther had quite a collection of spoils, including a beautiful camera. About 10.30 a.m. the weasel Manchester was tearing around in his usual mad manner and we were eventually underway after much cussing etc. as we had to go without our wash or were only halfway through. We went back along the escarpment for a few miles and stopped 300 yards from the edge of it. We were there a few minutes when suddenly our artillery behind us went into action. We debussed and moved towards the edge of the escarpment coming under fire almost immediately. We were on the right flank and had the weasel yelling out to us to open fire and the only thing we could see was some tanks of Jerry's which were giving us the works. We took to earth; Manchester was about 40 yards behind still bawling away at us. I can tell you we didn't think too kindly of him at the time. Our Section took the outside running down the escarpment to the flat and was then recalled up the hill again by Pat and by the time we had caught up with them they had worked their way down the hill so we had walked for nothing. We took up a position behind rising ground. During this period we meet with a bit of long range fire, machine guns and two inch mortars from tanks and had a bofor (*anti-aircraft automatic cannon*) or two popping about. Our artillery was going pretty well and had Jerry scampering. Some of our tanks came up behind us and asked us the direction of Jerry but by this time he was well on the run. We had to retire to the transport and on the way back we passed through an escarpment the same as we took yesterday. Gordon Boyd and George did a lot of hunting and had to be called back. Gordon had some Jerry flags and George a Mauser rifle.

The most interesting spoil - 8 eggs, 2 fowls, a snake, a scraggy sheep and an accordion. G. Boyd lugged back a big tin of "fruit" and you should have heard him scream when he opened it to find it was only bully beef. Choppy and Cliff tried to

bring a motorcycle up the escarpment but it got stuck and they had to leave it. This camp had been flooded and outside the tents etc was all sorts of things in the sun to dry out. We didn't have time to dig up Jerry luxuries in the way of eats, but a fair amount of chocolate (Caley's) came to light. There were swags of equipment of all sorts lying about but those following up would have collected it as we were moving all the time from now on. Just before we moved off again G Boyd accidentally discharged his rifle and gave us a fright. The country here was fairly scrubby and in places there were small patches that had been ploughed by the Italians. We saw a camel caravan accompanied by a few wogs and they were the only ones we saw until after we were captured. There was also a tree here, the only one I saw during the push.

There were no casualties in this show.

24 November 1941 - Gambut Aerodrome

We were in the trucks until 1 a.m. this morning and as the night was cold we spent a pretty uncomfortable time. We moved in a westerly direction. We appeared to get lost on at least one occasion. Uncertain of our whereabouts at

times. I slept a bit and Bluey was in the bottom of the truck under his blankets smoking so I joined him for a few puffs although we weren't supposed to. Still you do these things till you are caught! Just before we stopped we passed a Bren carrier, which was smouldering, and a few minutes later we got out of the trucks. Very soon word went around that there were dead New Zealander's lying about also some Italian and Jerry troops. We made no bones about digging in well and the going was terrible. Some of us finished before 3 a.m. and settled down for a sleep. I slept right through but woke up very cold. We were told to be ready for anything at any time. Dawn proved us to be on a road along which were a few burnt and shot-up cars mainly of Italian make and a few "stiffies" lying alongside covered with blankets. Padre Spence buried a few on the other side; also one or two New Zealander's who had lost their lives. We had bully and biscuits for breakfast and had our water bottles refilled. No. 2 Section got some chocolate out of an Italian truck but not sufficient to go round us all. Other boys got cases of tinned fruit.

About 10 a.m. we got a rude awakening when a couple of shells from Jerry naval guns landed among HQ Company closely followed by more. The whole convoy moved passed us leaving us last and we had the job of cleaning up Jerry. "C" & "D" boys set off in their trucks and

Gambut airfield



Men of 20 Battalion move past Valentines of A Squadron, 8 Royal Tanks, under heavy fire near Bir el Chleta, 24 November

were supported by Vickers and an ack-ack Section. Our tanks went into action ahead of us and our artillery and 3" mortars put up a sweeping barrage. We debussed within range of small arms fire. We were to have followed 20 yards behind our tanks but they were held up by the heavy guns and quite a duel ensued between them. Once the tanks start they spit forth a continuous stream of lead and flame. We passed the tanks followed by "A" & "B" boys in the rear. We met with pretty stiff fire from all sorts of weapons big and small including Bofors. When Jerry saw our strength he began to bolt again. We got a few shots in from 600-700 yards and were ordered to take cover. George wasn't in too good a mood, for after carting the anti-tank rifle into action for the third time, he found it was not working, something was wrong with the firing pin. I was a runner for No. 3 Section and was with Pat Abbot all this time. Four Jerry were operating the big gun until the last surrendered to our platoon. While waiting for them to come up I asked Pat what he thought of being under fire and he said he was a bit scared for a start which was the same as me. We searched the first two to come up but got nothing of value off them. Pat left them with me and went after the other two who looked like ghosts and he got a beautiful pair of field glasses off one. A big number got away but were rounded up by the tanks and Bren carriers. One boy on our left flank began to contact numbers of Jerry infantry but were recalled as we had wind of another attack on us which did not eventuate.

Ron Cameron, Don Burrell, Bill Grigg and Fred Fuller were the only ones wounded in our Company which was pretty light considering the fire we met with and with the weasel behind us ordering us forward into our own artillery barrage. I believe over 1200 prisoners were taken in this show. Some of the boys got a ride back on a big Jerry hauler which also conveyed the gun crew and it was driven by the Adjutant. We walked back and on the way we ratted a Jerry truck which had broken down. I got a fountain pen out of a pack. I thought we had only gone a few hundred yards but found out different when we started back, it was over a mile. When all were on the trucks we began to move off in this manner: "D" Company on the right flank of the convoy leading. There was a large convoy moving in our direction from a nearby escarpment and were thought to be a Jerry force but to our relief, turned out to be the 19th Brigade.

The country here was a little better than the usual. We saw four gazelles, many hares, and one fox, a big rusty coloured fellow with a bushy tail. We made a stop about 5 p.m. and had a great tea of bully stew, rice and tea, and it went down well. There were Jerry tents and camps all over the place here and during the day we must have passed thousands of Jerry petrol and water containers. After tea we moved to the top of an escarpment and dug in, or at least, tried to, for most of us struck solid rock. I slept with my head and shoulders lower than the rest of me and was kept awake most of the night by transport moving close by. In fact, too close for safety. This place was Gambut Aerodrome.

25 November 1941 - The Blockhouse

About 9.30 a.m. we moved about one mile off the escarpment down on a flat with a tank in front. On this escarpment was a rectangular blockhouse. By way of a change we were left in reserve and stood about watching our Bren carriers and infantry moving forward. Our forces met with all kinds of fire and a few casualties were being brought back. "Tiny" Freyberg made an appearance near our trucks for a while. Our peace was rudely disturbed by some big shells landing in our vicinity and a number of big lumps of shrapnel came tumbling among us. I never knew I could hit the ground so fast before and we soon got hold of our picks etc. and began digging in which was completed about midday after a bit of ducking etc. at times. On our right a Bren carrier was on fire and it sent up some tremendous rings of black smoke. There were also some very heavy explosions in the direction of the escarpment probably our artillery which was very heavy at the time hitting some Jerry dumps. Some of the guns had a go at the blockhouse and put up a pretty good show. On our left tucked under the escarpment were some of our tanks ready to come into the escarpment if required but as far as we know, were not used. Some of our transport, 6th Brigade, was closing on the blockhouse along the left edge of the escarpment. We were rattled up at times by mortars, artillery and I think some armour piercing shells which bounced along the ground. I saw one bouncing at least 15 times before stopping. But we got but biggest scare when about 20 planes, Jerry and Italian, came over and bombed our transport, then the Stukas paid us a visit and pelted the show with machine gun fire without result. I believe we lost about three or four trucks in the bombing.

Fox Fennesey was sent away as a Company runner in Fred Fuller's place. Jim Baker brought up tea to us in a truck and it was good, after which we drew our blankets. I had mine down and was just turning in when we were told to "stand by" as there was something in the wind. We were taken back to the Battalion and were given another 50 rounds which made 150 per man, also another day's rations and had our bottles filled and our grenades checked. We each had one Italian and at least two of our own grenades. Picks and shovels were sorted out, each man having one or the other. I had a shovel and later forgot I had it on my back. We discarded all our shaving gear, cameras etc. We left it in our greatcoats and blankets and George left his camera with Jack Docherty, who was staying behind because he had a blistered foot and couldn't march.

The Weasel was even more excited than ever and it was obvious something important was brewing.

Our Company moved off at about 8.30 p.m. on foot, meeting up with our other infantry boys and the Colonel got us all to sit down and he quietly explained our job. He said that the 18th and us were to break through Jerry lines in a bayonet charge and thus open up the Tobruk road and release the garrison. He mentioned that we had done well up to now and was confident we would meet with success. We were to conserve rations etc. as we might possibly have to hold out for two days. He wished us luck and we did the same to him etc. and moved off for the starting line, which

was a white tape stretched along the ground. We were on it about 10 minutes before zero hour which was 10 p.m. all in extended order about four yards apart with bayonets fixed. Pat gave us all a piece of chewing gum and Gordon Familton gave us some too. I often used to think about bayonet charges etc, but never thought I would ever be in one. Still we never had time to think about it. We moved off and I had my rifle on my shoulders most of the way. The going was fairly even but there was a fair amount of scrub about two feet high to dodge. We covered about 300 yards having brief spells on the way. Every now and again we had to ease out to either side and sometimes speed up or slowed down so as to straighten the line - bunching also had to be avoided. Soon after this we came under machine gun fire, mostly tracer, and everybody dropped flat for a few seconds until the Colonel yelled "come on the 20th" and we all got up and started yelling, screaming and singing which must have been terrifying for Jerry. I've never heard anything like it in my life and don't want to hear it again.

