

# The Letters and Notes of Iris Helen Knowles

## Notes From the Trip Book

From your fellow VA's of Wellington Center who wish you Bon Voyage and a speedy return to New Zealand.



**Iris Helen Knowles 815298**

## Date of Departure

9th November 1944	WAAC Camp, Miramar
15th November 1944	Trentham
14th December 1944	Miramar
19th December 1944	Final Leave
2nd January 1945	Miramar
6th January 1945	Empress of Holland
9th January 1945	Hobart
25th January 1945	Aden
29th January 1945	Cairo and Helwon

## Diary

**9th November 1944**

**WAAC Camp Miramar**

Shared a hut with Yula, Marie Fama, and Lillian Laurie. Spent six days here endeavoring to be equipped with uniforms. Lamps and candles were the means of lighting our huts - was really very easy living as far as the Army goes and the food was easy to eat. Were told we were to do our military training at Trentham Camp Hospital. Left by truck at 1000hrs on Wednesday 15th November.

**15th November 1944**

**Trentham Military Camp**

Shared hut with Yula, Marie, Dee Parsina. Went to the WAAC dance on 5th Dec and was brought back to our lines by a Captain who I had supper with. Food at Mess is absolutely awful. Left Trentham 14th December for Miramar.

Went on leave 19th December until 2nd January 1945 (Tuesday) Had leave Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Pouring rain on Friday 5th - went on board in the evening and left at 0430 on the 6th January. Was up on deck to see the last of Wellington as the Empress of Scotland pulled out. It looked lovely.

**9th January 1945**

**Hobart, Tasmania**

Pulled in about 10 am and saw the "Achilles" berthed on the opposite pier to us. Put signal over to George and had a good look at him from the bridge with glasses and telescope as we were both unable to get leave. He looked at me from the gun turret through the range finders and sent signals to me. The town looked very nice when I was looking at it through the glasses. Left at 7 o'clock in the evening when we went down to dinner. The meals on board are absolutely excellent. The "Achilles" and two destroyers are our escorts.



HMS Achilles

**15th January 1945**

**Empress of Scotland**

Played poker with two Army officers a couple of evenings in the lounge. Had afternoon tea with Commander Besley in his cabin - he took me up forehead of the bridge on Sunday 14th, when the "Achilles" closed us as she left. Went and drank his health after they had left. It looked really lovely. The Commander sent a real signal for me in reply to George's signal. Played "golf" up in his cabin with his 2nd in Command Dug Hollams. Joan and I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Sunday night saw "Holy Matrimony". Wednesday night went to ships concert- really good. Had been invited up to Captain Thomas's cabin for afternoon tea with the Commander. Very nice.

**18th January 1945**

**Empress of Scotland**

Went to the Commander's cabin for some iced beer until dinner. He's a pet.

20th Jan. Had afternoon tea with the Commander and a bottle of beer. Went down to the second dance - was very good. After dinner played poker with Laurie and Max. Beautiful night on deck.

21st Jan. Crossed the line - the Commander gave a little piece about King Neptune over the speaker.

22nd Jan. Commenced Hospital Duty

25th Jan. Had tea in Cabin 16 - went up to officers bridge to watch entering Aden - saw all difficulties with anchoring, 4 ropes (9") broke. Back there on 26th to see departure. Sloop we nearly cleaned up on securing to the buoy was the "Jasmine". Evening 26th stood on deck watching the light of Persia. Saw a portion of Italian Somaliland

27th Jan. WAAC dance and Officers dance. Aden was interesting, M.A.A. gave Joan and I a flower and arr. A.... he bought on board for us. Watched Black Outs diving for coins.

28th Jan. Party in Commander Besley's cabin - really amusing. Joan, Lily Bone, and I and the Adjutant and Dug Hollams.

### **29th January 1945 Empress of Scotland**

Left the ship on the 29th of January 1945. Had our luggage carried for us by the permanent Navy staff. Really sorry to leave. Came off in the first tender and were driven up to Helwon by truck. Marvellous living quarters.



### **30th January 1945 Cairo and Helwon**

Arrived last night for dinner after having the most wonderful drive through Cairo. The mixture of people is astounding - the WOGs are terrible low people. Were taken through some of their quarters which are out of bounds. The better class districts are absolutely palatial. The sunset along the Nile is too exquisite to explain - artists are almost right in their efforts. Saw pyramids in the distance. Stopped outside the NZ Forces Club- looks good. Saw Shepherds Hotel with people sitting on the wide front verandah.

