



**WAR JOURNAL OF  
DAVID ELLIOT WARREN  
0538835**

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### Foreword

*This is my diary from the time I left England on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1942 until my return home.....*

*It is not a day to day record, but only a description of the interesting things I have witnessed and various events which have taken place. Some of the entries are lacking in detail owing to the time that has lapsed between the date of happening and date of entry. There are also included here and there, various thoughts and impressions of my own, which, it must be remembered, have been influenced by the state of mind I happened to be in at the time of writing, so some of them may seem peculiar and biased. This was written primarily for Gwen's information and interest and secondly as a souvenir record of my sometimes interesting, unique and not often happy experiences abroad, dressed in khaki.*

### PART ONE OF TWO JOURNALS.

11/4/42 [Saturday]

We left Liverpool in 'SS Empress of Japan' accompanied by two other large troopships including the 'Capetown Castle'. I spent the day looking over the ship and getting my bearings. It's a very fine ship with some elegant woodcarving and panels and miles of corridors. We rocked slightly and the boys thought we were going to be sick.

13/4/42

Early in the morning we found ourselves steaming up the Clyde with some fine scenery on each side, lots of hills and small towns. We dropped anchor off Gourock among a host of other ships and close to 'Empress of Canada', a sister ship to ours. A big new U.S.A. aircraft carrier sailed past quite close with all its planes on deck, a magnificent sight. The harbour was full of ships, large and small, warships, merchantmen, a submarine and several Catalina flying boats.

14/4/42

Spent the day reading, eating and watching the comings and goings of the shipping, which was quite interesting.

15/4/42

At 6.30p.m., we turned around and slowly began to sail towards the sea. It was an impressive occasion and until dusk fell we passed some beautiful rugged country and watched the sun set over the high peaks of the Isle of Arran. This is possibly the last we shall see of the British Isles for some time, which explained why the decks were crowded with troops. It was too, a lovely evening and there was much for us to see in the way of scenery.

16/4/42

The convoy has got together now and there are about 30 ships to be seen all around us. When the sun rose we were heading due west. There are two cruisers quite close and several destroyers on the horizon each side, so it seems we are fairly secure. Our boat is rolling slightly, though the sea is calm and the sun shining out of a blue sky. I imagine we must be somewhere north of Ireland and about 100 miles or more east of Scotland. One or two seagulls are flying about, so land is not very far off.

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19/4/42

Played a very antiquated organ at service this morning. We have been steaming first W.S.W and now south so far. And we have put the clocks back one hour, three times. It is growing noticeably warmer too. The sea is a beautiful blue and covered in 'white horses' as white as snow, as is our wake. To look over the rail is like viewing a fine oil painting, the blue sky and the sea, small white clouds and the ships all around us. The water has a peculiar hypnotic fascination and the novelty of leaning over the rail and watching it rush past has not worn off yet. A rainbow can be seen in each wave as it breaks off the ship's side in a huge cloud of spray. We have all day in which to amuse ourselves and we get a little bored at times with nothing to do. The Promenade deck, which seemed so huge at first, seems to have dwindled in size somewhat and the Boat deck is reserved for that higher form of life, known as officers. It is rumoured that our first port of call is Freetown. ['White man's grave'] I imagine we must be somewhere in mid-Atlantic. I would give 5/- for a Sunday Express. I often look back towards England and think of home and wonder what Gwen and baby are doing.

23/4/42

If it had not been for the breeze caused by the speed of the ship, the heat would have been unbearable, the sun is blazing and the sea looks like bright blue paint. We have donned our tropical kit, but the sweat still runs free.

27/4/42

It has been getting gradually hotter each day and typical of the Army, they now decide they will have P.T. as it is so hot. There was a beautiful sunset last night of all imaginable colours, yellow, red, orange, black, blue, grey etc, which kept changing as I watched. A great many flying fish can be seen, they look like small swallows as they skim over the surface of the waves.

I am on guard again today on the watertight doors about five decks down. It is boiling hot down there and full of Chinese. There are about 500 of these chaps on board. Some of us are allowed to sleep on deck at night, as the 'air' in the cabins stinks like hell, sweaty feet, smoke and heat, etc. so I manage to slip out on deck most nights. We should sight land very soon now. We have been heading more east lately. We are putting the clocks forward 1 hour tonight as a result of it.

28/4/42

A Sunderland Flying boat has been hovering around us today, we must be getting close to port.

29/4.42

At about 9a.m. we sighted land ahead, consisting of some high mountain peaks, still misty in the distance and covered in clouds, it is our first sight of land for 14 days, since leaving Scotland. At about 11a.m. we are quite close, we have been steaming in line ahead through a minefield. The details on the shore can be discerned plainly now, hills of reddish earth, covered in scrub and dotted with palm trees, and various types of buildings and huts. It is a most exciting occasion to see Africa for the first time and I only wish Gwen were here, she too would be thrilled at the hundreds of fascinating things to see. As we are crossing the boom at the entrance to the river a small native canoe comes quite close, it seems infinitely small by the towering hull of our ship. Several more canoes approach us as we steam slowly up the river past Freetown. One of the natives in his canoe starts singing 'Bless 'em all', presumably as a compliment to us. They all seem to have a fair knowledge of English [good and bad] judging by the things they shout at us. If a coin is thrown into the water they will dive over the side of the canoe in a flash and pick it out.

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There are hundreds of ships in the harbour of all sorts and sizes and before we drop anchor, the R.A.F, who seem pleased to see us, give us an exhibition of aerobatics, a Spitfire roars round the ship, banking steeply and so close that we can see the pilot clearly. Also in the air are a Sunderland, Walrus seaplanes, Skuas, Albatross etc. On our starboard side is the small scattered town of Freetown, backed by hills and further inland, high mountains. Along the banks are various native huts and tropical plants and trees [about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile off]. On the port side some 2 miles off is a long low ridge of land and a golden strip of sand.

30/4/42

It is cooler today and cloudy. At about 3p.m. we had our first taste of tropical rain, Oh Boy, what rain. A small native boat with a triangular sail is being swept along by the gale not far off and it looks as though the mast and sail are going to be lost. The storm dies out after about an hour with a few terrific claps of thunder. I have been sleeping on deck the last few nights, it is glorious out there and there is a beautiful full moon. I remember the last full moon I saw was in Woolwich, which is now 1000's of miles away. The air is lovely and fresh in the evenings and there is only a partial blackout here, the lights on shore are twinkling all night.

1/5/42

Today is scorching hot and not a breeze to relieve it. What a pleasure cruise this is, we wake up in the morning and have tea and biscuits if somebody is not too idle to fetch it, then breakfast, laze about all morning, sleep most of the afternoon and laze in the evenings.

3/5/42

At 10a.m. this morning we get under way and steam slowly down the river, passing through a narrow channel of ships of every kind, cargo boats, troop ships, battle ships and aircraft carrier etc. We show our mutual admiration of each other as we pass close by each ship, cheering and passing rude remarks, calling the aircraft carrier a football field and a small old destroyer an ice cream tub, to which it did bear a little resemblance with it's [sic] awnings and light paintwork.

We eventually passed through the boom and headed out for the open sea. I played for the service again this morning. I was loaned a book of Handel and played a minuet and Rinaldo as voluntaries. Also went to service in the evening, it provides a welcome change of atmosphere from our sleeping quarters where wrangling, swearing and sexual discussions reign supreme. I am gratified to discover that rather than succumbing to my environment, my aversion to this [as we have it in large doses] tends to make me more immune from it. The services are well attended and I suppose a lot of the fellows feel the need for some 'spiritual uplift'. Some of the hymns make me feel a bit homesick; "Holy Father in thy mercy, hear our anxious prayer, keep our loved ones, now far distant, 'neath thy care" I wonder what they are doing now? I have become friendly with two New Zealanders on board, Colin Bellam and Trevor Anderson. It is amazing how small the world is, they were at Osmaston camp, Derby for a short time and Colin became acquainted with a young lady from Derby Corporation Electricity Dept. who I knew, he also knew of the famous Mr Duck. I have also met Basil Thompson on board, who I was at school with, he is now a pilot officer in the R.A.F. He used to attend the Y.M.C. at Wesley Hall.