Added to this we all started firing from the hip with our rifles, tommy's etc. Jerry used tracers and fired high and by stooping, one was fairly safe. The night was semi-moonlight but got dark later on. Jerry was flitting about ahead and they got plenty of hurry up. By this time we were more or less out of breath but as soon as the machine guns got active we kicked up a merry hell. We got among shallow trenches and into Jerry troops. We probably caught them unawares as blankets and packs were lying about. In the confusion Jerry also used a few grenades but taken all round they put up a pretty poor show I thought. Stu Wilson caught one through the head and was killed instantly and Frank Giles was also injured. Later on Phil McGrath and Watty Andrews were wounded and as they were taken back to Base Camp, we never saw them again. After we had covered 6000 yards stopping now and then whenever Jerry put up a flare, we stopped and dug in. We had only been working a few minutes when Bluey challenged and we all grabbed for our weapons. Four Jerries had blundered into our lines mistaking us for their troops. It was just as well we spotted them as they were heavily armed with grenades, tommy guns, rifles and revolvers. Arthur Hellewell got a pair of field glasses off one of them. After this break we set to once again and were dug in by about 3 a.m. only to freeze as we only had our ground sheets in one of the coldest nights we had experienced so far. Throughout the night we could hear Jerry mechanised machines moving in front and even hear them talking. Behind us we could hear the screams of the wounded, mostly Jerry's. If we had not been halted that night I think we would have walked right through to Tobruk. George and I did listening post for 1½ hours.

26 November 1941

Stand to 5.30 a.m till daybreak which was heralded by a continuous rain of artillery, naval guns and mortar fire lasting till dark. We improved our slit trenches in between times. Shrapnel etc was flying about all day and they had our range too. Added to this we had snipers peppering us whenever we showed ourselves. The guns that were pelting us were the ones we heard moving about in the night, probably there to cover the infantry we routed and had we gone on, we would have taken them.

They were on our left flank and well within sight and just out of mortar range, which well and truly plastered us.

The old hands used to tell us about the bombing and ground fighting in Greece and Crete and what we got yesterday was nothing according to them. I thought it was bad enough. We could hear the bombs coming down and there were no screamers on them at all. We also met with a type of shell which shot along the ground and exploded without warning. This was the most dangerous as it was possible to tell if other types were going to land nearby. Colin Foster was killed by a direct hit from a mortar and Jack Gordon was wounded by the same one.

A Jerry dispatch rider left the naval gun and came within 400 yards from our left flank to deliver a message to Jerry infantry who had closed in on our rear. For sometime we thought he was one of our dispatch riders as he was so close but when we recognised him he was well bowled over. About 3 p.m. Cliff Ewing and Arthur Hellewell were wounded by a "daisy cutter" or "bouncing billy" as we called the soundless flighted shell. A few more of these landed too close for comfort. Arthur was wounded near the eye and was blinded with blood etc. and we believe he is certain to lose the sight of one eye. Cliff suffered mostly from shock and concussion, which affected his mastoid ear and had shrapnel wounds in the fingers. Gordon Farnham had a miraculous escape as he was between "C" Company and "A" Company and had his Bren blown to pieces and spattered over him. His rifle was twisted and the woodwork blown off it and the muzzle landed on the other side of my tunic - the three were lucky they were not killed. Later in the afternoon a Jerry reconnaissance plane flew low over our front and the rear gunner fired a few shots and killed Shorty Erridge. It landed in our rear among the Jerry force mentioned before, the plane being well in sight. Our own mortars were only about 75 yards away and when they opened up we used to curse like one thing as Jerry turned his fire on them and needless to say we got more than our fair share. Bob Andrews was killed by a shell. Throughout the day word was being passed up and down the line of expected attacks, e.g. we were told 20 Jerry tanks and transport was moving our way and later it was changed to one tank and transport, but nothing happened. Our position was pretty dicky and we were continuously getting these scares. At night we had a two hour listening post to fulfil and it's a job no one was keen to do especially when we could hear Jerry transport and even voices calling out orders not too far away.

Rations still bully and biscuits.

27 November 1941

The day started off the same as yesterday. Very heavy shelling - it's a terrible strain on all. We as Infantry were useless against the gunfire and lived like rabbits. The 18th sent out a patrol over the flat on our front at about 9.30a.m. and there was a fair bit of machine gun fire. At 11 a.m. we got a hurried call with instructions that we were to take 37 prisoners with whom the 18th had requested to surrender the day before and had met with a refusal. These were the troops in our rear and in the very opposite direction to which the patrol had gone over. We were in with our packs - a

terrible mistake as we were easily picked off on the level ground. "B" and "D" Company boys were the mugs again while the rest held their old position. The mortars and artillery gave us a little cover fire but not near enough. After we had covered a few hundred yards in open order we met with terrific machine gun, mortar and rifle fire and chaps were falling in all directions and we knew then that we had run into a snag. We took over a few times but pushed on. Those we left behind were Tom Dowie, Morris, Jack White, Chappie, Bill Lowther and Andy Anderson, all caught by machine gun fire. Pat Abbott was wounded by a mortar shell in the shoulder and came up to us at about 2 p.m. Finally the fire was so hot that we had to take cover and just before this Gordon Boyd got hit. He died about 2 p.m. and later Arch Aitcheson was caught by a burst of machine gun fire. Five tanks went in and two got shot up instantly the remaining three clearing out, the heavy guns being too much for them. The Weasel was squealing away as usual but no one took much notice of him. We lay there all day and were pelted all the time, helpless to move either way. 16th Platoon was on the right flank and we expected a flanking movement which did not eventuate. We got orders to move out to the right and moved all at once. I went about 5 yards and fell over my legs as they were cramped with staying in one position all the time. I crawled to a wee bush about 9 inches high and lay behind it for the rest of the day. Familton and Bluey opened a tin of bully and threw it over to me. It went about three yards away and I left it there. Every time I moved a sniper had a pop at me. I smoked about a packet of smokes in the afternoon. Later in the afternoon Jerry called on us to surrender. We had been given word to lie doggo until dark and then retire.

Throughout this period snipers were very active. Just as we were thinking we would be able to sneak out with darkness drawing in, we heard the rumble of tanks. Here they were coming towards us blazing away with tracers and here we were sandwiched between the two fires. The tanks drew nearer then veered off in front of our old positions. It transpired that these tanks had broken out from Tobruk and did not know we were there while we thought they were Jerry's and they were firing tracers.

At last darkness fell and we tried to carry out wounded and as much equipment as possible. I helped to carry one of the lads for a while on a stretcher made out of ground sheets and rifles. Then I carried two Brens and a mortar sight and my own rifle. I landed in "B" Company lines and wandered around for about 15 minutes finding our own. I found the rest of the lads there and they had opened some bully and I had some of that. Later we got a hot bully stew and tea but the stew was sour as it had been cooked the night before and they couldn't get it up to us.

We took our old positions and those left in our Platoon were Bill Sharp, Jock Truesdale, Gordon Familton, Alf Rawling, Arch Todd, Bluey Adams, Charlie Bruce, Irish McCart and myself, also Arthur Cunningham. "B" Company were just as badly hit as us and out of two Companies of 246 men, only 60 came out. "A" Company did our listening post for us. The other Companies went out during the night acting as stretcher-bearers. It's impossible to describe our feelings. We were done in and had had no food all day and had lost a lot of our cobbles. During the day other boys were

in our lines and pinched our water reserve and some lost coats and blankets and I lost Arthur Hellewell's glasses he had left behind. I believe the tanks mentioned previously rounded up about 300 prisoners on the flat in front of our original positions but I did not see any of them. Last night George and I had one blanket between us. I had it while he was on listening post.

28 November 1941

Only 11 of us left now. We were expecting someone from the rear to take over our positions. However the day passed fairly quickly. Things began to hum early in the morning and we were out to pay Jerry for yesterday's licking. The mortars and artillery put up the heaviest barrage I have ever seen and were supported by our Vickers machine gun. The mortars put over 200 yesterday and 450 bombs today. After this rain of fire had gone on for a period, 20 of our tanks rumbled in, followed by Infantry of the 18th. With the entry of our tanks adding to the fire Jerry threw the towel in and in all about 700 prisoners together with a swag of equipment was taken. It was gratifying to see the result and sit back and look on but it hardly compensated for the loss of our chaps. We met with quite our usual share of shelling but lost no more men.

About 4.30 p.m. we started to move back and we were quite excited thinking that we were going well back for a rest as they said, but our hopes were soon dashed as we only went back about 500 yards near one of our tanks that had been knocked out on the morning of our "do". Once again we struck heavy picking and were not settled down till about 8.30 p.m. then we had to do our usual turn at listening post. We got a bully stew and stewed sprouts with tea, and it was most welcome. During the evening, transport moved through our lines both to and from Tobruk. During this period we were getting frequent reports that the 19th Maoris, 6th Brigade, South Africans and the Tobruk Garrison would be meeting us and all would be okay.

29 November 1941

Stalker Wilson was round early before breakfast calling for volunteers for a burial party to put our chaps to rest. I would have gone only I was on the end of the line and they had enough by the time I knew about it. The following were those they buried:

Gordon Boyd, Arch Aitcheson, Percy Scott, Stan Lawson, Curley Simmons, Jimmy Hamilton, Phil Alderton.

While they were out Jerry started shelling us again and the brunt of it seemed to come from where our original position was. We saw heaps of planes but the Jerry air force was conspicuous by its absence. On two occasions the RAF bombed Jerry positions on the escarpment behind the Mosque and appeared to land their loads right on the spot. We had a good tea again tonight. I was rather lucky today during the shelling. I had my blanket, Ernie Graham's coat, web rifle, ground sheet and two water bottles on the side of my trench when the shelling started and I lay face down in my trench and the next thing I knew a shell landed about 6 yards away and

something landed on my back - it turned out to be both water bottles riddled with shrapnel and I got water all over me. All the other things were riddled also and there was a big chip out of the side of my rifle. Our coats came up last night and I couldn't find mine so I took Ernie's.

30 November 1941

Things started merrily with a very heavy shelling which worked up to the heaviest fire we ever experienced. It was raining shrapnel and heavy stuff all day. No doubt the wireless truck 70 yards to our right and a team of Bren carriers on our left with us taking up the 100 yards between was the reason for us getting more than our fair share. Judging by all accounts, Jerry's detectors could pick up our wireless trucks and was able to plonk his dose in the correct place. At times we were covered with the yellow powder which was like sulphur and came from heavy shells which landed all around us. There was a complete ring of shell holes around George and me, about 10 yards out and about 10 yards between each one. We lost a number of water bottles through having them on the side of our trenches and we were told to keep them in the trenches. George and Bill Bee had bleeding noses caused no doubt by the concussion from shells. Gordon Familton went to "B" Echelon in the afternoon and got our personal gear and while there tried to get something from the YMCA for the Platoon and all they would give him were 3 cakes of chocolate. For the last two nights we got a few cigarettes and biscuits and one or two tins of fruit from the YMCA. The Quarter Master brought them up with our tea and through having a good tea, saved it for later. Gordon also brought up our sandbag full of eats and we were going to have a royal time next day. For tea we had a big helping of bully and sausage stew, then a big helping of rice and a large tin of blackcurrants between two, also tea. I suggested to George that we would save the currants till the next day and he said "no - let's have a good hoe in now" - which we did and later we were glad. We still talk about it and it's something to look back upon with satisfaction.