Saw Colin Bell on Tuesday on the bus going to Cairo. Went to the Club and met Max Millar - had dinner and went for a gharri ride out to Gizerah Island with Ian Berendsen.

On Wednesday met Colin Bell and went into town by trains. Saw the fruit marts, peanut alley, mousky, museums and main shopping areas. There was a dust storm all day. Arrived home in time for dinner and went off to the Tommies dance at the South African Camp. (Colin had

taken me to an Arabian Cafe for lunch). Marvellous dance - drinks and food super ale luna.

On Thursday changed some \$ with Max and called for mail at the NZPO - no luck. Went to All Saints Cathedral. Absolutely grand place. Had dinner at the Club with Max, Ian, Boyd Wright, Joan, Irene Grant, and we all went on to the Dolls Cabaret.

Friday went on a tour of the Coptic Churches - very interesting old churches. Were also shown over the Missionary Hospital. Went to bed early as we had just had Typhus and TAB injections that morning.

Saturday met Ian and Max at the Club and all went down the Mousky where I bought a cigarette box, ash tray, filigree tray for PT215 and PT35. Came back to the Club for dinner and then went down to Shepherds with Ian where we joined the motley throng in a drink or two. Left there for the Bandia to join the others, but didn't like it so went to the Washington - once again didn't like it so went on to the Dolls where we found Joan and Max. Saw the floor shows and rushed for the 12 o'clock train to Helwon.

Sunday morning Colin took Joan and I around Helwon - up to the Observatory and to the Japanese Gardens. The afternoon was spent at the Pyramids - were taken out by the Tommies - sat in front with a lad from Dundee. Had a short ride on a camel. Met Max at the Club and went to the 6:30 service at the Cathedral. Absolutely packed with service people. Had dinner at the Club and waited for the 10 bus.

5th Feb. Monday woke up with a cold. Stayed home until 5:30 when we all went to dinner at the Tommies Mess and danced at their club later.

6th Feb. Tuesday - roped up trunk as all sorts of rumours were flying around. Went into Cairo and did the posh shops - bought 2 1/2 meters of lace for PT40. Saw "Cry Havoc" at the Metro. Don't like smoking in the theatres.

7th Feb. Wednesday - Stayed in bed until 11:30 - had lunch and caught the bus into Cairo. Were taken on a drive out to Helipolis, past the Palace, though the Dead City - absolutely awful, felt as if I was in the Dentists chair, then out to the Gizera Sporting Club which is a beautiful place. Saw the polo ponies - came back to the Club for tea and went down Peanut Alley and bought brown sandals for PT55. Colin Bell and the bus driver Jack had to be thanked for that. spent the evening at the Homestead and Jamies Bar out at Helwon. Saw what looked definitely like a spot of prostitution - two Greek Orthodox Priests and a fat Wog girl.

8th Feb. Thursday - Dads birthday. Met the two Scottish Tommies outside the mess and went to the YWCA for lunch. Absolutely beautiful building and a lovely lunch. Made another visit to the museum and they made

us look at everything. They took us to a Free French afternoon tea place where the cakes and coffee were the best I've tasted here. St. Josephs Catholic Cathedral was the next visit - a really beautiful place with 12 side altars and marvellous high domes. We had no dinner and went to the Metropole to see 'Half Way House' which is a real good show. Saw first NZ Airforce boy there who came up and spoke to us in the Club afterwards when we were trying to fill our stomachs before catching the bus. Letters from Mum and Dad .

9th Feb. Friday - Met Colin and the Giant at the Club - had tea and picked up Myrtle Dodds and Jack and went out to the Zoo where we got caught in the rain - came back by Gharri and had dinner in the Sergeants Mess and then went to the Washington Cabaret. Lovely music.

10 Feb. Saturday - Collected our photos and went out to the Sporting Club at Gizera to see the races with Molly Welch and Natalie Campbell. Had dinner at the Club with Max and Ian - all absolutely broke - had to come back on the six bus. Went to the pictures at the Tommies Camp in the evening.