4/5/42

Sometime this evening we should cross 'the line', it is of course very hot and the morning and evening give is the only relief. It is grand on deck at night and last night we were treated to a fine display of lightening though there was no thunder. I had heard that it was very cold at night in the tropics, but I have yet to discover this, as it is quite warm with only one blanket out on open deck. There is a fearful racket in pop bottles on board, 2d is charged on each and as they are left all

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over the ship, there is a great temptation to cash them in at the canteen. I have done it myself, so I know!

5/5/42

We had a musical treat this afternoon, a talk on 17th century composers, including Handel and Bach and a selection of old songs, with 'Largo', 'Drink to me only', 'Alleluya' and madrigals.

The sea is abundant with flying fish and today I saw what I believe is called a Ray fish. It looked like a big brown bird floating in the water. It was much cooler on deck last night

with a strong breeze blowing and I had to use two blankets. Major catastrophe: the canteen has run out of practically everything except 'C to C' fags and various haberdashery, no choc, fruit, biscuits etc. This does not surprise me as huge quantities of these have been bought and it has been a never ending source of amazement to me where all the stuff comes from:- fresh water, flour, sugar, meat, potatoes, fruit , veg, chocolate and fags. Colossal stocks of these things must be carried, for instance, 10 fags per man a day=50,000 per day =1,400,000 per week, to mention only one small commodity.

7/5/42

A gramophone recital was held this afternoon, [light classical music] it was well attended by several hundred and among the pieces played was Purcell's Trumpet Voluntary with organ and orchestra, it sounded fine and was enjoyed by all. Was on guard again on watertight doors, made me fearfully tired, but slept most of the next day.

8/5/42

It is getting much colder at least in comparison to what we have been used to, there was a very cold wind blowing tonight. I have been feeling very homesick the last few days and I find myself wondering how I am going to stick being away from home for such a long while. If it were not for Gwen and baby I wouldn't mind at all. I wonder if little Ann will remember me when I finally get home, I expect she has started school now. I shall perhaps feel better when I hear all the news from Gwen and too, when I get off this blasted boat. We have been at sea a month tomorrow and it will probably be another two before we get to our destination, it seems incredible to be at sea for a quarter of a year: one consolation, [?] however is that we shall probably be nearer home than we are at the moment. Our position now must be about 20 degrees S and 500-1000 miles west of Africa.

10/5/42

Played at service again this morning and community singing tonight. Heard Churchill's speech on the radio and attended the weekly session of 'The Brains Trust', one of our educational facilities which we have on board, they also have German, French, Arabic, Persian, Art, Music etc.

When the sun was setting this evening we were heading due East.

11/5/42

Some dirty swine pinched 30/- out of my pocket during the night, this is one of several thefts from our room. No hope of recovering it or finding out who it was.

13/5/42

The more I see of the Army, the more I despair. It is thought we are approaching Durban S.A. and from various lectures we have had, it seems taken for granted that as soon as we are ashore

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we are all reverting to beasts and are going straight to the nearest brothel. We are told to keep away from the native women and in the next breath we are told that French letters are to be had from the M.O.'s for 2d per time. It is explained that the charge cannot be avoided as they want to obtain a fresh stock at Durban! Thus is seen the depravity and immorality of the British Army and its practices are condoned and encouraged by the authorities. I do not doubt now when I hear that the name of England and the English stinks all over the world. We have the audacity to send missionaries to remote corners of the world to 'civilise' and enlighten the natives, along comes the white man who comes to make his money here with his liquor, swearing, lack of religious and moral scruples and thoughts of greed and war in his head. What do the natives think? The first of the natives we saw at Freetown gave us an example of the white man's civilising process, as most of their English consisted of swearing and curses. I also understood that a high percentage of their terrible diseases to be found all over Africa, were brought by the white people and have become far more virulent than they originally were, in the hot climate.

Went to a picture show last night, saw 'Destry Rides again'. Am on guard again today. Looking over the rail last night was a fine display of phosphorescence, a common occurrence in these parts. The water was lit by hundreds of small star-like lights which danced about in our wake. I have written to Gwen and told her that we are going to Capetown, [as I thought at first] have also written to Dorothy, Eric and Mother. I shall send them an airgraph or telegram from Durban.

15/5/42

Saw several Albatross flying round the ship today, they are very graceful birds with a huge wingspan of about 7-10 feet. They hardly ever seem to move their wings in flight, but just glide and soar on extended wings all the time. Several ships of the convoy have left us, presumably for Capetown.

16/5/42

We have heard that we are disembarking at Durban and going to a rest [?] camp, but as the bridegroom said 'we'll have to wait and see'.

18/5/42

Early this morning before it was light, we saw many lights ahead-it is Durban and after a while we approach a narrow entrance to the harbour, with a wooded hill on the port and the town on the starboard. At 8p.m. we have docked at the side of a wharf and 9 p.m. sees us on African soil for the first time. The dock is full of natives and stevedores dressed in every imaginable type of clothing of all colours. After unloading a lot of baggage we board a train at 11a.m. and proceed to our camp, which is about 7 miles outside the town of Clairwood. On our way there we see a little of Durban, tall white buildings, lots of palms, banana trees and flowers. Outside the town and on the hills is a residential quarter. Some of the tall buildings in town are of about 20 storeys. It looks a very delightful place. After a short walk

from Clairwood station we come to our camp, which I hear, holds 30,000 men. We proceed to settle down in camp, as we are not allowed out today.

19/5/42

After hanging about all morning, passes are issued and the great exodus to town begins, a special train service is provided for us. I first of all had a smashing dinner with Trevor and Colin-a savoury omelette, chips, toast and butter and beer and 6 coffee. Had a walk round the town and bought some shoes and picture postcards to send home. The town is ours for the taking-the transport on buses and trams is free, food is abundant and can be had free at some canteens. The shops are piled high with fruit, sweets and cigarettes: it seems there is an abundance of every good thing in the world, things we have not seen in England for so long. The town is beautiful, all the buildings are modern, tall, white and clean, there are no chimneys and the air is lovely and fresh. The streets are wide and clean and the motor cars are all luxurious American types, Nash, Pontiac etc. The people seem bright and cheerful and the war seems far away. All the girls are lovely, not because we have seen none for so long, but they really are, in their summery clothes. I suppose the reason is the climate, fresh fruit and good food. It is Winter here now, but seems like a fine English summer. Along the main streets run the shops sheltered by arcades. There are 100's of rickshaws drawn by natives in the most amazing dresses: feather head-dresses, horns and bangles and ornaments cover them, they are bare-footed. I was once told that S.Africa was heaven on earth and the description does not see far wrong, it is a Paradise during the day and a fairyland at night, when the shops cafes and streets are brilliantly lit, not in semi darkness as is dear old England-even in peace time. I went on the bus down to the Marine Parade which runs along the front, the Indian Ocean to my right and rows of fine white blocks of flats and hotels on the left., the road was tree-lined and wide, the sea breeze rustled the leaves, the ocean was deep blue with huge breakers, breaking on the sand in clouds of dazzling white foam. The war now seems a long way off. There was a snake park at the bus terminus, I went in and saw all kinds and sizes of snakes, mambas, cobras, etc. I returned to town and had a bite to eat at the free canteen at Wesley Hall and decided to go to the pictures-or 'bioscopes' as they are called here. The show started at 8, but we were able to purchase our tickets beforehand and so walk straight to our seats when we returned at 8p.m. [As we bought tickets, the seats were automatically reserved for us]. England and queues please note! Standing in the street watching the world go by before the show commenced, who should come up but Charlie Haggins of 11/41. He apparently travelled in the same convoy as us and we were very pleased to meet up in circumstances we would never have dreamed of 3 months ago. Went to the show and saw Pygmalion. If only Gwen and baby were here, how wonderful it would be to have all these fascinating sights and have lots of delicious food to eat, I feel so mean enjoying myself as I am, knowing how they are doing without all these good things which would be of such benefit to them, particularly their health.