At night we had the position explained and were told that by tomorrow everything may be okay, all other units would link up with us, so together with the news and the great meal, we went to bed feeling more secure than we had for many a day. I had two blankets, two coats and my groundsheet, the surplus belonging to our wounded that had been taken back.

1 December 1941

George and I were on listening post this morning from 4 a.m. to 5.30 a.m. and then we woke up three chaps out of the ack-ack "S" platoon which was attached to us to make up our strength, and we left then on sentry till daylight and then went back to bed. The next thing I knew was that I heard George calling to me that there were tanks advancing on us but for a start we could not see them on account of the early morning fog, or haze would better describe it. News was sent around to prepare

Ack ack gun



for a tank attack and so the infantry prepared in the only way possible by waiting and hoping for the best. I didn't worry very much about them thinking that our tanks would be coming in to clear them up. However the Jerries started firing at us and at our "B" Echelon and Bill Bee made a dash for his sticky bombs which were in a shell hole 25 yards to our rear. He got them, also a message from Company Headquarters to say to be on the lookout for one of our tanks coming from the east. Well there were about 50 Jerry tanks making for us and I couldn't believe that only one was coming to our assistance, in any case, I don't think any of us saw it. Our artillery was mostly behind "B" Echelon and they appeared unable to get on to the tanks as well as they should have. Jerry not only had tanks but also brought up his big naval guns, haulers, infantry and a few trucks. The guns started off and plastered "B" Echelon and the tanks went in and made a mess of things and within 10 minutes or so about 20 of our chaps came marching up with their hands held high. These chaps were marched about 500 to 600 yards across our front and we had to hold our fire and then the tanks trotted along in our direction while the infantry settled down about 700 yards away. While we were keeping Jerry occupied the 18th sneaked away. The tanks made an encircling movement, the boys on each side and behind us, including Battalion Headquarters, turned the game in.

The tanks which paid us a visit blew up to a distance of about 40 yards off and stopped, this was only after our mortars and anti-tank guns had quietened. As everyone was being herded up we could do nothing better for our popguns were useless against the tanks. The only thing of any use we were able to do through the day was to keep the Jerry gun crews away from their job. I had about 100 rounds of ammo and 4 grenades with the pins ready to draw beside me in the trench and only used a few rounds as my rifle was no good through being hit on the barrel with shrapnel the other day.

During the engagement Jerry lost about 7 tanks. One of them, very near us, was on fire and the crew were caught in it but clambered out and then expired. This did not make a very pleasant sight. Had "B" Echelon not been in line of fire of the artillery we would have inflicted much heavier losses on Jerries tanks, in fact we may have turned them. Charlie Bruce was going crook about things and in fact I think we all felt disgusted with the way things turned out. Personally I think this state of affairs was the fault of the artillery. It never ever dawned on me that we would surrender; in fact it never entered my head. The first I knew about it was hearing Bluey yelling out, "what are we going to do, they are behind us now?" Well that finished it for us and the only thing we would do was give in.



Photo from Alan's collection

For "stand too" in the morning we were supposed to have our web and packs on but we never did as they were a nuisance on watch for 2 or 3 hours. I happened to have my web on at the time but no pack or water bottle which was unfortunate for me. I also had my mittens and jersey on but no coat which I have missed since. Bill Bee went back again for his but by then I was further ahead. We were lined up and the only thing Jerry was concerned about was our emergency chocolate ration, which they went for in great style. However mine was in my pack along with a tin of bully and a packet of biscuits, also about 150 cigarettes, but I suppose they have them by now. Our MO was killed some say in cold blood, four hours after he was captured but there are various stories on the subject.



*Prisoners of War:
Alan Cochrane, Dick Mussen, George Downes*

When all were collected, including wounded, we were marched off. Two chaps were carrying wounded and they dropped a blanket at the first stop which was right amongst their tanks. When we started off again they left the blanket lying and I picked it up and was often tempted to throw it away at different times during the day but was glad of it later on. Our line of direction when we started marching, meandered about, halts being made at all the big Jerry guns - they are pretty shrewd. No doubt they thought our artillery, which by then had come to light from somewhere beyond our old positions, would hold their fire. As it was they kept on firing and it was only a miracle that some of us were not hit on the march out for there were chunks of shrapnel blowing about and ploughing things in general and here we were, ducking our own screamers. A Jerry in charge of us made us keep our hands up for a while then let us rest them, then up again and said in English, "How do you like dodging your own fire?" We found that quite a lot of them could speak English. Some of the chaps who were wounded, battled on bravely, others were assisted and one had to be carried on a blanket. We marched up the escarpment beside the Mosque into a Jerry escarpment. Here we rested for a while and the badly wounded were taken into a Jerry RAP (Regimental Aid Post) with Mori Merritt, the stretcher bearer from our Company to help them. The distance covered so far would be about 3 miles. From here we marched through the camp seeing numbers of ack-ack guns, naval guns and some of our own trucks. We saw the ack-ack open up on one of our fighter planes but couldn't get anywhere near it. In many places wrecks of cars, guns etc. could be seen apparently the result of RAF bombing. Well the day was pretty warm and we marched and marched having an occasional spell. Bill Bee and Bluey and Bill Sharp were the only ones in our crowd who had their water bottles and they gave us a sip at times. Some of the lads had tins of bully and we all shared it. Eventually we reached an Italian Camp and they came rushing out as though they had never seen white people before.

The Italians photographed us a few times and they flattered us by the number of guards who were detailed to accompany us. At one halt the RAF passed overhead, about 50 planes, fighters and bombers and the Italians ran like hell and we stood and waved furiously. I don't think there is any doubt that they knew who we were. They

turned and we saw them bomb in the direction from which they had come. An Italian Officer appeared and the lads asked him when we could get water and something to eat. He said we have plenty and beer also and why didn't you come over to us sooner? It was by now 4 p.m. and we had done about 4 more miles and when we asked how far we had to go, we were told only 3 kms. Well we marched and marched and each time we stopped we were told just 3 kms more. All told we did about 15 miles that day and arrived at our destination about 7.30 p.m. being on the march on and off since about 10 a.m. It was pretty tough going in our condition having had nothing to eat since the night before and water was practically non-existent. Here we squatted about on the ground and were told we would get a tin of bully and a packet of biscuits and half a pint of water per man and the bully and biscuits between two men. Well what a shock we got! I was expecting the bully and biscuits to be similar to our own. What a cropper we came when we got a tin of bully about the size of a 50 cigarette tin and two biscuits which were about $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5" square and about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. Well I've never struck anything so tough in the biscuit line before and in fact I couldn't bite them. After a short rest we were herded into trucks which were pretty dilapidated without cover of any kind and set off once more. About 10 p.m. we were taken off the trucks and herded into a barbed wire enclosure without shelter of any kind. To make things worse it started to rain. George, Alf and I curled up on the ground with the one blanket on top of us and our tin hats for pillows and we tried to sleep and we were miserable. I forgot to mention that George put his anti-tank gun on a truck and that was the last we saw of it.

Thus ended for us the second battle of Libya and how or why we should have been the mugs we will probably learn in the days to come. During these last few days I have found out the meaning of prayer and so have a lot of other chaps. There are one or two things I have omitted in the previous notes which I will record here:

On the 20 November 1941 a Dornier (German plane) had just come over our lines to pay us a visit when five planes, part of a big flight of Spitfires chased her. We jumped out of our holes and cheered and yelled like mad. It was just like a football match. Unfortunately the expected scrap did not eventuate within our sight as Jerry ducked into a cloudbank with our boys hot on his trail.

The base plates of the mortars were badly buckled up with the pressure after all the firing on the 28th.

On the night of the 26 November there was a continuous tank battle, a ding donger with all kinds of fire, machine guns up to artillery. The night was being continually punctured by gun flashes and none of us were feeling over comfortable as they were only $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 miles off our left flank. In the morning we got a few rumours hardly worth mentioning, but it appears certain that the South Africans were in the show. I'm not certain if the above-mentioned date is correct. Also on the night of the 26th I think it was one of our mortar

trucks which was being brought up, that was hit by a fireball shell and the ammunition caught fire. We were treated to an additional show of fireworks from Jerry in addition to the mortar bombs etc. exploding and the blazing truck made a fine target. On the night of the 30th there was a rumble of trucks and artillery going through our lines and we found out that there were also ambulance convoys going through. Later on we learned that a Division had gone through to Tobruk the same night so they must have known that Jerry had something in the wind and just left us there as the mugs.

We were going to get a hot breakfast and bread this morning and we certainly got it, but the wrong sort. Hot lead instead!

2 December 1941

Dawn broke with the weather threatening. We collected around tiny fires we made of property we wished to destroy. Around 8 a.m. one of our planes passed overhead in the direction of the salt lake and it was a treat to see the Italians scampering like rabbits for their warrens at the foot of a nearby escarpment. Later we saw a few Jerry planes. A drum of water was tossed over the fence and it was pounced upon by the boys who made short work of it although it tasted salty. Later on a few trucks arrived and before passing out we were fleeced of a few articles which they had no need to take. I lost my steel mirror and pencil. There was a bouncing, bullying type Italian and I would like to meet him when I had my rifle and bayonet! All our boys got in one truck except three of us and we were on the one with the Officer's and we set off on a reasonably good, undamaged road. The first event of note was a stop at an Old Italian fort with "Bag Bag Hotel" in English on it. It began to rain and as we were in an open truck, Alf and I used my blanket for a cover. From here the road led down a tremendous escarpment and we would go backwards and forwards before reaching the flat and striking out for a good tar sealed road. I may mention here that it was bitterly cold travelling on the open trucks.

We reached our destination about 3.30p.m. or 4 p.m. and what a show it was. A few dilapidated Italian tents and the inevitable wire enclosure. We could see the coast and the weather was bitterly cold and the ground damp. There were scraps of old Italian ground sheets lying about and there was a scramble for them. We managed to get a few pieces between us. We got a biscuit and half a tin of bully each, the only thing to eat all day. We got anything suitable such as tin hats and scraped break winds of soil. We got ours about 9 inches high on the back and two sides. Just to make things worse it rained that night and a terribly cold wind blew. George, Alf and I slept together again but couldn't keep warm.

