

Friday, May 16th 1941.

Here we are again, still going strong and as fit as ever - well, almost. It is about 7 weeks since I last posted you a letter; since then I have written 3 or 4 but couldn't post them and finally had to destroy them plus about 9 others that were ready to be sent on their way. I sent you a cable yesterday through Army Post and at the same time Mrs Zaidan sent a civil cable to the Mater. I don't know which one will arrive first but I hope they get to N.Z. P.D. as the Mater is bound to be worrying as I believe I was posted as missing. It is hard to know where to begin on our Greek adventure; perhaps I had better give you an outline of it all and then go more into details in later letters.

We arrived in Greece about 2 months ago and spent 2 days at Athens A.S.L.. The place is not very big but is full of interest, wine and good beer. Here we began our Northward Trek and passed through every type of country imaginable. For hours we would be climbing steep ranges, then we would suddenly plunge into deep gorges where the road would be hugging a cliff on one side while on the other there would be a straight drop of a thousand feet or more. Then we would travel across plains for hours until another huge, snow-capped range would seem to bar our progress until we climbed the zig-zag road to the summit. After a few days we arrived at a position between Olympus and Salonika. If you've got a map handy this letter may be more interesting to you. From there, we watched Salonika being destroyed and saw the Hun advancing towards us until he swung right towards Albania. For a few days we didn't know where he was and finally had to evacuate our carefully dug positions as we were in danger of being cut off. Our retreat was by way of the Olympus Pass and it was in the Pass that we spent a few days in the snow.

Owing to various reasons we had to continue withdrawing until we came to a point near Larissa where we determined to stop and delay the Hun advance as long as possible.

We christened our guns with a few ranging shots about 8.30 p.m. on April 17th. A little while later they opened up in earnest and the Battery gave Fritz an idea of what voluntary troops can do. Our first shots demolished a bridge and all night long the guns boomed and the ground shook. I had quite a good sleep and in the morning opened up Radio Communication. The day was interesting as I knew everything that was going on. During the periods between messages I wrote you a letter as there was nothing else to do. Gerald's medium mortar fire was very accurate and the blasts shook the truck as they exploded among the trees. I was watching one fairly big tree when a shell burst near it and stripped it of leaves and small branches in a twinkling.

Later in the day the truck was used as a Mobile Observation Post and we watched Hun tanks and infantry advancing and saw our shells exploding and playing Merry Hell (Pardon?) with them. It is rather interesting to know that our infantry were vomiting as they fired at

Gerald - it was such a slaughter that no one could help it. Before the tanks appeared, the Huns were retiring in some confusion but nobody can stand before an armoured tank so our troops retired in good order. All this time the Hun Air Force were playing havoc in our rear and I saw some bomb craters that would hold a house. We were on a hillside for a while and watched about 30 Stuka dive bombers in action. The wings are fitted with screamers and the sound is not too comforting - not at all, any, none etc..

At dusk we began falling back to LARISSA one troop covering the other. When we neared it we had to make a sudden about turn as Gerald's numerical superiority plus his huge tanks had allowed him to occupy it. We sneaked away during the darkness - no moon, praise Allah - and after manhandling the truck over rocks, streams and mud, we found ourselves on a road as dawn broke. There we were, well and truly lost, six of us. For a while we stuck to the road but being machine-gunned from the air is no joke and we tried to cross some marshland and reach the road south. At about 10 a.m. we were hopelessly bogged so we hid among the reeds, had the biggest meal we could hold and then set off on foot after smashing all radio equipment and then setting everything on fire with about 12 gallons of petrol to feed the flames.

For nearly all day we travelled round the Lake while Jerry planes searched for us and machine-gunned everyone they saw. As we moved along we could see Junkers landing in a drome about a mile away and air borne troops alighting. On our left a Greek shepherd signalled to them - just another 5th Columnist. I wanted to shoot him but we decided against it as it may have given our position away. During the next afternoon we arrived at Volos and there learned that the Army was miles away so we had to trudge on at nightfall. Friendly Greeks gave us food and rowed us to an island on the Volos Harbour. We walked across it, got another boat to the next island and so on across 3 islands. Finally we got a scow to Kalkeesh which is at the bottom of the long island on the East Coast of Greece. We arrived there at 6 a.m. on the 23rd and no sooner were we ashore than 27 fighters came over and machine-gunned us for 45 minutes. We took shelter under a railway turntable then rowed across the Harbour to a N.A.A.F.I. dump and ate and ate and ate. At night we boarded a train and during the next night came to a point on the Morea Peninsular west of Athens. We saw 27 planes machine-gun civilians on our journey - "Good Germans fighting for the Fatherland". The next night was spent on the beach as destroyers took troops off. We missed by about 50 and went to bed about 5 a.m.. The next 2 nights were the same. All day we hid under olive trees and watched the bombers and ME's at work.