20/5/42

This morning we had the most comic route march ever conceived by any army. We dressed up nicely in battle order and marched to a field near to the station, we waited here with several other companies, smoking or lying on the grass, then we



were marched to a small wood across the railway line and sat there all morning and ate fruit which our officers bought for us. There are several groups of Indian fruit sellers near the station. The women are dressed in silk and cotton sarongs and dresses and have jewelry [sic] let into their nose and ears: they are barefooted and carry large baskets of fruit on their heads. I had a pass again after lunch and set out once more to taste the delights of Durban. I boarded a bus to the south beach, which runs along the front in the opposite direction to the Marine Parade, here was good bathing in the surf and towels, costumes and dressing accommodation was provided free. I spent a happy hour in the huge breakers which occasionally broke several feet above my head and swept me towards the shore with terrific force. There is some fine surf-riding to be had here, but there are some nasty currents to trap the unwary bather who ventures out too far. I felt this myself and it gave me a nasty sensation. I had tea at Wesley hall and decided to visit the museum, this proved to be so fascinating, that

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I had been in one room only for over an hour before I realised it. There were many exhibits concerning the evolution of man, which I found immensely interesting, there seemed to be so many relics and signs of prehistoric man in Africa. Also displayed were many of the tools, implements and weapons made by the savages of the Stone Age, stone axes, knives and spearheads. A huge case contained every imaginable kind of fish, some weird and wonderful, including the flying fish, which we grew so accustomed to on our voyage. Astronomical exhibits included a representation of the sun and all the planets in its orbit, spaced out at the correct proportional intervals all round the room and a description of each one. A greatly enlarged model of the atom with electrons revolving round it was reproduced. I tore myself away from the museum eventually and betook myself to a cinema, seeing an 'Old Mother Riley'. Last night two men were killed in the station owing to the crush and one lost a leg, conditions improved a little tonight but there was still a terrific crush.

21/5/42

Duty calls today and I have to stay in camp. I am glad of the opportunity this affords me of a rest after the strenuous sightseeing, but I am eagerly looking forward to another interesting day in Durban. Unfortunately many of the fellows have made fools of themselves, by drink and bad behaviour, it is a great pity and makes me ashamed as the people of Durban have been very decent to us and we don't want to abuse our welcome.

22/5/42

Had a walk round the town today looking at the shops and buildings. Wade and I were just going to have tea when we were stopped by a man who invited us to have supper with him, we gladly accepted and were then taken in his car to a small private hotel overlooking Durban. It was dark when we arrived and the lights of the town presented a fascinating spectacle. We had a sumptuous dinner with him and his wife and spent the evening chatting about South Africa, home etc. They are

writing home for us. I cannot remember their names. We were taken back to the station in his car at about 10.30 p.m.

23/5/42

Went to the South beach this afternoon and swam and sun-bathed. I had my photo taken sitting in a rickshaw drawn by an elaborately dressed native, they will be pleased to see these back home. Harris and I decided we would see a little of the surrounding country so we boarded a bus going to Greenwood Park. As later events proved this was the start that led to us having a most marvellous time during our stay in Durban. The bus took us through the outskirts of the town, then over a long steel bridge over the Umgeni River. After crossing the river we commenced to climb up into the hills surrounding Durban and we saw at close quarters for the first time the delightful residential district that encircles the town. It was quite unlike anything to be seen in England, most of the houses were bungalows, built of wood, asbestos or other material and all were painted snowy white. The roofs were of red corrugated iron, in front of each was a large verandah with polished red steps leading to the gardens. It was the gardens, perhaps that contributed to the beauty of the scene. They were a blaze of colour, flowering bushes, fruit trees, palms, banana plants and creepers. Each house was well spaced out and was separated from its neighbour by at least 50 yards. None were alike. We were able to command a magnificent view from here, looking down into the bay, which was deep blue and held 50-60 ships anchored there. A little to the right we could see the tall buildings of Durban, nestling in a flat plain, behind which rose the hills.

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The sun blazed down on the panorama spread out before us seeming to exaggerate the colours and making everything sharp and clear, here, as in town there were no chimneys,(the Durbanites use electricity for practically everything) and as a result the air was gloriously fresh and cool. On reaching the summit of this part of the hills we commenced to descend, turning inland, and as we did so we caught a glimpse of a range of mountains in the distance across a wide fertile valley covered in trees and fields. Just before reaching the terminus at Greenwood Park we were entreated off the bus by a woman waving her arms and saying "Come on in and have some tea boys", no second invitation was needed, so we piled out and found ourselves in a small Presbyterian church built of corrugated iron, this too had a veranda running down the side, which was set with small tables and chairs. We were provided with sandwiches, buttered scones, cakes and delicious tea, the people there were extremely kind to us, we were provided with a duplicated letter saying we had visited their church and on the back I was able to write a few lines to Gwen, this they were sending home for me. After we had eaten our fill here we walked down the road and climbed a short hill whereupon we were able to look across the valley to the range of mountains we had seen from the bus, we sat on the grass here and amid the continuous chirping of crickets and grasshoppers we watched the sun set over the distant ridge and dusk descend. – On walking down to the main road again a car stopped and offered us the usual invitation to supper and a chat, so once more we accepted the hospitality of Durban and we were driven away inland for about 10 miles with sugar cane lining the road

and stretching as far as we could see in the dusk. We reached his house eventually at a place called Mt. Edgecombe, and after being well fed and watered in the usual manner, our host, a Mr Gerry Walsh, said he would take us over the sugar factory where he worked. After a short drive we arrived at the factory and started on a tour round it. Beginning at the point where the cane was unloaded off trucks and fed into a machine which cut it into short lengths and from there to the huge rollers which crushed it and squeezed it while the juice thus extracted was run away to vats where it underwent many processes and finally came out as a thick brown syrup which was later purified and then crystallised and came out as sugar as we know it. We were then taken through the warehouses where thousands of sacks of sugar were stacked awaiting disposal, a sight to gladden the heart of any English housewife who can now only have a few ounces. We returned to the Walsh's house laden with sugar cane, which we intended taking back to the camp. After having supper, we were given a pair of socks by Mrs Walsh, who also promised to write home for us. It was nearly 11 o'clock when we started back on the long drive to Durban, but we were finally deposited outside the Central station and caught the last train back to camp arriving there after midnight, tired but immensely satisfied with our day's outing.