3 December 1941

The locality of this place was about 12 miles off Tobruk (west) overlooking the sea. During the night we saw planes, tracers and heard heavy guns going off and still thought we had a chance of being pulled out of the fire. Bill Bee and his cobbler disappeared and we thought they were gone for good but they were only out on a working party and came back at night. They got a good feed off the Jerries they were working for. We spent the day resting and were given another biscuit and half

a tin of bully and managed to get about a bully tin of water each. After this we went to improve our shelters and as they had taken away a lot of chaps, we managed to get some more pieces of ground sheets. The Weasel looked funny making a hole for himself with his tin hat. We spent a pretty uncomfortable night again.

4 December 1941

We were given another biscuit and half a tin of bully each as we went out the gate and onto trucks about 8 a.m. and all our gang managed to get on the one truck but did not strike a covered one. There were about 24 of us on it and it was pretty cramped. We travelled along a road passing occasional dumps and Italian camps most of which were under escarpments and the occupants living in caves and tents in a terrible



Derna airfield after an RAF raid

jumble. At one stage we passed swampy areas near the sea coast also a number of graves of Jerry airmen and planes lying nearby. The most interesting event was the Derna Aerodrome which was practically out of use at the time on account of the heavy rains keeping the planes grounded. There were hundreds of planes around of all kinds,

fighters, bombers and troop carriers, many of them smashed up. In some places there were piles of wrecked planes, bombs etc. lying about, many under water. Derna is a small town which looks great seen from the big escarpment. White houses, palms, and a small harbour. We went down the famous zigzag, a great piece of road building. After fording the river the other side of the town, being necessary on account of the bridge being washed away with the rain, we pulled in at another enclosure, this time equipped with tents which were being whipped about by a piercing wind. The time would be about 3 p.m.



Derna Town

Our stop was only about 10 to 15 minutes and we pushed on once more. They asked us if we had had anything to eat and we said "no" so they gave us another biscuit and half a tin of bully each and at the time we were still trying to eat the ones we got that morning. We used to put them in a tin hat and hide them with another one. We were terribly cramped in the trucks and chaps were going crook at one another all the time. We went up the escarpment again by a different road taking 20 minutes to reach the top, the trucks barely making the grade. These trucks by the way were all run on diesel oil. The country from here on was a little better, working from stunted growth to trees as we neared Benghazi. We passed through a canyon and it looked great at the time as the moon was showing.

We travelled all night and reached Benghazi at 7 a.m., the trip lasting 23 hours. As

usual we struck rain at night. The town of Derna by the way was badly knocked about by bombing and there was a small Red Cross ship just pulling out of the harbour. I slept for a while during the night and munched biscuit the rest of the time.

5 December 1941

We lined up outside the barrack walls for a few hours, were counted and recounted then popped into the wire enclosure surrounding the barrack walls and were given a biscuit and half, a tin of bully each and a little water. The compound was full, about 2000 men in it and there were 1200 odd outside. A lot of these had been there since the day before and had been given tents open at both ends about 8ft by 6ft in size for 8 men.

Benghazi Camp



They gave some of our crowd tents and the rest of us had to fish. Many chaps had to sleep in the open but Bill Sharp, Bert and George Downes and I managed to get two pieces of tent. We made a sort of sleeping bag out of it by sleeping in one half and having the other over us. We also had my blanket and Bill's overcoat and during the night it started to rain.

We were given a dixie of macaroni between four and also one loaf of bread each. We got about a bully tin of macaroni each. I can tell you we were a sorry looking crowd, worn out and many sick and suffering pain from wounds. Sanitary conditions were shocking; in fact I have never met worse. On the 6th we managed to get two more pieces of tent and closed the ends of ours up but we were just as badly off as we had three more of the boys with us. We finished up by letting the tent down on top of us. "Meals" came along at any old time. Sometimes we got a tiny issue of macaroni and got two loaves of bread and half a tin of bully each per day. We also got coffee in the morning about a bully tin each. Water here was always a problem. We would line up for the coffee and then would line up for the next meal, usually the bully, about four hours before it arrived because it was a case of first in. The last usually got a short issue. On the 7th a medical chap from one of our hospitals took a church service and it was very good and well attended.

8 December 1941

Last night another crowd of chaps arrived, mostly wounded and among them were some of our boys, Bill Lowther, Andy Anderson and the rest. They were left out in the rain all night and in the morning were put in with us. There were parties moving out all the time, in fact the whole 2000 were taken away and they were the ones who were on the torpedoed boat which was hit off Greece. They made room for us inside the barracks and were then pushed into a big barrack room and had to lie on the cold tile floor which was just as bad as the damp ground outside. Before going in we had to fill in a big card, also a Red Cross card to our folks to say that we were being well

treated by the Italians. It was a mockery but we all did it just to get word home. There were 40 of us in the one room which formerly was occupied by 60 Italian soldiers. Percy Foster, the South African wrestler, was in charge of our hut and he was a good chap and did his best for us. Conditions were pretty bad here. Coffee of pure salt water. Fresh water was only available on very rare occasions. We got the coffee about 9 a.m. and half a tin of bully and a loaf about 1.30 p.m. or 2 p.m. and sometimes a lemon as well. About 5.30 p.m. or 6 p.m. we got macaroni and we usually got about one and a half bully tins of juice and one of macaroni and also another loaf. The coffee was vile with no sugar in it. The weather was terribly cold and the cold floor was so hard that we were turning over and over to ease our sore joints. Dysentery broke out and the RAP was overcrowded all the time. The Italians seem to have no idea of sanitary arrangements at all; in fact they are as bad as the Wogs if not worse. There were two big water towers but like many other things of Italian make, they would not work.

Every day or so there were new prisoners coming in with news of our advance and giving estimates of our expected rescue. It was always a few more days, or by the weekend etc. We were told of units well to the south west of Benghazi and that the Indians were making for the coast in a few days. Men from the RAF long-range desert patrol, tanks, etc. kept our hopes up with their reports. There were a few attempts at escape but none got away as far as I know. Two chaps nearly got away in an empty water cart. We held community sings on two or three different nights and they went off well and there was some wonderful singing and they all finished with the "King" in rousing manner.

We frequently experienced air raids usually every third night and the ack-ack was very severe. The RAF call it the "Berlin of the east" so severe is it. There was a big ack-ack gun just beside the barracks which kicked up a terrible noise and shook the place like one thing every time it went off. There was a big wireless station nearby and some of the bombs landed pretty close and shot hats, tins and dixies etc. from off the walls. The cooks were mostly South Africans and worked a shocking racket and robbed the camp of a big amount of food etc. such as making jam for themselves out of the lemons and the coons (natives) were given only loaves till they found out and went crook. The chaps conduct was shocking and things walked frequently and the way they lined up at meal times and dived into the dixies was disgusting. We were issued with 64 cigarettes the whole time we were there, not near enough for some chaps and all sort of things were popped to the Italian guards for smokes, such as watches, rings, wallets etc. Most were content with 30 or 40 smokes and sometimes a loaf of bread as well. On occasions at night the Padre came in and gave us a chat and prayer, also we would sing a hymn and the way the chaps responded was marvellous. On Sunday the 14th we went to an English Holy Communion service and that night there was a heavy RAF raid which lasted about 2 hours.

The Officer's were fed better than us but were bundled away pretty quickly some by plane and others by submarine or destroyer. We were short of everything and most of us made wooden spoons. I still have mine. Some used tin hats for dixies, in fact

anything that would hold food. On the first night in the hut Alf Rawlings took crook with dysentery and was delirious through the night. He had had a narrow escape on the morning we were captured, a tank shell exploding in front of his trench and he got the backs of his hands cut with pieces of stone and shrapnel. He was put in the sick bay and a few days later was taken to a hospital in Benghazi. I have his tin opener and it has opened hundreds of tins since then. I haven't seen him since and if he got away which I think he would, he was going to write home for us.

17 December 1941

The Italians were preparing to leave the place and even small parties were being bundled away. The coons, always a happy gang, were taken out into the town and had to smash up all short of things, telephones, wireless stations and anything of importance. They came back with arms full of boards etc. with which they brewed up their bully. George and I managed to get some wood and we used it to cook up our tin of bully and one loaf of bread and it was very good. The cookhouse was out of wood and they brought in a load of furniture from the town. Jerry fighters, 109 fighter planes, were fairly active and once or twice our recko planes were over in daylight and the ack-ack frequently had a pop at them without result. After the air raids we saw a few fires about on the following day and in the last day or two, the Italians set fire to dumps etc. and often blew stuff up. Italian planes were about at times flying very low and they looked like big box kites. We often saw Libyans walking about, a few of them equipped with rifles. Towards the end we saw the Libyans carting flour away in big sacks. Bill Bee was crook off and on with dysentery and Cliff with his ear. The clock tower was visible and even it stopped chiming. Benghazi was pretty well smacked up and at that time there could not have been more than 2000 including soldiers in the place. About the 18th we saw a sight for sore eyes - the Jerries in full retreat along the main road heading for Tripoli, transport, guns, loads of materials and even tanks on trucks. The trucks were very close practically head to tail and continued day and night easing off on the 20th.

20 December 1941

First thing in the morning the Italians started packing up all their gear and the Padre said that he believed they would let us go but that wasn't to be. They went outside the gates and some of the boys raided the Commando's office and canteen and got all sorts of things. George got an old blanket off a window and it has come in handy since. However we were all lined up

and marched out the gate and given 2 tins of bully and 3 loaves of bread each which we were told was to last 3 days. We were then marched from the camp down through the town to the harbour, this being our first real look at the place.

Benghazi waterfront



Well the place was in a terrible mess practically everything wrecked, holes drilled right through buildings, crumbling walls and shattered roofs. The town itself is typical of all Libyan towns, white buildings many quite modern and the streets etc. in the main part being well laid out. In the centre was a flowerbed, lawns and many palm trees, walls frequently plastered with propaganda stuff, quotations etc. and paintings of Hitler and Musso. At last we came to the harbour and what a mess it and the surrounding streets were in. On the way we saw the railway station and it was a total wreck. There were boats of all sizes and descriptions and in all stages of disrepair many right under with only the masts showing. Others were beached and perhaps the sight we were looking forward to was the famous "cathedral mole" which we all said we would fish from before we left on the push. The mole is a jolly big concrete affair extending out in the shape of an "L" and is about 30ft above the sea and there were great holes in it caused by bombs from the RAF. One break in the wall must have been about 15 yards across and the sea was storming though in great style. We sat about in the cold and rain and watched the loading of two boats at the wharf. Well the wharf was a pretty novel affair, a pretty big ship sunken with piles driven in on either side the area between the ships side and the piles being boarded over thus forming a double-sided wharf. Furniture, munitions, cars, transport guns and all sorts of stuff was being loaded on the smaller one while the larger ship, a battle ship grey colour with a cut away bow, did not seem to be loading. Civilians were carting down their possessions all sorts of stuff, blankets, bundles, bags and cases were being carried and trundled along in hand carts and loaded on the ship. We saw quite a few Jerries buzzing about also both in the town and about the harbour.