11th Feb. Sunday - Still at Helwon - went into Cairo and Joan actually paid our fares with her last PT5. Decided to go to 'Whom the Bell Tolls', but couldn't get in and went to Grappi's for coffee with 2 Tommies who made a good effort at making us believe we knew them. One openly admitted that he had before the war lived on his wits alone. At 5:30 we were introduced to half a dozen airforce lads and went off to dinner with them. The one I was with Chet Palmer had worked in the Prudential at Auckland. Went to England in Brian's (Dalton?) lot and on his way to Burma. Left the Club and went to Tommies where I had my first John Collins. Chet and I took another Gharri and went and joined the others at the Washington. Had a look at Cairo from the roof garden or maybe a look at Chet. They came home on the 10 bus with us and once again I saw Chet.

12th Feb. Monday - Collected 3 letters (Mum, Dad, and Yula). Met Chet at the Club just after 3pm - went with him and Joan and an English Pilot Officer to the 'Lady in the Dark'. I saw more of Chet than the picture. Had dinner at the Club and went over to a bar filled with Air Force (NZ, Aust and English), had a really interesting hour there and rushed off to catch the train in a taxi. Once again Chet was all I saw. They came in for supper as we had to be in by 9pm. Were told we were leaving in the early hours. Took Chet out to the gate and had a really heavy woo in the garden. Said goodbye at the gate. Rushed in and ironed and packed.

13th Feb. Tuesday - Were woken at 4:30am instead of 3am but got away only half an hour late. Rather a good trip in ambulances up to Port Said along the Canal. Stopped at Ismaillie YWCA for morning tea, cost us 1/- each but was worth it. Came on board the SS Volendam at eleven - cabin of 15 with Joan and Deidre next to me.

## 13th February 1945 (Tuesday) SS Volendam

Marvellous meals - an absolutely first class ship - Dutch ship. Spent the first evening playing bridge under instructions from Max and Ian, also a Captain in the Indian Army. Repeated the performance the next night. Had dances on deck before dinner where we met the Royal Garhwal Rifles - I spent the next two evenings on deck with Peter - got red paint all over one side of my coat. Peter was a good dancer and a real nice kid - born in India went to school at Ampleforth and Oxford. Father in charge of large railway company in India. Watched the Gurkhas disembark on 18th Feb. Came off just after 11 and brought up to Bari by truck. Towns are absolutely filthy and people most un attractive, but country lovely.



## 18th February 1945

## Bari, Italy

Living in Ward 7 of No 3 NZGH. Told after dinner that I was going to Ancona (No 1) and am I thankful on not staying here. Cold and ugly. The Club is not nearly up to Cairo. Natalie Campbell and I went for a walk around Bari on Monday 19th when we ran into Mr. Potter of the YMCA and arranged our own transport up with him the following morning. Left at 6:15 and had a lovely drive up to Senigallia, arriving at 5:15 on Tuesday 20th Feb. Bari is a dreary characterless town.

## 20th February 1945

## No 1 NZGH Senigallia

Natalie and I had the first day reasonably free so we set off to find Brit up at HQ. Had 2 afternoon teas en route, but eventually found her - collected Brit and Peggy and brought them back for dinner and gave them a real treat - a shower.

Started work the morning of Thursday 22nd at 7 o'clock, Ward 2. On Sunday 25th my first half day, Peter and Paddy turned up. I went off to Ancona with Peter, Paddy and Dee. Went to dinner at the Officers Club at Transit Hotel.

The next fortnight was spent with Peter when I wasn't on duty - stayed at the YWCA one night - we went to the Ballet that night and was it super. On Peters birthday 7/3/45, I bought him an Italian version of Pinocchio - we spent the day together in Ancona - had a champagne lunch and dinner at the Club, Santa Lucia was played for us again. A lovely fortnight of dinners, lunches. hitch hiking and Peter. Then I started night duty on the 10th of March 1945.

On Wednesday 14th March, Peter came out at eleven as it was my night off, and his last night - we went into Ancona for lunch - hitched in a Italian cement truck. Peter was feeling in a 'bad' mood and we had an amusing lunch with Hal. The mist was rolling fairly heavily and Peter and I went for a walk and a woo up on the cliffs of Ancona. The grass was covered with daisies of all colours and the trees were just blossoming. Peter is the sweetest thing I know, even though I got an awful swollen lips.

We went back to the Club for dinner and had a real party (only Pat and Ronnie missing). I stayed the night at the YWCA, but Collie didn't turn up to take me home in the morning so I managed to scrounge a ride with a British Educational Officer who was in the lounge - his name was Dick Turpin (brother secretary to Atlee). Peter left that morning.