24/5/42

Harris and I took a bus labelled Brighton Beach intending to see more of this 'land of flowers'. After a drive of about 11 miles over the hills we came to a long stretch of golden sands, which shelved steeply to the edge of the sea where huge waves broke. There were very few people here and after walking along the beach we had some tea and cakes at a café nearby and decided to return to Durban. On arriving here we left Greenwood Pk. walking again, so we boarded the bus and once more enjoyed that delightful drive through North Durban. We alighted at the canteen and were again welcomed and given tea, we stayed there until their evening service, I was honoured to play the organ for them and we enjoyed the service very much. 9 When the service was over, I was thanked by the Minister who said he would write home for me and were then introduced to a Mrs Mackenzie, who invited us back to have supper with them. We were escorted to their home by their three small daughters, Audrey age 6, Sheila 9, and Daphne 11, who proved delightful companions. After supper we found that Sheila sang and Daphne played, eventually I was hauled to the piano, a lovely tuned, new, Challen, and we had a fine musical evening, it reminded me a lot of the time when Ann used to sing 'God is our refuge'. Sheila had a sweet piping little voice and I began to grow very fond of her on our subsequent visits. She had a pretty little round face and two big dimples when she smiled, and dark curly hair. We left here about 10 with a parcel of cakes and an invitation to come again whenever we wished. I recall that Harris and I had attended a service at Wesley Hall in Durban this morning. We were allowed out at 10am as it was Sunday.

25/5/42 Whit.Mon.

Had dinner in town at one of the several canteens that provided eggs, bacon, sausage, chips, bread, butter and fruit salad and ice cream and coffee or tea all for less than 1/-. Harris and I tried to get into the pictures to see '49<sup>th</sup> Parallel' but we were unable to, so we decided to buy some picture post cards and take them out to

the canteen at Greenwood Pk. and have tea and write them there where it was quiet and peaceful. After writing them we met Daphne and Sheila who persuaded us to go home with them, this we did rather reluctantly as we were loath to take advantage of the welcome they had extended to us. However we spent an enjoyable evening and were glad we went.

27/5/42 Wed.

Today all our company started out on a route march and scheme lasting till Friday. I was detailed to stay behind as tent picket, so was unable to go out (officially). I stayed in till after dinner today and managed to slip out and have a bathe in the afternoon.

28/5/42

The first of those who had fell out started trickling back this afternoon and I heard how badly the company had fared, about 30 of them were sick the first day owing to the heat and marching.

29/5/42 Fri.

Went for a bathe with Robinson this afternoon and had tea afterwards at the Durban Jewish Club (one of the cheap canteens for the Forces).

30/5/42

Harris and I went out, and had lunch at the Victoria League Club, did a little shopping afterwards and decided to visit the Mackenzies, taking some flowers with us for Mrs Mackenzie. We had the usual enjoyable evening and were sent off with a box of cakes and a kind invitation for us to spend the whole of the next day with them.

31/5/42 Sun.

We arrived at Greenwood Park about 12 noon and were met off the bus by the junior Mackenzies who looked very charming in their Sunday and summery frocks. We had a delicious dinner and after a rest went down to the canteen. After a short stay there H. and I took the girls for a walk up the hill where we had been previously. Strangely enough they had never been there although it was little more than a mile from their home, but 7000 miles from ours, however they enjoyed it and the ice cream we provided them with. We returned to the canteen and back to their home, and after a tea up to the usual standard we all went to the evening service where I played the organ again. Back at our hosts home we had a sing-song, the girls went to bed with a goodnight kiss all round and we were again fed and sent back to camp with a tuck parcel and further invitations. We now look upon the Mackenzies home as a kind of haven and we have grown to like them very much and to be deeply grateful to them for their kindness and generosity. It will be a long time before I forget them, if ever.

1/6/42

It was later today before we were able to go out, but after a meal in town we adjourned to Greenwood Pk. We wrote letters at the canteen and commenced to walk towards town, taking the opposite direction to the bus. It was a lovely walk in the cool of the evening and after about half an hour we were picked up by a car and dropped in town, after having supper we went back to camp early, as since we have been here we have been existing on 6 hours or less sleep a night.

2/6/42

By arrangement with Macs we went there early today and after having tea with them we spent yet another happy evening chatting, singing and playing the piano, we 'borrowed' a large tin of jam from the cookhouse for Mrs Mackenzie. We were invited to come early the next day and have tea with them and we would all go to the pictures in Durban in the evening.

3/6/42

After buying chocolate for the girls we took the old familiar route and arrived at Macs about 3.30, Mrs Mackenzie looked as though she had been resting and rather than inflict ourselves on her too much we went to meet the girls out of school. (The Mackenzies are more important to us than Field Marshals of the British Army). We were able to leave camp at 11 this morning in order to see Field Marshal Smuts, who was inspecting troops in town, also 100 of our men, I was not unduly impressed. The pleasure of meeting two pleasant people and three grand little girls had made me overlook Smutty when writing this. Harris and I lay on the grass outside the girls' school waiting for them to come out. This was no school such as we think of them at home, but a pleasant building situated on the side of a hill and overlooking beautiful scenery. Palms and flowers surrounded it. I found myself wishing with all my heart that Ann might go to a school such as this and grow sunburned and extremely healthy looking as all the children round here seem to do. Instead of which she goes to a school in Evington Valley Rd. surrounded by factory chimneys instead of palm trees and overlooking houses and busy streets instead of a beautiful fertile valley and hills. But at the moment I more fervently wished that I were in Leicester meeting my baby out of school and feeling her small hand in mine and listening to her chattering. Godspeed, that happy day. My reverie was broken by the squeal of delight of Sheila as she saw us and we gave her a pickaback home and all had tea. We kissed the kids goodnight and set off to Durban and went to see 'Smiling Through'. Mrs Mackenzie had been looking forward to seeing this and enjoyed it tremendously. We saw them off at the station and retired 'home' ourselves.

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4/6/42

I sold my shoes today and while in town bought another pair costing £1, but valued at 29/- according to the very pleasant chap who served us. After doing us this favour he wanted us to come out and have tea with him, which we politely declined

as we had other plans. We had been paid before we came out and I had received £3, being credits and wages and we were all after painting Durban red that afternoon, with the help of our credits. After a cup of tea we booked for the playhouse to see '49<sup>th</sup> Parallel'. Had a grand high tea at the Jews club and experienced that perhaps childish novelty of having our shoes cleaned by a native boy. We always indulged in a 2d shoeshine whenever we went to the Jews club on subsequent occasions and always seemed to get a kick out of it. We enjoyed the bioscope very much, perhaps more due to the building than the picture. It was the most beautiful striking building of its type I have ever seen. Inside it was designed to represent the courtyard of an old castle with mullioned windows round the walls, lit up with old-fashioned lanterns for illumination, the ushers were dressed in knee breeches and ruffles, but most wonderful of all was the roof which looked exactly like the night sky. It was a great blue –black dome and all a-twinkle with the most realistic 'stars' giving one the impression of being in the open air. All the picture places here are very well ventilated and cool and the seats are roomy and comfortable. Another cinema I have been in had armchairs in it and the admission price included ices or drinks, which were brought round to patrons by a waitress.

5/6/42

Feeling the urge to see more of Durban, we took a bus to Mt. Vernon and after a long steep climb through a district similar to N. Durban we came to the crest of a range of hills and were able to look down on the town. We got out at the bus terminus and walked long a lane lined with bushes bearing peculiar berries and flowers, banana plants and creepers. There were a few houses here and in their gardens grew multi-coloured flowers, orange trees and plants of every description in glorious profusion. At the end of the lane we came to some grassland, which ended on the verge of a high cliff. Below us was a deep gorge, through which flowed a small river. Along the banks of this, winding and curving around the hills, ran one of the main railway lines out of Durban, leading to Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg and other places in the interior. We stood there and watched one of the long, electrically driven trains appear round a bend and pass along 200feet below us, to disappear round the next bend in the track. Retracing our steps along the lane, we were invited to have tea on the verandah of one of the charming little houses. We were asked to wander round the garden while tea was being prepared and help ourselves to oranges off the trees, this we did, revelling in the novelty of picking oranges as they grew and eating them. Behind the house grew some trees bearing paw-paws which are quite a common fruit here, we also saw the avocado pear and huge bunches of bananas which were still green. The avocado pear has a peculiar flavour and is eaten as a vegetable with pepper and salt. After tea we were wished Bon Voyage and we took the bus back to town. From here on to our rendezvous, to be welcomed by the three girls and fed royally. After the usual sing-song and pleasant evening made enjoyable by good company we were despatched with a parcel of Mrs Mackenzie's delicious cakes and pastries and a kind invitation to spend a day with them on Sunday.