Benghazi Harbour

Well we were hanging about all day and at dusk we were herded into a big cinema which had been gutted by fire and bombing. It must have been a great building at one time. Well George and I started to make a brew of bully and bread and had just got started when we had to get out and march back to the barrack. Charlie McDonald, I saw before we started but hadn't seen since, I think made his escape and we would have done the same only we didn't know where our troops were at the time although the night before we saw a lot of flares going up but they were a good way away.

By the way, I forgot to mention previously that all the way up the desert we saw Jerry flares at night going all night. I think he was scared of the dark. We were in good form and our spirits soared again and the streets echoed with shouts, yells and whistles and a variety of marching songs. The Italians told us that the RAF did not bother the town very often only the harbour, the cinema or the Municipal building which were only about 500 yards away. When we got back we asked the cooks to heat our bully for us and we had it just warm.

21 December 1941

We slept well last night after our march to the wharf and back. Only one or two guards about and things looked pretty good for us - rumours of all kinds going around. The remaining Padre addressed us and requested that we make no trouble with the Italians that as far as he knew we were being left behind. I can tell you we were all bucked up by that news. By the way, George got some coffee yesterday as well as a blanket. The cards we had filled in on first being taken into the camp had been left behind by the Italians and these were scattered all over the place. Later we were told to line up again but no one was in a hurry to respond and most were hunted out of the huts to which we had retired. After a delay mostly on our part, we set off again for the harbour and though we had a bayonet or two poked at us, we just dawdled as much as possible for we counted every minute we could waste as so much in our favour as far as rescue was concerned. I can still see the Captain in the lead trotting along in great style and getting a hundred or so yards in the lead, then turning round and impatiently waiting for us to catch up. Eventually we reached the street running round the harbour and for a time the rain just poured down. We had a few cigarettes tossed to us by Jerries off trucks on our way down to the wharf. We got two cigarettes each. Some chaps got nuts and chocolates off civilians. We also saw a Libyan lying at the street corner with a bullet hole in his leg but no one seemed to be worrying about him. We hung back at the end of the line in the hope that they would not be able to take us all. In the end we were marched along the wharf and were searched for matches. We soon saw the reason as the whole of the wharf was charged ready to be set off at a moment's notice. As we were waiting to board the ship a young Jerry was spiking spuds with a stick and tossing them over and the boys were eating them raw. The old boat was jumping about a bit and we boarded it by walking up a wobbly plank. Being about last on board we found the holds were full and we were forced to claim a bit of deck. In the meantime the smaller boat was absolutely packed with gear, civilians and the gear was stacked on the deck and in every possible corner while the owners were perched on top of it, all with life jackets draped about their necks just as a mark of respect for the Royal Navy.

Our ship the "Norsedresderke" previously mentioned as the grey ship was quite a well-built affair. The crew were Italians and those in charge of the guns etc. were all Jerries. For escort we had an Italian destroyer - a very compact affair, fast, apparently well armed and having two funnels. We left the port at dusk and what a sight the town was. It was covered with a pall of smoke and flame from the buildings and dumps which had been set alight. Even after we were well out to sea we could still see the flames etc. The sea was pretty heavy and a lot of spray coming over the bows wet our blankets etc. George and I made a bed on top of the hatch and what a night we spent.

I forgot to mention but at Benghazi when the chaps from the hospitals and medical orderlies arrived they had all sorts of things. Some even had as many as four blankets, a ground sheet and coat, while a lot of us only had what we stood up in. Our chaps who were in charge of us decided that each man should have one blanket or

coat and they shared them round. Some with very bad grace. George got a blanket off Ginger Cunningham and he didn't like the idea of handing it over. Also the medical orderlies played a dirty trick on our boys in hospital, most of them hiding behind the Red Cross on their arm. They took all the food and water from the hospital when they were captured and left the wounded men with nothing. I saw them with my own eyes a fortnight after they arrived at Benghazi opening tins of our bully and packets of biscuits. Well we had a blanket each and the one we got in the barracks and two Italian groundsheets, also a piece of scrim we picked up on the boat.

The Port of Benghazi lies on the shores of the Gulf of Sidra off the Mediterranean Sea. It is the second biggest city in Libya. At the start of World War II, Benghazi had about 22,000 Italian inhabitants, but they were evacuated before the city fell to the British in late 1942. During the North African campaigns of World War II (1940-1943), Benghazi changed hands five times and suffered some 2,000 air raids. Destruction was extensive.

The prisoner of war camp just outside Benghazi was a transit camp under Italian control, described by many as "a hell hole".

Benghazi



22 December 1941

The day dawned dull again and a few lemons were tossed about and after a mad scramble I managed to get hold of a couple. Later a couple of Jerries threw some cigarettes among the boys while others, watching from the bridge, were taking snaps of them scrambling for them. More propaganda I suppose! We also got a loaf of bread each. Some of the boys were in the holds and they were more fortunate than us. They broke into some stores and got jam, flour, macaroni, lard, sardines, chocolate, pears etc. Sanitary conditions were awful. Through the day we saw an Italian plane or two flying about. This night was pretty crook, cold and raining. Heaven only knows, we were miserable enough without having rotten weather etc. plied on us.

23 December 1941

The day dawned a little brighter and from early dawn we were in sight of land practically all the time and often had visits from aircraft, mostly Italian. The land looked a little better than lower Libya more trees etc. showing here and there were clusters of white houses along the coastline. At 9.30 a.m. there was an alarm of some sort and we felt a bump - possible a depth charge. The destroyer was leaving and a lot of signalling was going on, all of us hoping for the best. They came round and gave us half a loaf each and a tin of bully between 16 of us, which gave us about half a spoon each. At last we neared the Port of Tripoli. We wormed our way around a lighthouse and sunken reef passing a hospital ship which appeared to have run ashore and had part of the deck above the water. The harbour proved a most interesting

sight. At first we couldn't believe there could be so much shipping there but soon saw the reason for it. At least two thirds were out of action, half under water, holes here and there - no doubt the result of both Navy and RAF. Not only were there cargo and transport ships in this condition but also quite a few destroyers. We reached the port about 11 a.m. and were soon landed on shore on big barges manned by Jerries. What we could see of the town from here was quite impressive but I think most of the better class buildings skirted the waterfront.

We were counted and recounted in the usual manner and marched three quarters of a mile from the acting station and were bundled into cattle trucks and they were all over crowded, 40 or more in a truck. We were lucky and got in a closed truck and we only had about 30 in ours. Jock Truesdale fainted as we were about to step ashore and he and Bill Lowther, who had a bullet wound in his arm were left behind. We always had a good laugh at the Italian way of counting sometimes in one's or two's, then three's, four's and five's and when we marched from the wharf to the station they counted us in nine's and we marched that way. Just past the station we saw some kind of war memorial and then a few barracks including a small Jerry one. A number of buildings along the coast had ack-ack guns



Tripoli

mounted on them and many were badly plastered, but not nearly as bad as Benghazi. We traced our steps along another line and pulled up at a main station which was nothing startling. We saw a fairly modern train or two and quite a swag of antiquated engines, rolling stock and carriages which must have been 30 or 40 years old. About 3p.m. we finally set off on the road and kept on the go until dark when we stopped. The country was quite fair and had great possibilities if properly worked. They were making quite a fair job of improving things with oranges, lemons and olive groves but the Wog's were just scratching the surface as had been done for thousands of years. For the most part the land was quite level but towards nightfall we approached some very mountainous country. We saw good tar sealed road which appeared to run right through the country along or near the coast. Well we froze all night, a few of us would sit down for a while and the rest would stand up, it was the only way we could work it. It was the most uncomfortable night I've ever put in and I'll never forget it. However we had one consolation that was that Tripoli was being bombed heavily as we saw the flares etc for two or three hours. We did not get moving again until about 11.30 a.m. the following morning.

24 December 1941

We had been trying to get out and stretch our legs since day break and when we finally got out and settled on the sand to enjoy the sun, we were hunted back about 10 minutes later and set off once again. The country here was very sparsely

populated, only a Wog or two in sight with possibly a few camels. The Wog's had little escarpments of ragged squat tents and the surrounding land was scorched with perhaps a green crop or two showing.

At 2.30 p.m. we pulled up at our destination, a tiny station at the foot of some hilly country. We were lined up and set off on foot for a camp on the top of a mountain which seemed to be on the horizon and it was without question the worst march we had ever been asked to do. We were accompanied by more guards, two Libyan soldiers mounted on five horses, one a grey. We plugged on and on over rolling hills which was really a pass between two tremendous lines of hills. Chaps were dropping out and it was not long before we were a very straggly line. At last we came to the foot of the mountain, the road twisting backwards and forwards, one a few feet above the other so steep was it. The steeper going was much worse than the flat and chaps were dropping out like flies, many flat out to it. Bill Sharp and Bill Bee was pretty crook with dysentery but managed to see it through. Just on dusk we reached the top of the mountain and entered the town of Garian. One valley or slip near the top was terraced and the boys said it was like Palestine only it was better irrigated.



Part of the Garian mountain range.

The folks here were all out doing their Christmas shopping but they did seem greatly cheered to see us. Half the shops were closed and the place did not look to be thriving. I suppose the population would be a thousand or two and would be dependent upon the

soldiers and farming people on the plateau for a living. We marched right through the main street to a big barracks and we had tiled floors again to sleep on only they were much colder than at Benghazi on account of the high altitude. We marched about seven miles from the station and about 4 miles of it was hill which would be about 4000 ft high. We were given two loaves and 1 tin of bully each and a mug of black coffee and somewhere around midnight we were given another blanket which wasn't so bad.

25 December 1941 - Christmas Day

We reckoned on being in Tripoli for Christmas and here we were but under different circumstances to what we anticipated. Here is how we feared for the day.

We were told the night before that the Christmas dinner would knock our ears back. Coffee in the morning, two loaves of bread, and dinner we got at 4 p.m., macaroni very thin, it certainly knocked our ears back alright, and another meal about seven of

the same. There was a church service in the afternoon taken by one of our chaps, also an RC service in the morning taken by the Italian Padre.

26 December 1941- Boxing Day

Nothing much of interest today. Got coffee, two loaves, macaroni, also a lemon and at night were given a spoonful of cognac, it was very strong. I gave mine to Bill Sharp he was crook and couldn't get his own. We were just going to sleep about 9.30 p.m. when some Italians came round and got the Sergeant Major to take all our names, about 400 of us, and we were to move out in the morning.