My next night off Deidre, Joan and I went to a Military Parade (Arty) 22/3/45 where Gen. Freyberg gave out decorations. It was a wonderful sight seeing all the troops march past to the playing of the bagpipes. Saw Betty Exley's Steve Simons at the luncheon. Went for a lovely drive away up into the hills - had afternoon tea in a casa (7th Anti Tank) belonging to the General Manager for Italy of the Vacuum (Oil). Had dinner in a Mess where Jack Fisher was Adjutant - he seemed just the same. Got home to bed at 10 and was I tied - slept all the next day. The driving was simply marvellous at that time as Spring was really on the way - blossom and flowers everywhere, all the trees coming into leaf. We gather wild primroses and violets and saw Deidre's brother.

Friday 30th March 1945. This was my next night off and Joan and I stayed at the YWCA - went out to dinner with Sandy and Stewart and the picked us up the next day for lunch and then took us to a hockey match that the Garhwallies played We squabbled all the time over Peter and Co.

My last night off night duty was Saturday 7th April and I went to a 'do' in the MO's Mess with Peter Foote, the dentist who refilled all my old fillings. Quite enjoyable - sat on the beach afterwards and had a real good whiskey.

Came off night duty on the morning of the 10th April 1945!!!!!!

April 12th went to Jesi with Elizabeth Morrison and some friends of hers who were giving her a birthday party. Dee and I enjoyed ourselves but it had nothing on Peter and Paddy's idea of a night's fun even though there is an absolutely super floor there.

Sunday 15th April 1945. Sandy and Stewart came out and after tea we drove out to Jesi and danced. It was very nice and I appreciated it, but felt very tired.

Monday 16th April 1945. Half day - went up to Senigallia to BOD to see about shoes and called in to see Mr. Potter - had a cup of tea and then discovered a Symphony Concert was on that night - Mr. Potter took Deidre, Joan and I, and it was super. I thoroughly enjoyed it and know Peter would have too.

The next seven weeks were spent in Ward 2 - going to Jesi Club and a few SAAF do's, but nothing terribly exciting. On the 4th May I was sent to work in the Theatre, where I stayed for the next two months - hating it nearly all the time.

**4th June 1945**

**Senigallia**

Met Conzuis Van Blommerstein and for the next fortnight had a simply marvellous time. I hardly seemed to have time to sleep and all my clothes in a terrible mess. Lots of evenings Keitha, John, Conzuis and I would go miles along the beach and have spumante and chicken, or goose, chips and green peas - it was absolutely perfect. One evening Conzuis and I went up the hills on our own and lay there looking at the sunset - the Adriatic looked simply marvellous - the colouring is exquisite. The sun not setting until 9 and it was 10 before it got dark.

Saturday 16th June 1945. Conzuis and I went up to Pesaro and went to the British Officers Club where we were the only 2 'colonials' present. It was really rather delightful spot, but typically Pongo. On the Sunday we went down to Loreto where there is a beautiful Cathedral and absolute poverty around it. There is a marble house on the altar that is supposed to have appeared over night and the only place this stone is found is in Palestine. Of course for thousands of years pilgrims have crawled around it, but my knees would not fit into the grooves made in the stone by their knees. That was the last day I went out with old Conzuis who was an absolute pet.

**24th June 1945**

**Riccione**

I was told I was going to Venice the next day on my four day Venice leave so I hopped up to see Basil Potter about getting me a raincoat and I ended up on my way to Riccione. I was all mixed up with Padre's and

Bible Class students but spent the afternoon on the Riccione beach and at the YMCA. Met a lot of the 14th there and of course had to go to Church which was an excellent service. Arrived back from an unexpected pleasant afternoon about 10 o'clock and had to pack for Venice in the morning.

**25th June 1945**

**Venice!!!!**

We left at 6 o'clock and had a very good run up, arriving at 2:30. Passed through the POW area where there were what appeared to be whole divisions of Teds. Crossed the Po river, one of the original pontoon bridges - its really quite a big river. The countryside then became very interesting all the way to Venice and there was really very little war damage. It was an awful hot sticky trip though. We parked the ambulance in the car park - a building of about six stories and went to the Club in a 'Duck'. Had a bath and changed for the evening and set off to see the town. Did all the shops in St. Marcus Square and came back to the Club for dinner but met Brit and Peggy in the bar and then things started with a bang.