6/6/42 I was on picket today and therefore confined to camp, but Harris and I managed to slip out in the evening for a few hours, when we proceeded to the Jews club and had a tasty supper of scrambled eggs, salad, fruit and ice-cream

and coffee. Returning early, we endeavoured to catch up a few hours, which we have lost in sleep lately.

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7/6/42

Attended service in camp this morning and played piano. After this we were able to leave for town about 11, where we caught the bus to Greenwood Park. After a game with the kids in the garden we sat down for dinner, which surpassed anything I have had since leaving home. Giving it time to settle comfortably in my stomach assisted by loosening of belts and relaxation, we were reluctant to exert ourselves, until the girls' impatience had it's [sic] desired affect on us. So we decided to visit the Monkey Park in Burman Drive. We all enjoyed ourselves here, the kids fed the monkeys with nuts and bananas and we fed the girls with ice cream and chocolate. The monkey's habitation consisted of many acres of closely packed trees and bushes and was situated about halfway between Durban and Greenwood Park on one of the heights, which commanded an impressive view of the country lying inland. As we were waiting for the bus to take us back a car stopped and offered us a lift. Instead of going direct however, he took us right and left of the main road showing to us some of the magnificent houses there. [even better than those on the bus route] Turning to the right towards the sea, we drove along a road for about a mile towards a place known as Umhlanga Rocks, from where we were able to look down and across to Durban. We arrived at Macs about 5 and had tea. We have been very fortunate in staying in S.A as long as this and we have a suspicion that this may be our last Sunday here and rather than go to chapel we have a good sing-song and other light entertainment. Sheila recited for us, she has a sweet little voice and her accent is very fascinating. We bid them goodnight and returned to camp.

8/6/42

Our company set off this morning on a short route march to Isipingo, a place about 6 miles away on the coast and to the south. On arriving here after about 2 hours march we had a bathe in a rock pool [the coast here is nearly all rocky], this was very refreshing after our hot and dusty march. After a cup of tea and some food, we started back, passing many wide-eyed 'piccaninnies ' on the way and native dwellings. Back in camp about 4.30 to hear of rumours of impending departure, so, tired as we are, Harris and I decide to go out. We enjoyed a good feed at the Jews club and after a stroll round, returned to camp to sleep the sleep of men of "the wide open spaces".

9/6/42

Thinking I may be detailed for the baggage party tomorrow and not wishing to run the risk of leaving without seeing the Macs once more, I set out for Greenwood Park on my own as Harris has been unfortunate enough to be caught for Guard. After dinner we were pleased to see Harris arrive. He had done a little bribing and wangling and so managed to leave camp. After another happy evening we agreed to come up tomorrow evening if all is well.

10/6/42

By dint of much wangling and dodging we managed to leave camp about 4 and after buying Mrs. Mac some chocolates and Hayden's Serenade for Daphne and Sheila, we take the familiar road for the last time. The dinner we had surpassed all previous ones and after a play and sing we reluctantly kissed the girls goodnight, they had been kept up for the occasion. Mr and Mrs Mackenzie saw us down to the station [ we took the train back] and as we sat in our carriage we shook hands and with genuine sorrow in our hearts , said Goodbye to two very good friends and Christians. I shall never forget their kindness and hospitality, beautiful home and their three little 13 daughters, Audrey, Daphne and Sheila. God bless them all. We brought away with us two large boxes of cakes, pastries and scones. I could tell how quiet Harris was during the evening that he too was sorry to be leaving.

11/6/42

Our Company is supposed to be C.B. today!?! Harris and I sneak out of camp by a back road which leads across about a mile of common land and then through some woods to the village of Montclair, from there it is only a short distance to the main road where we get a lift into town. We make a few last minute purchases and have a real good 'bust up' [we had been paid this morning]. I had three large iced milk shakes one after the other and after a last walk through the main street we make for the hole in the fence and so on to the station.[the hole in the fence dispenses with the necessity of paying.

12/6/42

We have packed up and move off from Clairwood Camp at 9a.m. After a struggle down to the station with all our kit we have to wait an hour for the train. It eventually comes and on our way to the dock we sing Farewell songs. There are several big liners at the dock and we boards the 'Ile de France', which is fairly new and I believe held the blue ribbon for the Atlantic. It has a displacement of about 43,000 tons [much bigger than the Empress, which was only about 25,000 tons] there are 7000 of us on board and the only room left for us is on the deck. Soon after we have embarked we begin to move off, as we passed through the narrow channel leading to the sea, it was possible to see along the length of the front, South Beach and Marine beach with the fine tall buildings of the town behind, gleaming white in the bright sunlight and behind that the hills covered in trees and dotted with little white houses. It is indeed something of a wrench to leave this wonderful place where we have had such a glorious holiday of nearly a month. Out at sea we could distinguish the water tower on the summit of the hill near Greenwood Park and several other spots, which we will remember by the happy times connected with them. Goodbye Durban, a million thanks for everything. We are nearly out of sight of land and when the sun is setting we are travelling east.

19/6/42 Friday

We have had an uneventful week. Our ship is on it's [sic] own [a magnificent target for Jap subs. Or dive bombers] and as a result has been making good speed leaving behind and average of 500 miles of Indian Ocean a day. We crossed the



line on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> morning and today we sighted land about 5p.m. On approaching closer we can make out a high flat table land with steep rocky sided dropping to the sea and a lower cliff extending from the mainland with a lighthouse on its summit. The whole looks extremely rugged and barren. I estimate it to be Cape Guardafini in Italian Somaliland. Soon afterwards we change course and head towards the setting sun, this bears out my theory and I assume now that we are sailing up the Gulf of Aden toward the Red Sea.

20/6/42

Passed a couple of merchant ships this morning. The heat is terrific, the worst we have experienced yet as I am writing this sweat is running down my arms and legs. Some of the fellows are in a worse plight than me, the perspiration is pouring down their foreheads and dripping of the ends of their noses. It is said that we have worse

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to come yet when we are passing through the Red Sea, which is hot at the best of times, but this is Midsummer. The ship is too large for me to have memorised it's [sic] miles of passages and corridors yet. There are several lifts and 1000's of steps connecting the 10 or 11 decks, it is quite spacious in parts and is beautifully decorated with some fine panelling, wrought ironwork and huge paintings of pastoral scenes and frescoes. In peacetime it must have been a luxurious ship to travel in, but some of the gilt has been taken off it now, unfortunately owing to the extra accommodation being allotted to troops. There are about a score of civilians on board including several children and babies, their lot would be a hard one if anything happened, 7000 of us to about 40 lifeboats, although I am sure most of us would willingly give them preference.

21/6/42

Played the piano for two services this morning, the sweat which trickled off me nearly put the piano out of action. We have got together a small choir and at the evening service put up quite a good show. As we are now near our destination and have travelled about 20,000 miles of ocean in safety, the service tonight took the form of a Thanksgiving service.

22/6/42

Wrote to Gwen and told her I was in the Red Sea. We passed several islands during yesterday and saw schools of porpoises. We are disembarking on Wednesday at Port Suez and are going from there somewhere by train. I would have liked to have gone through the canal, but perhaps I will some other time?

23/6/42

We are arriving at Port Suez tomorrow and as we sailed up the northernmost tip of the Red Sea we could see land on each side. If it had not been dark, we would

probably have been able to see Mt Sinai. The land consisted mostly of sand and sandstone hills and was very barren looking.