27 December 1941

Up at 5 a.m. standing around till about 7 a.m. getting our names called off a roll and were given coffee, two loaves and a tin of bully each for the day's rations. Well we set out at 7 a.m. and marched off down the hill again to the tune of "Tipperary", "Maori Battalion" etc. We made a fairly fast march down the hill about a third of the time it took us to go up. We were bundled into trucks again and set off for Tripoli and got to Tripoli about 2.30 p.m. We were marched around the streets to the far side of the harbour next to the seaplane base. Once again we boarded barges and were taken out to a ship and were caught in the rain just as we were about to go aboard. Only our barge load went aboard, about 20 of us and the rest went back ashore. We were given life jackets as we climbed the gangway. The harbour contained practically the same shipping apart for a submarine which was in port. This time we were fortunate as we all got together down a hold just in front of the bridge. We passed another cold night. As usual sanitary arrangements were awful. Dick Johnstone stood in a queue for 2 hours before we got through and it hailed and rained all the time and we were out in it with a groundsheet over us. When we got back down in the hold I got over to George and he said - "stick this in your shirt" - and handed me a packet of biscuits. I said to Dick up on the deck that I wouldn't mind having something to put under my belt before going to sleep. Well it transpired that Charlie Bruce, Bill Sharp and George went up on deck after we sailed and grabbed a case of biscuits from under the guard's noses. There were biscuits and bully stacked on the deck beside our hold and they were guarded but the Italian's are poor sailors. As soon as we left the harbour there was hardly a guard anywhere on the boat who wasn't sick. Not that it would have made any difference to the boys as they were desperate and there would have been a guard less if he had interfered with them. Well we chewed biscuits all night and were our gums sore. We had about 6 packets each. Later George went up on the deck and threw the empty case overboard and there were some chaps who had a case of bully open but they couldn't get any of it as a guard chased them.

28 December 1941

It was a shocking cold day and we spent the day lying down beside each other trying to keep warm. I forgot to mention that it was the heaviest downpour of rain I have

ever experienced last night. It poured down through the hatches on top of some chaps who had to move. By this time the guards were in a helpless state and quite a lot of stuff disappeared. During the day we passed the Island of Catalina which is more or less a rock rising sheer out of the sea. There were a few small houses scattered about and it's no wonder there weren't more for it's the most desolate God forsaken place I have ever seen. We were very close to the Island when passing it - no more than one quarter to half a mile from the shore. I was on deck at the time and couldn't help wondering that if we were torpedoed that we wouldn't live very long in the sea as it was the roughest I have ever seen. We were issued with two biscuits and two tins of bully each and then we got another half tin of bully each. We couldn't sleep very well that night and at 2.30 a.m. George said he was going up on deck. He was away for over an hour and I was wondering where he was when he came back and dropped something on top of me. It was a tin of bully and he had six others, also about 200 cigarettes and 4 packets of tobacco and a small housewife's (needles and thread etc) he had got up on deck out of some of the guard's packs. Well for the next quarter of an hour all you could see was glowing cigarette ends all around us. During the day there were chaps popping cigarettes to the Italians in exchange for bread.

29 December 1941

The weather was still cold but the sea was not so rough. Early in the morning about 8 a.m. we spotted Mt Vesuvius smoking away and there was snow all round it. We were very close to the Island when passing it and had a great view of it. There were quite a few old houses on the side of it and how anyone makes a living there beats me. When we drew nearer to it we witnessed the strange spectacle of the volcano smoking, yet it was covered with snow up to the lip of the water. The foot of the volcano was lined with buildings and a railway runs part of the way round just at the waters edge.



Mt Vesuvius postage stamp 1941



Naples Railway Station 1941

Our next sight was Naples and the harbour. The harbour was full of shipping all idle; ships from ocean liners down to barges and tugs were either tied up at the wharf or anchored in the port without a sign of life on them. We had very little chance of seeing the town and only gained an idea of its size. On a prominent hill we saw an old castle which must have been a fort of some kind many years ago. We also noticed

that cars and trucks were pretty well non-existent practically everything being drawn by scraggy horses and oxen. We were mucked about with on the boat a good while and then parties were marched off for showers about 100 at a time and we were the last off. We had to stand about on the decks and our feet were frozen. We got off about 5 p.m. and were marched around to the shower house and we went in in lots of 25 and put all our clothes in a bag and they were put through a fumigator while we were having a shower. You should have seen the dirt - it came off in layers even though the Italian soap was no good. Here the Officer told us about the marvellous camp we were going to with plenty of food, huts, library, sport, in fact everything we could wish for. George and I were the last out of the showers and there was an Italian running round with a gas cape, an Italian ground sheet that someone had left there. Well I took them off him. We were taken back to the ship's side in trucks, and boarded a train and could hardly believe our eyes to see real carriages but the catch was that there were not nearly enough and we were jammed into the passage about 2½ feet wide. We were jammed in so tightly that we all couldn't sit down at once. Our discomfort was added to by a guard who kept stamping, singing and yelling all night and screaming about Churchill, England and us. The mentality of some of these and their type of humour could not be appreciated under the circumstances. The train pulled up sometime in the night and we managed to sleep a little in a cramped position with our knees up. George and I were at the end of the passage and the guard was in the end compartment with some of his coppers and only looked out at us now and then. There were some packs and cases belonging to them in the corner and we ratted the only one that was open and got a loaf and two tins of bully which we ate there and then. We also had some biscuits to eat as well.

30 December 1941

We were off the train about 9.30 a.m. in the front and was it cold and we went through the wearying process of being counted again. The name of the place was Capua and we marched through the outskirts of the town into a country road and were soon in the camp which is only about 15 minutes walk from the station. The camp is on flat ground at the foot of high hills beyond which is a range of mountains. The huts there were a few and were occupied by the guards and some of our Officer's while we were packed into tents, first 12 and then 16 in each. The tents were terribly flimsy affairs, a covering and nothing else; daylight could be seen through the material so poor was it. We were given bed boards and palliasses (mattresses). It was a softer bed at least than we had experienced for some time. We also got one small Italian blanket and one great big one supposedly Red Cross. We were altogether as usual and got soup and a corner of meat for lunch and rice and macaroni for tea, also two loaves. They use a lot of olive oil in their cooking in this country also tomato puree very highly concentrated.

On the 1st January we got a Red Cross parcel each, also 50 cigarettes and we thought we were in clover. George and I shared our



parcels between us, such as opening one tin of meat etc. at a time and we got hold of a fireplace (a tin) and some wood to heat sausages etc. up for breakfast. We also got coffee in the morning.

A Red Cross parcel.

There was an air raid over Naples on the night of the 22nd January and it lasted about 2 hours.

Occupants of our tent were Bill Sharp, Dick Johnstone, Blue Adams, Shorty Hunt, Irish McCant, Charlie Bruce, Cliff Ewing, Gordon Familton, Bill Bee, Arch McIntosh, Dick Mussan, Charlie Thomas, George Downes, Sid Perry, Jack Philpott and myself. Arch, Bill and Jack went to hospital with dysentery and Don Muir, Ralph Willocks, George Jonett



Naples was the most bombed city in WW2

and Bill Watson came in, in their place. Most of us slept double after the first night - it was so cold George and I slept together. The meals were coffee at 7 a.m., black with sugar. Our two loaves came up at 10.30 a.m. and lunch at 12.30 p.m. which was a watery soup with cabbage in it, also a small square of meat which had been boiled in the soup. About 6 p.m. or 7 p.m. we got tea, one night macaroni boiled with tomato puree and olive oil in it and the next night rice boiled the same with beans in it. Needless to say we always looked forward to the rice as the macaroni had no staying power and only filled you for about half an hour.

On the 10 January 1942 we were given a postcard and I wrote to Mum. There were only about 10 lines on it. Some days we used to get about 8 half figs, dried ones at lunch time and they were very nice and we sometimes got lemons and mandarins and on the 11th we got a slice of cheese instead of soup as they were out of wood and could not cook the soup. About this time it rained and snowed for five days and we spent most of the time in bed. Sanitary arrangements were a little better than at Benghazi and there was water running all the time out of a pipe with holes in it for washing at. Our parcel lasted us for seven breakfasts and after that we saved 6 to 8 spoons each of either macaroni or rice at night one loaf and boiled it up in the morning. We had some garlic that George got at Garian and Dick Johnstone got some salt from the cookhouse where he managed to crawl into a job. There was still the same trouble concerning leftover food at meal times until they started working a system which was that each day a tent would be carriers for meals, also first in line, and they would get the extra food. As there were 12 tents in our row we got it every 12 days and then we had more to save for breakfast. On the 12th we got an issue of wine and this is what we did to it later on. We put it in a bottle and George and I sold it to a chap in the canteen for two packets of biscuits - a pretty good bargain.

14 January 1941

Our mattresses were emptied and our blankets were fumigated and we went for a shower and got a shave and haircut. I never got my right blanket etc. back so grabbed the first ones I came across and on the 15th our line Sergeant made a search for extra blankets and seeing I had one, my name was taken and on the 16th he took me along to go before an orderly room hearing but it fell through. For a start we had a check parade every day and they marched us out the gate and kept us standing there for anything up to 2 hours no matter the weather, rain, snow or hail while they looked in every tent then we were counted back through the gate in single file and if the count was wrong they did it again. One night we got back and half of us had our tea when they put us out again and left our tea out to get cold. The Italians seem to have no idea of counting and if they have any more than 10 they are no good. They also start to do things late in the afternoon and our tea was always late. We used to make a lot of toast and dry out our bread. It was sodden at times, not proofed enough before baking and the loaves seemed to get smaller.

On the 17th we were issued with a woollen body belt and it was a lice catcher. Some chaps wore them as hats and I made a pair of socks out of mine and some chaps popped them to the guards for "pane" or "smokes".

On the 18th we got 10 cigarettes and were paid one lira (coupon) and 5 more cigarettes. Gordon Familton, George and I bought a packet of biscuits and 3 cigarettes for our 3 lira which are only used in the camp. We also got an issue of jam, quince and fig in an oblong block about 2" x 1" and $\frac{1}{2}$ " in size and it was nice and tasty what there was of it.

From the 19th on we used to get one loaf in the morning and the other at night. The explanation was that the bakery had broken down and after fixing it they couldn't catch up. We also got paid 10 lira and 25 cigarettes each and George and I bought a pipe each for 3 liras each.