We woke at 9.30 one morning to find everyone running to the beach. On enquiring, we found Jerry armoured cars were 300 yards away so set off in the approved army manner. Eleven of us got into a 14 foot dinghy and rowed like mad. We kept at the oars for 36 hours and during that time had 2 spoonfuls of meat and vegetable ration each. Were we hungry? Finally we came to a village and saw a boat with an engine. Our idea was to steal it and make for Egypt but we went into the village first to try and get some food. They had very little but we managed to buy some and ate it in a pig-sty. Jerry planes were overhead and we held our breath as they inspected our boat. They must have decided it wasn't worth bombing and went away. In the village we met a few English Officers and

troops who had just bought the boat for £600.00. At dusk we set off and travelling by night and hiding ashore during the day we travelled South. Our motor broke down several times but we finally set sail for Crete. At dawn we were 2 miles from Crete when the motor broke down again. The seas were high, the wind was off the land and we were blown back 30 miles to Anti-Kythera. If you ever want a barren place, go there. It is all rocks and nothing else. We were weak from hunger but two of us set off on a 3-mile trip to the village there. That trip took us 2 hours as we had to stop and rest every few hundred yards. When we did get there they had no food at all.

A fisherman took pity on us and rowed us back and we slept all day. In the morning we had a little bit of boiled goat but got some more later in the day. That night we got a bigger boat and set off for Crete. On our arrival there we ate for about 4 hours. As the food was cooked we slept and ate it as soon as it arrived. After a few days we set sail in convoy for Egypt and arrived at Imbaya camp at 2 in the morning. At 2 p.m. the same day I was at Zaidans at a garden party and enjoying myself immensely. That's the end of our trip. When I landed in Egypt I possessed 1 Pr Shorts, 1 Shirt, 1 torn Gas Mask containing my razor, 100 cigarettes, my photos of you and that's all. Everything else went up in smoke. I have handkerchiefs, rug, photo album and a few souvenirs that I had left in Egypt. So we start life anew.

Fifth Column activity in Greece was very strong. Everywhere we went shepherds drove their flocks near us so enemy aircraft would be attracted, arrows were ploughed in the ground pointing to passes etc., circles were ploughed near our guns, fires were lit near us at night, troops were machine-gunned from private houses and the Huns were led through little known passes. We could trust no one. On the other hand some Greeks treated us marvellously. At times they refused money for food even though they had none left for themselves. They gave us wines when we were exhausted and guided us when possible. Even after the Germans issued an order saying that all who helped British troops would be shot some of them helped us just the same. At one village some Greeks fed us and gave us wine and at the same time others helped themselves to our gear and stole one of my boots and I had to travel for 2 days using a piece of wood as a boot.

The Germans were unnecessarily cruel. They machine-gunned women and children, deliberately machine-gunned a horse and so on. I had the uneasy experience of watching a tank fire a 2 pound shell at a group of us. It was a tracer and we could see the flash as it was fired and watch it come towards us. We dived flat and it whistled overhead. The Hun artillery opened up on us at one time but they couldn't get the range right and their shells exploded behind us. Our guns got to work and after about 10 minutes fire they were silenced for the day (and ever I hope).

Next Sunday I'm going down to Maadi again to lunch with Mrs Zaidans sister. She's very fat and a bit shy at first but very nice when you know her. Her husband spent a few years in America and is a real Yank as far as speech is concerned. On Sunday night I'll be going to Perkins for dinner so I've got quite a bit to keep the future bright for a few days at least. My pay book shows about a fiver credit even though I've spent a bit in the last couple of days as I had to buy toilet gear etc..

After all my plans for a "wet" birthday I spent it in Anti-Kythera. We are getting 7 days leave in rotation so I'm going to try and build up my credit if I can.

I haven't seen Tom as he left Egypt with the Concert Party about the time I left Cute. I know where he is and he's quite O.K. When I rang some people in Maadi, just after I got back, they told me I was dead and as far as I know, I think Tom was told the same story. I'll write to him to-day and let him know. Jim Hollis doesn't seem to be around anywhere in Maadi so may still be in hospital. Frank Bee is probably with him. I don't think they left Egypt so will see them sometime. Two of your letters arrived while I was in Greece but that is all. I believe some mail was destroyed and other letters are on the way here so I'll be getting some soon I hope.

If we get paid to-day I'll post you a souvenir from Greece. I've had it a couple of weeks now but haven't been able to post it. It took three of us to choose it so I hope you like it. If you don't, give it to someone you don't like. Saw "Gone with the Wind" yesterday in Cairo and enjoyed it greatly. After the pictures we went to "L'Americaine" and had one "Ali Baba", one Strawberry Sundae and one "Josephine Baker". Then we wandered to the Kursaal, had some Gin Slings and so on around the city. We got home quite sober but it was a good day as we called at the familiar places and met old friends again.

Time for us to go so I'll have to close. Oh yes. That snap with the fish arrived O.K. Couldn't make out what the "baby" was at first. Jolly good snap too. I'll write again early next week if I get the time.

G. A. Kirk - Birmingham