Had dinner with Frank Menzies and Rex Lawrence, and a Pongo friend of theirs, then collected the other two and set off for the Luna where we picked up Sister Gardner and a Naval type I dislike. The Luna is delightful place - a perfect floor and bar but it closes too early. Frank and I went off for a gondola ride in the middle of a storm - lightning flashing everywhere. We dodged under the bridges during the heavier rain and I saw the Grand Canal and the Rialto by lightning - we sailed around all the back streets or canals looking in the windows at beautiful paintings and chandeliers and discussing everything under the sun, because the moon was hidden.

I arrived back at the Club at 01:30 and we opened a cake and ate great hunks of it in the corridor outside our room. I got to bed at 2 o'clock after an exciting and interesting evening. Venice is all one could wish.

The next day I set off shopping and picked up a Kiwi en route and we went around all the shops and I did my shopping. Has lunch with Brit and Peggy and then went up for a sleep and we set off shopping again. We had dinner together and then I went out to the Europa for dinner with Sisters Gardner and Haggert and 3 Naval types. Beautiful place, up until then the nicest hotel I had seen. Danced between courses and then sat on the balcony watching the moon coming up over the Grand Canal. When the Club closed we took a gondola and set off looking at Venice by moonlight. The gondolier took us to a pub called the Grotto where we danced to Viennese Waltz's and Italian melodies with Kiwis, South Africans, Yanks, Naval Officers and Italians - a delightful hour, one that could never ever be repeated. We arrived back at the Club at 3 o'clock.

The next morning I went sight seeing with one of the Kiwis from the Grotto and we went over the Dowagers Palace and the Bridge of Sighs. There are some wonderful paintings in the Palace - one on Noahs Ark was lovely and the one on the arrival of the Pope or someone in Venice also. Went back to the Club for lunch and then went of for the Lido on a naval craft with the disliked Naval type and Frank, Rex, and Sisters Gardner and Haggert. Frank and I went and had afternoon tea at the Palazzo del Mare which is the best place I have ever seen - 2 orchestras playing everything, just too super for words - the place I would like to spend my honeymoon. It would be really wicked in peace time. Lay on the beach afterwards watching ltes making ardent love to officers and then went back to the pub we had had our 3 bottles of champagne at 650 a bottle. The Naval type nearly had a stroke when he got the bill. Went back to Venice in a gondola and collected a collected a shirt of Franks to wear as we had started on our honeymoon. I met him down in the bar for a couple of Alexanders and then had dinner. We sat in the bar until everyone arrived and the whole lot of us went of to the Tina where we stayed until it finished and then on to the Grand where everyone imaginable was but we left early - 12 midnight and went on a gondola ride in the moonlight around St. Georgia and the other Islands until 3, when Frank escorted me to the wrong room. There was I in the wrong room without a shirt. Had to run all the way to the corresponding room on the floor below shirtless. Luckily met no one. Our honeymoon was annulled at 3 am. We left at 8 in a gondola all completely and utterly exhausted and everyone slept most of the way back. Came over the Po this time on the triple baillie bridge. "This bridge took a bloody lot of building" Arrived home at 8 o'clock and reported to Ward 7 the next morning and found I had a half day, day off and was going on leave on Sunday.

**28th June 1945**

**Padova**

Spent about half an hour trying to find a cup of tea , eventually getting one in an lte Restaurant for L35. Had a good look around the shops, but was feeling far to exhausted to be interested in buying anything. Rather a good town to shop though. Spent an hour and a half in the place altogether and a long enough too.

**2nd July 1945**

**Florence**

*(Details below are also rewritten and included in a letter.....)*

*815296 Nurse I.H. Knowles*

*No 1 N.Z.G.H.*

*2nd N.Z.E.F.*

*C.M.F.*

*12 July 1945*

*Dear Mum and Dad.*

*I last wrote up to the 1st July I think, anyhow I will start my story from the morning of the 2nd and I'll go into as much detail as I can. All I hope is you don't get fed up before I finish.).....*

At seven in the morning, Joan, Deidre, Molly Welch and I were out at the gate hitching on our way to Florence. After 3 lots of lites had passed, along came a comfortable staff car that took the lot of us and all our baggage. There was a Tommy driver and Greek M.O. from a British Hospital in Rome, bound for Venice - the guard, quite relieved to see us off his doorstep waived goodbye. We stopped off at Riccione at the YMCA DIV Hostel for breakfast. Mary Burrell (our mess officer) was staying the night so we hopped over and told her of our hitch. We were sorely tempted to make for Venice, but got the Greek M.O. to drop us off at Forli, after we had almost ended up in a free fight trying to explain the medical situation in New Zealand to him. Not one of us could agree with each other. We said goodbye to him when we were dropped at the Florence road and placed ourselves in the hands of the Polish M.P. on the corner.