24/6/42

We dropped anchor this morning at about 9a.m. not far from the entrance to the canal and about midday we were taken off in small tugboats and lighters and deposited on a wharf alongside a railway line. After a cup of tea and a cake, we moved off. During our journey I witnessed what must have been the greatest contrast possible between any two countries in the world. We had left, only 12 days ago one of the most beautiful fertile countries on earth, and now we were travelling through a desert, an awful barren land which stretched as far as the eye could see, all sand, shale, gravel and small boulders, some quite flat and other parts hilly, but which looked more like slag heaps than anything. Tufts of brown dry grass grew at intervals, nothing living was in sight except a few vultures, which wheeled overhead, and I expect there were the usual ants, flies, lizards, etc. A scorching hot dry wind was blowing which stung our eyes and nostrils. At one point we passed some real sand such as one sees in desert love scenes, which was a light brown and was blowing and shifting into ridges and dunes. We stopped at one station in the middle of this God-forsaken wilderness. Here were a few huts, camels and goats. Another train was here waiting for us, as it was a single track; this train consisted of cattle trucks which were crowded with Arabs, who not content with being herded inside, were also sitting on the roof and hanging onto the sides, they were an ugly

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crowd and kept crying for cigarettes and 'baksheesh'. We moved off from here and our attention was taken up by some Arab vendors selling miscellaneous articles for exorbitant prices:-small wallets, bracelets, rings knives and eatables. I bought a bracelet for 1/6d. I expect it will look fairly discoloured by the time I get it home, but it is a souvenir. After about 2-3 hours we sighted trees and buildings in the distance lying in a valley, which we were told was Cairo. As we passed through the town, our route was lined with gardens, palms and native houses. The latter were the most amazing structures I have ever seen. They were built of nondescript material, which looked like grey stones and mud and were in a very bad state of repair. Most unusual of all were the roofs, it seemed as though the builders had grown fed up with them half way and had left the tops of the buildings as an untidy heap of rubble and stones. They resembled the back gardens of a slum district in England, even derelict huts built of wood and flattened petrol drums were up there. Dirty children played there and goats and chickens scratched in the mud. Later we saw that it was a characteristic feature of the city.[this untidy roof business]. Each one had several wireless poles, all at different angles and clothes lines situated thereon. Our train eventually drew into some sidings at a large camp and we made our way to our section about a mile away. After tea and a wash we were too tired to do anything else but stretch out and go to sleep.

25/6/42

After the usual Army 'messaging about', F.F.I.'s etc, the more adventurous of us including Harris and I went out [on occasions like this, most of the "good" soldiers wander about camp and spend the whole of their time asking each other if they are allowed out!] It was a tidy step to the main gate and here we caught a tramcar, which, after about half an hours journey, for a fare of 3 millemes [3/4d], brought us to the centre of Cairo. We found all the sights around us tremendously interesting and they are so numerous and complex, that it is difficult to do justice to them with pen and paper. I wish I had a camera, it would provide a far better means of description of the capital of Egypt. The buildings here were of a fairly modern type and were all a fawn colour, they were not exactly European type but had a distinct 'foreign' look about them. They reminded me of the structures created from a child's box of building bricks, having many curves, angles and ornamental pieces. The traffic keeps to the right here and we found that crossing the road was a hazardous business; vehicles seem to approach us from all directions at once.

The citizens were a motley crowd, mostly Egyptians wearing the traditional red fez, but with a good sprinkling of French, Spanish, English, Indian troops and Arabs dressed in their 'nightgowns' and turbans. The city is very densely populated and the streets are crowded with the above and also many veiled, black clad women and younger dusky beauties, dirty children roam everywhere and boot blacks, paper boys and street vendors abound selling all manner of things including lemonade, sunglasses, hosiery, haberdashery, cakes, sweets and curios. If they are asked how much an article is, they will say perhaps 10 piastres [2/1d], whereupon his customer will say it is too much, then they start bargaining, the buyer offering say 3pt. and the Arab saying 'No, what you gimme?' Eventually the sale is made for about 5 or 6 pt. and both are satisfied. Each section of a street has different smells and as we walked along we sampled some of them-; cakes cooking, hairdressing salons, incense, the heavy scent of the women, horses and many other aromas, some pleasant and some not, all mingling with the heat and dust of the streets. We sat on the edge of the pavement in one of the many cafes and had a coffee and watched the world go by. The Egyptians sat in these cafes and smoke the local pipe, a huge affair standing on the floor and the tobacco burning in the top, from where the smoke passes through some water in the base and then through a long flexible tube to the smoker. This description must suffice until I find out more of their intricacies.

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The tramcars are single deckers and draw two or three trailers' thus looking like small trains. Sections are reserved for first class passengers and 'dames'. Harris and I sat in a ladies compartment the first time, until our mistake was pointed out to us by the conductor, whereupon we beat a hasty retreat followed by the eyes of several veiled women.

26/6/42

We went to town again this evening and walked down a long street from the centre to the River Nile, this happened to be a narrow part here as there is a large island, which splits the river in two for a good way. We took a train back and had a meal in

the Services Club. After a further strolling round, taking in the "Wagh el Birket: [a street full of brothels and of course much frequented by the Army] we returned to camp. So was spent my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

27/6/42 Sat.

Today we decided to visit the pyramids, so leaving the camp about 3.30 we took the tram to town and a second one from there to the pyramids, which lie across the river about 6 miles off. We had to change trams about a mile away and here, we were approached by a dragman **DRAGOMAN???**, who offered us his services as guide. We accepted this as we had heard it was worth it in order to see all the sights properly. Arriving at the terminus of the tram tracks we were confronted with the three huge Pyramids in all their glory. After a short walk up a hill we came to the base of the largest of the three, that of the Pyramid of Cheops, which is 4,850 years old and 480 feet high and has a base line of 480 feet and covers an area of about 13 acres. We were told that it took 30 years to build by 100,000 slaves and consists of 2,500,000 blocks of stone, the average size of each being about 40 cubic feet and weighing about two and a half tons. The majority of the stone used for the pyramid is fossil ferrous limestone cut from the plateau on which it stands, and the hollow nearby, where the Sphinx stands, is the quarry from which the stone was obtained. Some finer quality limestone was brought across the Nile from 10 miles distant and was used in the outer covering, while the granite, which was used inside and also for the Temple of Amman Ra [the sun god] was brought from Aswan, 500 miles away. Some of these pieces of granite used in the Temple are huge, perhaps 20 feet long and 10 feet wide and thick and must weigh many tons, they are beautifully joined without cement and are polished flat and smooth and all the walls and pillars in the Temple and burial chambers are very well preserved. We examined the Sphinx and saw the 6 smaller pyramids and another burial ground also the place where the boat was buried alongside the Cheops Pyramid, which brought King Cheops' body up the Nile to be buried in the pyramid. After about 2 hours we paid off our guide and set off back to town. We must visit here again sometime as we have seen only a small part of it. I would like to go inside the pyramids and also climb to the top of them. We had a meal in town and returned to camp very happy at having seen so much of the places we have only heard of, before.

Addition- The method of building the temple and pyramids is rather interesting. In the case of the temple, the massive blocks of stone were erected by first laying the lowest layer, then filling the enclosure thus formed with sand, after this the second layer was laid and the height of the sand increased to that level, and so on until the roof was completed then all the sand dug out. With the pyramids a huge ramp was erected, increasing in height as the structure rose and the stones were rolled up it until the last one was in place, then the ramp was destroyed.