On the 20th we saw an Italian plane crash and the two pilots bailed out, one chute opened and the other didn't which makes one less to get shot and we all cheered like mad.

On the 21st we were given a post card and I wrote to Mum. George and I had been hanging onto an Egyptian one pound between us to get changed at a permanent camp when we got to one and everyone said we wouldn't get it changed. However there was an Italian floating round selling figs at a pound a packet so we bought a packet, rather expensive but they were the best I have ever tasted, and were well worth it at the time although we regretted it later on. Rumour was floating round that the Bank of Italy had collapsed also that American troops were landing in Ireland and Scotland and that Mussolini wanted peace with England.

23 January 1942

It was snowing early in the morning and was very cold. There was a crowd of Tommy's roaming round first thing handing in bed boards, blankets etc. ready to go to another camp and we lay in bed and pitied them. We also got an issue of jam, a

spoonful between three men. George, Shorty and I cut for ours and George won, it wasn't worth splitting up into three.

24 January 1942

We were on a working party today cleaning trenches around tents and we worked from 9.30 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. and then there was a check parade till 1.15 p.m. then lunch and we worked from 2.30 p.m. till 4 p.m. We got an orange each and one loaf between four for our trouble.

26 January 1942

Meals the same, we got an onion each as well as being paid another 10 lira.

29 January 1942

It rained and snowed all night also blowing and at 4 a.m. our corner of the tent blew in and our bed got a bit wet on top. We had to get out and fix it. About 4 p.m. today we were called out for clothing parade and marched down to the shore. We tried to get as much as possible out of them so we went down with very little on. I went down without a shirt and had a blanket around me to keep me warm as it was pretty cold. George and some others went down without their jackets. Somehow our cards got mixed up and we were last through and got back at 7.30 p.m. I got an overcoat, hat, 1 handkerchief, 1 shirt, long underpants, belts and 2 squares of cloth about 18 inches square for socks. George got his new jacket. When we arrived back the lads had some tea saved for us and we also got some from the cookhouse. They also had a fire going in the tent so we managed to get warm before going to bed.

30 January 1942

Different meals today. We had about half a tin of plain rice that Dick gave us and we boiled it last night and put in oranges and figs we had been issued with and this morning we put in two loaves of bread and it made two dixies after boiling and it was great. We got an issue of cheese and had macaroni and beans for lunch and rice for tea. We flogged the handkerchiefs to the guards for a loaf each, a good bargain and George, Charlie and Bill flogged their battle dress jackets for pane (bread) and cigarettes. They are hard shots! During the last few days we have had a fire going most of the time because we had to use up the wood. When the Tommys were going away the bed boards were piled up beside the cookhouse and before the Italians came to get them a lot of them disappeared. We got at least three in the last few days. George, Gordon and Shorty also got some boards out of a shed beside the canteen or "spacchio" and if they hadn't someone else would have. I forgot to mention we scrounged a towel each at Naples after the shower but they were only what we call tea towels. The Italians are very short of soap and a lot of boys sold theirs out of their parcels for pane.

Before going any further I will try to write a bit about the country:

The first thing I noticed when we arrived at Capua was the oxen drawn wagons or carts and sometimes one ox and one mule and the loads they put on them. What we

load on a dray for a three horse team, they use a mule or light hack and anybody doing that in New Zealand would be up for cruelty to dumb animals. The next thing was the poorness of the houses along the road and the dirtiness and poverty stricken look of the inhabitants. I don't think they know what butter is as we saw quite a lot of men on the road working and they only had what we call a hamburger, bread with a slice of meat in it. They certainly are a seedy looking race and I often wonder what Julius Caesar would say if he could see them and the descendants of his Roman Empire. We saw quite a few Jerries in trucks which was all the motor transport we saw. Just by way of contrast along one side of camp was an electric train line and then on the road beside it were these oxen drawn wagons etc.

The prices in the canteen were exorbitant for everything but what else could we do with the coupons but use them there. Figs were 7.50 a half kilo packet, cigarettes 1.20 and 2.50 for 10; tobacco 1.45 and 2 lira; loose figs 5 lira for half a kilo; biscuits were 2.50 for 9, about 2 ½ x 1" and ¼" in size and they were just like rusks; oranges two for 1 lira; dates 25 lira a kilo; AO1 cigarettes 5.20 for 20; papers 40 cents; matches 40 for 25 cents; razors 3.20; notebook up to 2 lira; ink 3.20 lira a bottle; fountain pens 6.50; pens 45 cents; nibs 25 cents; wine 3 lira for ¼ litre; jam 6.20 a block ¼ kilo, and at the time a lira was 90 to the English Pound so you see that things were dear.



Canteen food

31 January 1942

We were up and had our usual breakfast of bread and rice boiled up and we handed in our blankets, bed boards etc. at 8 a.m. and were given 35 cigarettes. All the blankets were examined for holes etc. and any damage was charged up to us to be paid later. About 9.30 a.m. Dick came over from the cookhouse and told us to go over one at a time and he would give us some macaroni that had been left over from the night before and we got half a dixie each out of it. At 11 a.m. we had soup and two loaves issued and at 2 p.m. we were marched out the gate with our gear and were searched for Italian blankets and we had our tin hats taken off us. George had the two groundsheets and expected to lose them but they only looked at them and they passed us on and we still have them. At 3 pm we had rice and a good helping and had to stand in the rain to eat it after which we were marched past a hut and given two day's rations, 2 tins of bully and 4 loaves each. In all when we left George and I had nine loaves of bread each so we didn't do so badly.

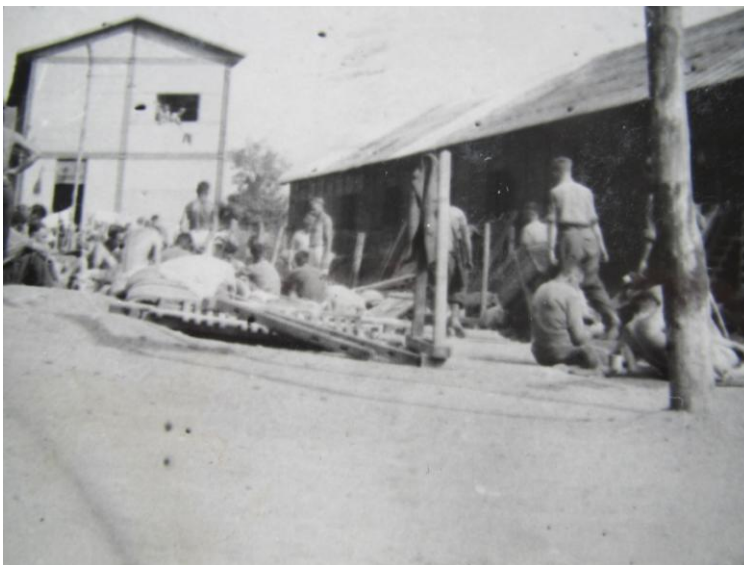
We were then marched to the station, counted and then counted again and were bundled into box wagons after dark. We had been standing in the rain all afternoon and were soaked. After being brought to Capua in carriages the trucks were a come down and there were 33 of us in each but there were wooden seats in them, 5 to a seat. Bill Sharp, Dick Johnstone and Sid Penny curled up on the floor at one end and George and Irish at the other and I had the seat but the truck had a square wheel under our end which kept us from sleeping. I got about two hours sleep all night and

looking out when the train stopped once at 3 a.m. I saw a station called Misera. It was in a gorge and snow capped mountains behind it was a wonderful sight to see.

I forgot to mention that at Capua the lads used to trail up to the ration cart when it came into the compound and get leaves of celery, cabbage and sometimes whole cauliflowers and occasionally a loaf of bread. It wasn't robbing anybody as there was always a surplus of bread and the Italians sold it to the boys. The celery was good in our morning stew. Also there was something wrong with our kidneys and I've known some of the boys to be up at least 10 times a night. Some of Dr Witt's pills would have come in very handy!

To continue, it was bitterly cold travelling and we had our boots off and our feet wrapped in our blankets to keep warm. We stood on the seats part of the time and looked out the vents. There was snow on the ground until we neared the coast, the country looked desolate. They have a funny way of building straw stacks, round affairs with a pole up through the centre.

Camp 52



We arrived at Chiavari at 2 p.m. and were told we had to march for two hours to the camp. We set off happily singing etc. with the whole population out to see us, a terrible lot in uniform in fact more in than out of it. One thing we noticed was the complete lack of motor vehicles also the complete lack of Jerries. We marched for about ten miles altogether and we were tired and footsore. The name of

the Camp is Coreghia (Camp 52), and is a new camp. We arrived about 5.30 p.m. and were issued with three blankets and a pillow each. The blankets are the size of cot blankets hardly big enough to cover us.

The huts are about 100ft long by 18ft wide with two rows of 2 tier bunks in them, 100 men to a hut. The road from the station wound through really high hills on either side all terraced and built up with stone right to the top and it must have been done a year ago some say by prisoners. They have olive trees all over them and very little ground cultivated at all. There are a lot of cables from the road leading up the hill on which they bring down wood and there are houses all over them in the most inaccessible places right to the top and there is a church to each little cluster of houses with a clock tower on each. There are approximately 45 huts in the compound, cookhouse and canteen and they are working on a big mess room. We had

a tin of bully each and a loaf of bread and turned in for a very comfortable sleep, the warmest night I had had for a long time.

2 February 1942

We had coffee at 7 a.m. twice as much as we got a Capua and at 8 a.m. we had to stand too our beds for check parade. We had to do it three times a day, 8 a.m., 1 p.m. and 7 p.m., a much better idea than standing outside in the cold. We were paid in the afternoon, 13 liras each in coupons and George and I bought some figs. We didn't get any hot meals as we had bully and bread out of the two day's rations issued at Capua. However the Tommys in the camp gave us what they could and we got a ladle of stew.

3 February 1942

They sent two men down for the coffee and they brought it up and ladled it to us in bed which was a good idea. Then they went down after first check and brought up the bread and dished it out the same way. We had macaroni for lunch and a good issue, two ladles each and at night we got the same amount of thick vegetable stew with meat in it, the best meal we had had since being captured.

4 February 1942

We had rice for lunch and were issued with 3 cigarettes, 5 cigars and 4 packets of tobacco, being back issue owing to us. We all put in a few cents around the camp and that will buy a paper every day for 4 months so we will get some news. We also got an issue of sugar, half a Gold Flake tin each.

5 February 1942

Every Monday we get 1 loaf and 1 biscuit instead of 2 loaves, also we get plain unsweetened rice. We got 1 loaf and 1 biscuit and an issue of cheese and George and I sold five packets of issue tobacco for 10 lira.