Once we had made it clear to the Pole as to where we wanted to go he collected chairs off of the nearby shops and we sat on the side of the road eating biscuits and sipping out of the old water bottle. We were sitting there still hopeful at the end of half an hour without a thing bound for Florence having passed. At last a Yank 15 cwt truck arrived on the scene and on we went, bag and baggage with not an inch to spare. Luckily I was sitting in the front on the edge of the 2 seats, and didn't get my full share of the dust. I've never seen such a road as the one over the Appenines - at most of the worst bends the fence was missing and the drop would only be a matter of a few hundred feet straight down. I breathed a sigh of relief when we were on the level road again. they dropped us at the NZ Club in Florence just after 4, all hot dirty and tired.

The Club there, like the one in Venice, is one of the better hotels still run on pre-war scale as far as everything but food is concerned - you couldn't complain about that though. We had 2 double rooms with our own bathrooms and were soon in steaming hot baths. The beds were those delightful ones you see over here with a mattress about 2 foot deep. I dined with a couple of friends of mine, Tom Lawson, and Jeff Townsend, who were returning from leave up north and they took Molly and I around Florence that night to give us the general layout of the town. We walked along the banks of the Arno and over the Ponto Vecchio bridge - its the only original bridge still standing but either side had been heavily ruined by the Teds and they had blown up part of the passage that went through the top of the bridge and round the houses on either side connecting the Palazzo Vecchio with the Pitti Palace, which were two of the dwellings of the Medici family who used to rule Florence in years gone by with a rod of iron. We ambled on to the British Officers Club for a few drinks at the bar before it closed at 10:30. Tom and I went back to the Club and I was asleep by 10:30. Joan met Paul Gabittes there and as he was leave he came nearly all the way with us.



The Ponte Vecchio, Florence, Italy

Many of the older bridges across the Arno River were destroyed in World War II. The Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge), built in 1345 and shown here, survived. Goldsmith and jewelry shops line the bridge.

The next day we made breakfast by 9 o'clock and then set off shopping. I had a new cameo put in my ring and also bought another of Flora, the goddess of flowers. the one in my ring is Minerva. I got these at the cameo factory and saw how they are made. They are carved out of layers of shells. Only a small portion of the shell can be used for the better type cameo and it was really interesting seeing them in their different stages of carving. On our way to the shopping area we called in at the Santa Croce Church and we went into the Spanish Chapel built specially for a Spanish Ambassador in about 1500. This chapel had a very high ceiling. beautifully painted.

*(At this stage the trip book entries cease in a long written form and continues with dates and Locations)*

#### **The Letter continues....**

I think I now have a permanent kink in the back of my neck from looking up at ceilings, and to get back to the chapel, it is supposed to make even the worst voice sound beautiful, so I tried it out - made the others go away, but they stood out in the courtyard and listened. You don't hear your actual voice, it is the echo and I could listen to that myself. It really sounded good, almost fit for opera! We all arrived back at the club about an hour later than what we agreed upon.

By this time I owned three caperlines(?), one straw leghorn and two felt ones, a black for mum and a navy for me, Jock's two pairs of gloves which took every bit of the two pound ten shillings he had sent me, another pair of navy ones and a white alabaster figure about six inches high, three pictures, one being of Venice, one of Florence, and one of Rome. Later in the day I bought a reproduction of Mde Le Brun's painting of herself, the original of which I had seen in an exhibition at the Pitti Palace. I think it is a really beautiful thing (the original). In Rome I bought a reproduction of Titians's "Love Profane and Love Chaste". I think that is about all I bought. I had a marvellous time in the hat shop trying on hats in the most advanced seasons styles for New Zealand. In about five years time we will probably considering similar styles back home. We also bought a Florentine Lily (silver) for ten shillings on the Ponto Vecchio - I don't think I lost my lily in our room at Florence and after I had shifted nearly

all the furniture in the room I eventually found it under my bed. How it got there I still don't know.