In the burial chamber near the Sphinx was a deep hole perhaps 30-40 feet deep and a narrower hole of the same depth alongside joining with the larger one at the  
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bottom. To lower the coffins [without ropes] the smaller hole was filled with sand, the coffin placed on the top and then the sand dug out from the base of the hole allowing the coffin to sink down to the bottom and so into the main hole.

28/6/42

There is a fine swimming pool in camp and this afternoon I sampled it. After tea Harris and I went down to the town to a Methodist chapel. When we arrived there, we found to our surprise that the minister was speaking in Afrikaans to a congregation of six. He apologised to us afterwards and as it was only 7p.m. we crossed the road to the Church of Scotland, which was full and enjoyed a good service.

29/6/42

We have started in workshops today. I did not go in as I went sick and stayed on for the rest of the day as tent picket.

5/7/42 Sun.

H. and I went to the pyramids again today taking another chap who had not been before. It was terribly hot and dry and dusty and the novelty of seeing them had worn off a little and was overshadowed by the climate conditions. We went inside Cheops Pyramid, but came out after climbing up a long dark passage, which sloped up into the interior, we were bent double and after a few minutes were wet through with perspiration, so decided to turn back. I have been getting on well with Arabic all week in the workshops and found several phrases very useful in the town, particularly to the ragged boys who clamber onto the trams selling lemonade etc. We are not able to leave camp during the week, but we occupy our time fairly pleasantly in the evenings visiting the swimming bath and St George's home and Naafi. Hence my writings will be curtailed a little during our stay here owing to lack of material.

12/7/42

Went to a service at the Methodist Church in camp this morning. After dinner we decided to visit Heliopolis, a town in the opposite direction to Cairo and apparently a kind of suburb, It was quite an attractive little town, much smarter and better class than the decrepit buildings in Cairo and a lot cleaner too. There was much greenery to be seen, many trees lined the roads and some of the houses in the residential parts had hedges at the bottom of their gardens where they joined the street, quite a change from some of the dry dusty quarters round here. We had our tea in the services club which overlooked the racecourse, a brilliant strip of grass. I had my photo taken for 5 piastres but it turned out to be terrible! The buildings here are very picturesque, they are a light brown or cream colour and are dazzling in the strong sunlight. They have a verandah on each floor and are very ornamental, being covered in carvings and decorative coloured borders. The Egyptians are an interesting race, the class distinction here is greater than in England and is more heavily emphasised by the clothes they wear. The upper classes wear European clothes and a red fez and travel first class on the trams and buses, while the lower classes wear the usual 'nightgown' and any old rags that they possess and a piece of rag wound round their head, or a linen or felt skull cap. Some of these latter types are a filthy crowd, one can see bugs crawling around in their rags and all of

them have flies seething around them on their lips and in their eyes and seem to be quite unaware of their presence. Some of them are crippled or blind and have limbs missing. They are a happy-go-lucky crowd and fairly simple-minded, always laughing or chattering, but

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always ready to twist anyone or pick a pocket. Most of them are barefooted. It is not unusual to see an Arab stretched out on the pavement, fast asleep; when they feel tired, they simply lie down on the spot and nobody seems to object to this procedure. I came back fairly early as I am on picket. It takes about 20 minutes on the tram from Heliopolis to Ablassia and costs 2 millesmes [about 1/2d]. I have written Airographs today to Eric, Sheila, Gwen and Sammy. I wish I could have some mail from home. I have only had one letter and one telegram so far. I get fits of depression occasionally and feel terribly homesick. I am always thinking about my two girls, I expect they are thinking of me, too. I hope the day is not far distant when I will be with them again. I often try to visualize exactly how I shall feel when I finally step inside 19 and see Gwen and my baby, what I shall say or do. God Speed that happy day. Closing down.

16/7/42

I attended a medical board this morning and was regraded to A2. I contrived to arrive back too late to go back to workshops in the afternoon, so accompanied by Arthur Wood, who was also lead-swinging, I went to Heliopolis and spent the afternoon swimming. It was terribly hot and on our way back to tea, the sun scorched us like a blazing fire.

19/7/42 Sun

Had an interesting walk around Cairo, visiting the Abdin Palace, home of King Farouk and wandering round some of the back streets watching the Arabs. We had a delicious supper at the Pole Nord, which cost us about 20 pt.

24/7/42

We rose at 3a.m. today, having previously packed and moved off in convoy ay 6a.m. and passing through Cairo and along the road by the Pyramids, which looked very majestic and impressive in the morning sun, we took the road through the desert to Alexandria about 180 Kms. distant. We made a halt at 9a.m. in the middle of nowhere with endless desert stretching as far as we could see in all directions. I was a driver's mate and during the morning I had a go at the wheel of our 8 ton wagon. I found the gears a bit awkward but managed to keep the thing on the narrow road for nearly an hour. After a halt for dinner, we pushed on again stopping twice more to pick up petrol and water. About 3p.m. we were near Alex and not far from the Mediterranean. We turned left here and came to a rough stony track, which we took for about 10 miles. After some of the usual Army delay, we turned off across the desert and came to our site in a few more minutes. It was nearly 6p.m. and after tea we spread our blankets and with the rising full moon for illumination, we turned in.

25/7/42

The site we have parked on is a stony stretch of wasteland and desert, inhabited by ants, flies lizards, snakes, bugs, grasshoppers and massive black beetles. A few hundred yards off there is a salt marsh, covering many square miles and in the distance, a few miles off is a range of hills, behind which I imagine lies the sea. I mean to find that out in the near future. Today we are very busy setting up camp, digging trenches and latrines, erecting tents etc. and preparing our workshops. The cookhouse has set up shop and we eat our sandy meals squatting down on the rocks

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blowing across the marshes which have a distinct odour of ozone.

26/7/42

Philip and I decided we would go for a bathe tonight as we had heard from some Arabs, that it is only about 5 miles. So with eager anticipation we looked forward to the evening and after tea we set off [about 6.30]. We found a track across the marshes and after about  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour, we came to the foot of the hills, we met an Arab here who let us have a ride on his donkey. I was slightly in front and as I rode up to the top of the hill and reached it's [sic] crest I saw with a thrill of pleasure the Med. stretched out in front of me, with the sun going down, a ball of red fire on the horizon. The sea was still some distance away and to reach it we had to cross a road and trudged through about a mile of soft white sand and rock. Coming at last to the shore where we realised our labours had not been in vain. The sea was lovely and warm and bathing conditions ideal. Hundreds of crabs scuttled over the sand, but they were very timid and ran into the sea on our approach. When we had finished our swim it was getting dark and we were faced with the difficulty of retracing our steps over the sand and marsh for 5 miles and finding camp in the darkness. We had noted several landmarks as we crossed the first line of hills without delay, but as we approached the marsh we were unable to find the narrow path and had to tramp ankle deep in the mud to the camp, which we found, surprisingly enough, right in front of us, so our navigation was not too bad. The bounds of the camp are marked by five palm trees to the west and a small oasis, consisting of a few palms and fig bushes about a mile to the east. In this oasis is a deep well, which boasts a petrol pump. A few Arabs live here, what for, I don't know. Apart from these few trees on our boundaries there is no other growth worth speaking of until one reaches the hills in the direction of the sea, where there are plantations of fig bushes, although parts of the desert, especially near the marshes, nourish a sort of heather which grows in clumps" camel scrub".

30/7/42

We made another expedition to the sea tonight, but as we started much later it was almost dark when we got there and on our return we had to rely almost entirely on the stars, as the moon hadn't risen, however we managed to strike the path across

the marsh without any deviation and were able to congratulate ourselves on our navigation again.