Camp 52

6 February 1942

Thirteen of us on a working party today and we were part of a gang of 72 and had to carry timber and fibrolite corrugated roofing over the river for 2 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon. An Italian Sergeant in charge of us gave us a cigarette each. We got an issue of vino, or wine, a mug per man. I tasted it and gave the rest to George.

7 February 1942

It snowed last night and is thawing fast. Issue of cheese. There is a committee formed in the camp called "The Welfare" and also a sports committee. The Welfare deals with all complaints from the men.

9 February 1942

1 biscuit, 1 loaf, plain rice for lunch, issue of vino.

10 February 1942

We were given a telegram form of 25 words to write home. George and I bought quarter of a kilo of jam for 8 lira; it was very dear but very good. We were issued with some sort of blacking for our boots; it's the first time mine have been done since 11 November.

11 February 1942

Camp 52

We went out on a working party this morning and got sent back to the hut. An English speaking Italian reckoned we were too slow in getting out. However we went out in the afternoon and carried stones from the river in a bucket-like basin, one between two of us. We looked like a human dredge. Issue of sugar and cheese. I made a hamburger out of the crust of half a loaf and some meat out of stew.



12 February 1942

Biscuit instead of loaf today. I made a spread out of grated cheese and water and it was very good. We were taken for a shower in the afternoon. Issue of vino - gave mine to George and Bluey. We were issued with 2 sheets each for our beds.

13 February 1942

Issue of cheese. Hard frost this morning and cold all day.

14 February 1942

We had a competition of 500 in the hut, 50 cents each. Dick and I lost our game.

15 February 1942

Church this morning - Church of England taken by an Australian Red Cross man. We had pasta suda which consists of macaroni boiled and strained with fried onion in it. Issue of vino and our gang pooled it and played 500 for it. We lost our game.

16 February 1942

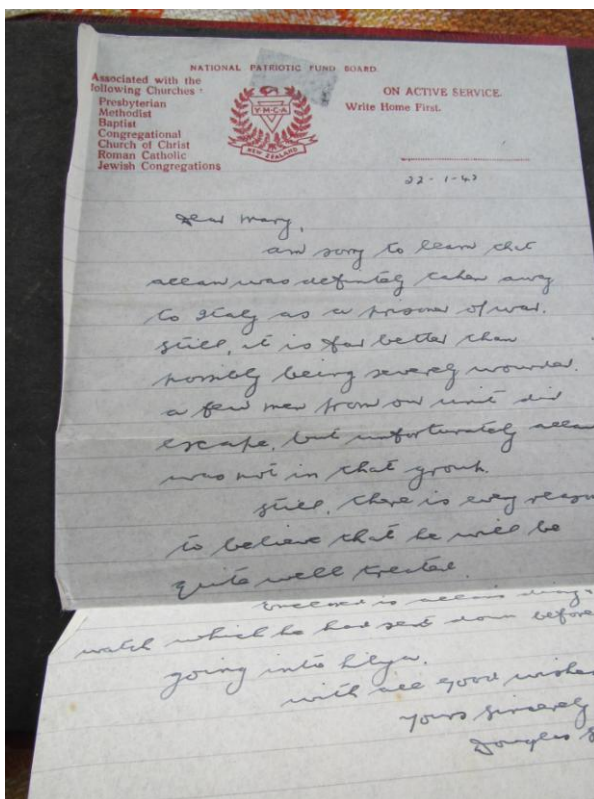
Plain rice for lunch, issue of sugar, in working party shifting soil at new mess rooms. There was a kid about 10 working there and doing a man's work. We were given a Red Cross parcel today, one between three of us and I shared mine with Blue and Charlie, also one tin of tobacco (Players) between four of us. We made a drink of cocoa and had the apple pudding for supper. We made a fireplace and boiled up in the hut.

17 February 1942

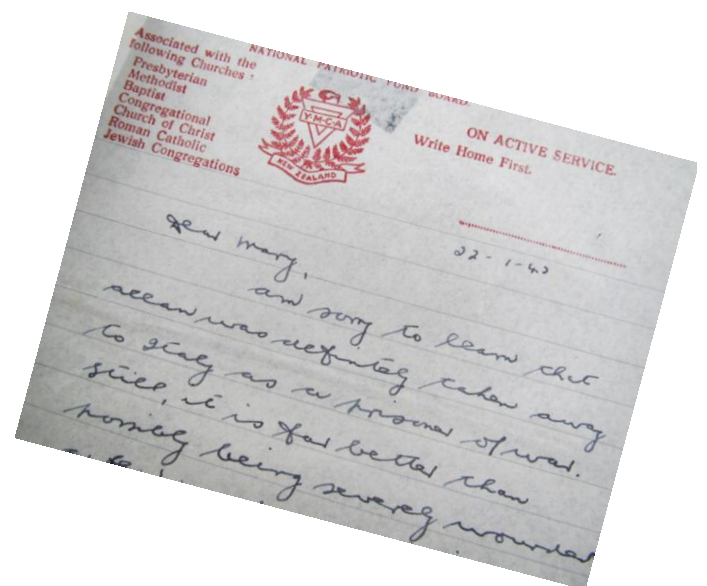
Had tea and bacon with bread, margarine and lemon curd for breakfast. We had cocoa in the afternoon and nearly got caught boiling up. The guards came through looking for fire.

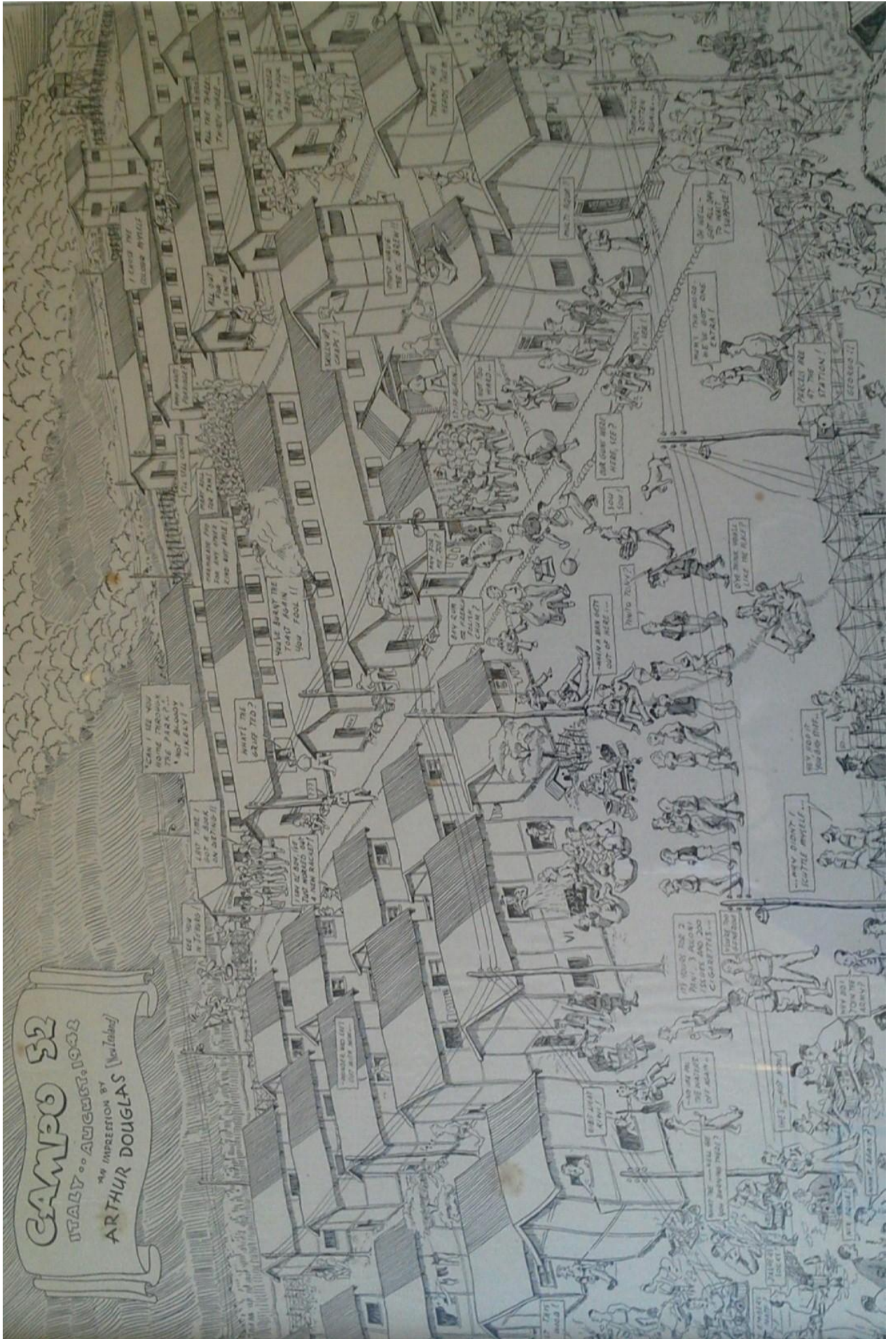
21 February 1942

Issue of 66 cigarettes, also sugar. Dick, George and I made a duff today with 6 loaves, $1\frac{1}{2}$ biscuits, $\frac{1}{4}$ kilo of figs, cocoa, wine and sugar and got it cooked at the cookhouse. We were issued with a letter card and postcard and I wrote a letter to Mary and card to Mum. We had a talk in the hut tonight by gunner Speights on the making of tennis balls, water bottles etc. by the Reid Rubber Co.



Letter sent to Mary advising that Alan had been sent to Italy as a prisoner of war.





CAMP 52
ITALY - AUGUST, 1942
AN IMPRESSION BY
ARTHUR DOUGLAS

"CAN I USE YOUR
SHIRT PARKA?
I'M NOT BLOODY
SICKLY!"

"LET THE
HOT & DAMN
ON BEHIND!"

"ICE NOW
WATER!"

"HOW MANY
DO YOU WANT
FOR A NEW RACKET?"

"WHAT THE
HELL'S TID?"

"YOU'RE BASTARD!
FORGET AGAIN
YOU FOOL!"

"MILK OR
CAREY?"

"DON'T WORRY
ABOUT THE
MILK!"

"I'D LOVE TO
BUY A CAR
OR A HOUSE
OR A CHAIR
OR A CHAIR?"

"I'D LOVE TO
BUY A CAR
OR A HOUSE
OR A CHAIR
OR A CHAIR?"

"I'D LOVE TO
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