That afternoon was spent in doing the Art Exhibitions, previously mentioned, at the Pitti Palace where the main thing of interest was the private chapel which was all painted on plaster with the story of the family. I mean walls and ceiling. I have seen so many Madonnas and Christ's I can't remember where they all belong. We went into the ballroom and saw the most perfect ceiling I've ever seen - the subject was Greek Mythology and all the Gods and Goddesses were portrayed on the ceiling in larger than life sized figures. It was beautifully coloured and most interesting. From there we went to the original Cathedral of Florence, which is now a Baptistery and all the piccile bambinos get baptized there to this day. It is shaped in the form of an octagon. You can't imagine the size of these buildings - they don't look large from the outside, but try and imagine going into the Prudential building and the whole place being one room - give it a tip on the side so that the height is its width. Then we went over to the Duome (the present Cathedral) which has the most wonderful iron carved doors in the world. They were doors centuries ago and the figures on it are complete bodies, not just carved on the surface and they, of course, depict some history. We went inside and as usual there were no pews - no church seems to have them in Italy - maybe one or two - but church in Italy is survival of the fittest without a doubt.

Before we went back to the club for lunch we made a detour to study an exhibition of Michaelangelo's sculpturing - the main one being his celebrated 'David', which is a perfect dream of a workmanship. It looks like a real live man in the most perfect physical condition, with all the muscles taut ready to throw the disc. It is certainly the finest piece of sculpture I've seen and mark you I've seen many! He must have been an absolute genius when you consider his sculpturing, painting and architecture, that he has accomplished. His main fault in sculpture was that he failed to finish so many things.

After lunch we wet off in a trip up into the hills overlooking Florence and the bus broke down. We had to walk and climb miles it seemed up to the top of the Fiesole hills where you get the most perfect view of all Florence. By the time we had hitched back to the Club I was ready for dinner and bed again as we were to be called at 1 am so that we could catch the Union Jack paper truck bound for Rome at 2 am.

There were seven of us leaving in this truck and I was sat in the front with the Ite driver and we set off in the dead of night under his care. His English wasn't even poca poca, but we munched chocolate together until 4:45 am when we arrived at Arrezzo, only to discover that was the end of the journey and that the connecting truck (all three tonners) was not due for another two hours. Nothing daunted 2 WO's and a Captain and I set off to try and find the odd cup of tea. We prowled into every open door without discovering anything but sleeping bodies through keyholes, but eventually we arrived at the Officers Transit Club Hotel and bullied the Ite porter into turning on a cup of tea for us, collected the others and some sandwiches, staying there until about 7 am when Joan, Deidre

and I (we left Holly in Florence) attended Mass at the Church next door for a little while. When we got back the other truck had arrived and we were horrified to discover that it wouldn't leave for another hour, but we did change our parking places in to the main part of the town, where Deidre and I barged into the Employment Exchange after some Ite woman, and I called one out and tried to explain that I wished to spend the proverbial penny with completely no avail. After almost completing the act she grasped our idea and took us away to the back of the building where we then discovered the whole history in pamphlets of what is the most common enemy at present - not Japs - VD.

We left Arezzo just about 8 am in this second three tonner, and I'm afraid I don't know much of the trip until we got to Perugia as I was sound asleep. I believe the country on the way down, especially the lake was beautiful - in fact the whole countryside here is beautiful no matter where you go. Perugia is a lovely clean looking town and we stopped at the Naafi for a while and used the most unusual type of convenience I've ever seen - in fact we stood looking at it for about five minutes wondering how you used it. Anyhow after we left Perugia we passed Assisi which is the home of St. Francis, who is the Saint of Animals. It is a beautiful big monastery set up on a rise overlooking the whole valley. We saw many Monks but didn't have time to stop and go over the place. Some day I hope to get the opportunity as it is supposed to be one of the most interesting of the monasteries.

When we got to Filigno we were dropped on the strada and made our way to the Transit Hotel where we had morning tea. From this point we acquired a tommy driver and his truck and he took us to the best hitching point for Rome. It was now getting on for midday. It wasn't long before we were on our way again in a fast little van thing - after the style of a small ambulance - he again was a tommy and was going right through to Sorrento so Deidre, who had a date that night in Sorrento, stayed on. She got there at 10:30 and went to bed exhausted. Joan and I got out at the Club in Rome about 14:30 and went to bed for an hour - had a bath and felt fairly refreshed.

On the last trip we came down Route 6 and passed through Cassino. Well, I thought Rimini was a big enough mess, but Cassino just looks like an ancient ruin - absolutely nothing is standing - it is just a heap of rubble. The Monastery on top of the hill is just the same as the remains of the town. The Ites are going back to live there now and they are having built for them a settlement after the style of the Govt's block of flats at Berhampore. Maybe not quite as well fitted out.

Our night in Rome was spent at the Opera. Joan's friend took us and we went to sleep, but Joan and I thoroughly enjoyed it even though it wasn't the best one to pick for the first time at Grand Opera. It was Tosca. The first Act was alright, the second good, and the third very good. When the heroine jumped over into the Tiber it was a wonderful jump. If she did it now she would land on the road and I'm sure the road must have been there even in those days - it is a really good distance from the battlements across the road from the Tiber. The famous singer Gigi was singing that night - he's got a marvellous voice, also has a home

just out of Loretto (south of Ancona) which is used as an Officers's Rest Home at present - it's a lovely place.

We took a Gharri home from the Opera and felt quite excited about it because it was the first gharri ride we had all had since leaving Cairo. As you can imagine we slept like the dead that night and were up at breakfast just after 7:00. Paul helped us to carry our bags over to the YWCA where Joan and I caught the ATS bus down to Naples.

The ride down, rather remarkably, was rather cool, but as usual I had a sleep most of the way. The only other girls on the "bus" (truck in reality) were three Polish girls, only one of whom could speak any English. She and I had a bit of a mutter. At one stage of her life she had nearly adopted by a Mrs Fraser of St. Clair, Dunedin, but the war broke out then and as she was a qualified chemist she got attached to a hospital laboratory and came out through Romania, then over to Iraq where she was in charge of Polish children and nearly all their supplies come from New Zealand.

When we got to the hills overlooking Naples -----!!! Naples is definitely the sink of iniquity. Why the hills down there should be lower than the Wogs in Egypt I can't imagine, but they are. We didn't get off the "bus" as they took Joan and I out to the Auto Strada and before they dropped us I had arranged over the back of the truck, a lift in a 1942 Chev American Staff Car and we just purred along the Auto Strada at 70 mph and felt as if we were hardly doing 10. These two Yanks were on their way to pick up the owner of the car - their Brigadier, so they dropped us at the corner of the road to Sorrento and after five minutes along comes another Tommy who picked us up and took us to the door of the YWCA at Sorrento. We got there just after 3 and found Diedre waiting for us. She had been down to Amalfi and Positano, but Joan and I missed that as we went to Capri the next day.

August 1945	Riccione
9th August 1945	Perugia
23rd August 1945	Stafefalo
24th August 1945	Udine
30th August 1945	Stafefalo
29th September 1945 (Peter and Tom)	Riccione
4th October 1945	6th Field Ambulance Breakup Party
6th October 1945	1 NZGH Nurses Mess Breakup Dinner Party
10th October 1945	Senigallia
Last day - 12:30	
11th October 1945	Bari
12th October 1945	La Salva
14th October 1945	Caves Castellama

17th October 1945      Molfetto  
30th October 1945      Rome

1st November 1945      Florence

*Entries with no dates . . . .*

Leghorne  
Pisa

21st December 1945      Bologna  
22nd December 1945      Monza, Milan  
25th December 1945      Milan to Calais  
27th December 1945      Folkestone, England  
28th December 1945      London, England  
30th December 1945      Edinburgh, Scotland

1st January 1946          Aberdeen, Scotland  
4th January 1946          Edinburgh, Scotland  
5th January 1946          Harrow Weald, Middlesex  
8th January 1946          London  
11th January 1946          Brighton and Rotheringdean  
   Folkestone  
12th January 1946          Calais, France  
14th January 1946          Switzerland  
15th- 19th January 1946      Milan, Italy  
16th January 1946          Lake Como

21st January - 10th February 1946      Bari, Italy  
10th February 1946          Taranto, Italy  
13th - 14th February 1946          Port Said, Egypt  
15th February 1946          Suez Canal  
19th February 1946          Aden