4/8/42

Tonight, I, and two others, decided we would go to the pictures at Amerea, an oasis and camp in the direction of Alex. and about 6 miles distant. On reaching the main road we were able to get a lift and arrived at the cinema at 8.45. We had a drink and saw the pictures, Mickey Rooney in 'Hold that kiss'. It was the usual Army style of place and there were only wooden forms to sit on, but it was a change as it was the first picture I had seen since I left Durban. We had a lift back in three stages and arrived in camp O.K. I have had about 6 very welcome letters from Gwen this week and one Airgraph from Mother, dated July 8<sup>th</sup>. I am looking forward to having some Air letters from Gwen, so that I may have some later news. About 30 men a day are going into Amerea for a shower, it was my turn yesterday and it was the most enjoyable bathe I have had for some time. Fortunately we will be able to have one about once a week. We are allowed 2 gallons of water a day so we are not short and arrangements have been made for a laundry now, so we will be spared the trouble of doing our own washing.

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20/8/42

Nothing has happened this last fortnight to break the monotony of life in the desert apart from one or two trips to the baths and pictures. I have also discovered a Y.M.C.A. not far from Amerea where a 'Social hour' is held each Sunday night, making a pleasant diversion from my weekday activities.

I have received another Airgraph from Mother a letter from Mrs. Mackenzie and today a telegram dated July 4<sup>th</sup> from Gwen. I shall be very happy when I have some Airletters from Gwen, as the last letter I had was May 31<sup>st</sup>. about 10 weeks old. Our officer's virile brains have conceived a high spot in our social activities, namely a monthly trip into Alexandria. I was fortunate enough to be on the first batch to go and at 1.30 yesterday we commenced our trip in two lorries. Arriving in Alex. about 3p.m. we parked in Mohamed Aly Square and dispersed to do the town. Albert and I found that the town was a great improvement on Cairo being much cleaner and brighter, in places reminded us of Durban, particularly on the sea front where the wide curve round the harbour backed by tall hotels and buildings was very reminiscent of Durban. There was a very fine shopping centre in the town and here I bought some silk stockings and cold cream and face powder to send home to Gwen. I am sure she will appreciate this, as I think it is almost unobtainable in England. After a stroll around the streets and shops we had a good tea at a typical Egyptian café. There appears to be a large French population here and some Spanish, indeed there seems to be a very cosmopolitan crowd here as in Cairo, but most of the big shops are French and have French assistants, who we found very fascinating. I should have mentioned the crossing of the marsh on our way here. We turned seawards at Amerea and after a short descent, came to the marsh which gleamed a brilliant white in the sun. It was about a mile wide here and the tarmac road went in a straight line across it, rising over the sand hills the opposite side from where we could see the sea. We started back at 8.30, most of



them were very much the worse for wear, some having to be lifted onto the lorries, but after a somewhat noisy trip we arrived back in camp very pleased to have had the opportunity of seeing another Egyptian city.

27/8/42

Much ado was caused and great was the excitement in camp tonight, when the officer's mess tent was burnt to the ground. It went up in a huge sheet of flame and we all rushed to the scene, trying to hide our grins in vain as we heard the bursting of whisky and gin bottles and saw all their easy chairs, tables and wireless set etc. blazing merrily. It very quickly died down and we were shooed away by our forlorn officers, to speculate amongst ourselves as to whether it was accidental or otherwise. It has been lovely in the evenings this week, the moon has been full and it has been possible to read by it's [sic] light. It gets dark fairly quickly and recently I have acquired the habit of going about a mile from the camp to a small hill on the edge of the marsh and as the sun drops rapidly over the hills in the distance, a huge ball of red fire. I sit and soliloquise and ponder on the wickedness of the world, ["What fools these mortals be"] or read my Bible, which I had given me on the ' Ile de France'. It is very peaceful and cool and still, with no sound to break the serenity of the night as the moon rises and millions of stars spring into light in the huge purple –black dome above me. In the vastness and quiet of the desert at night, it brings home forcibly the smallness of man as he fights and squabbles below the stars, for what? One day I suppose we will come to our senses and live like civilised human beings. We are told we are fighting for a noble cause, but I fail to see anything noble in dedicating several years of ones life to assist in the slaughter of our fellow men.

21

Another item I feel I must mention here is our treatment of the Arabs who wander over the desert and those of the towns, too. I have seen and heard of many cases where they are inhumanely treated by us. This coupled with what we saw of the life of the natives of S.Africa has given me much cause for shame and anger that my countrymen should behave like beasts. We practically invade Egypt with our army and pitch our camp in the desert and then prohibit the Arabs, who have used these tracks across their land for centuries, from passing through. After this and our general ill-treatment of them, we wonder why they hate us and spit and throw stones at us. Ill-mannered of them it is true, but then they are an ignorant people and as we have not taken it upon ourselves to educate them, they know no better. Up till a short time ago the natives of Durban were not allowed to walk on the pavements, but had to keep in the gutters, where they were presumed to belong, by white people. If any black children playing in a park or sitting on a public seat saw any white children coming, they had to move quickly. There are not many public seats in S.A., but special ones for the Europeans and others for non Europeans. I have seen an M.P. here chase an Arab vendor, selling chocolates, sweets etc. from a basket, and tip up all his wares, distribute them to the laughing audience and after the poor Arab had been hit in the face, he would run for it. I have seen them at Alassia after they have been caught stealing some article from Ordnance, stripped and beaten on the soles of their feet. Many too are the stories told of the Palestine riots, some years ago when the Arabs were shot and tortured

for the pleasure derived from it. An N.C.O. here says he has seen a Mills bomb dropped down the pantaloons worn by the natives and then the wretched fellow was told to run, which he did, until there was nothing left of him to run. So much for this Christian England of ours, this civilized democracy. After inflicting ourselves on the native population of all our far flung Dominions, S.Africa, the Red Indians of Canada, the Aborigines of Australia, the people of India etc. The least we could do is to treat them in a civilized, Christian manner, instead of which we regard them as the scum of the earth, after, too, we have exploited their countries and the valuable materials they hold, for our own personal gain and profit and capitalistic greed.

28/9/42

We had a very bad sandstorm this morning, which blotted out the sun and at times visibility was only about 10-15 yards. It was apparently caused by the strong south wind, which was contrary to the usual north wind, which blows from the direction of the sea, almost continuously and across the marsh and consequently does not carry very much sand with it. By midday however, the wind had swung round to its normal direction and resulted in a fairly pleasant afternoon, but late in the evening the sky turned a peculiar colour and the setting sun could not be seen. What had presumably happened was all this morning's blown up sand had been carried out to sea and was now returning, high up, carrying with it small particles of moisture, which was forming a kind of fog or mist. This theory was apparently correct as when we awoke the next morning we discovered there had been an exceptionally heavy dew during the night. At teatime today an aerial dogfight seemed to be taking place overhead although the planes were too high up for us to see, but the trepidation in camp was great when 3 loud whistles sounded overhead, we all dropped flat, but, much to our relief, they weren't bombs but only shell caps which hit the sand close to us. A leave rota has been started and I believe Harris and I are going on Saturday, we are allowed 2 days travelling and 4 days stay. We will probably go to Cairo. So it seems I shall have to wait patiently for the opportunity to go to Palestine. I shall be very disappointed if I return home before visiting the Holy Land, but of course, going home is of paramount importance and would compensate adequately , any other loss.

## WAR JOURNAL - DAVID WARREN - APRIL 1942-DECEMBER 1943

3/10/42

Today I was among the fortunate few to have the privilege to go on five days leave. After handing in our bedding in etc into the stores we were paid our credits and a 15/- ration allowance which together with my ordinary fortnightly pay which I had received yesterday, gave me a total of a little over 600 piastres (£6). At 11 am in a thunderstorm, (the first rains since we came to Egypt) we left camp in a lorry for Amerea station. After refreshing ourselves at the NAAFI, (no soldier who has been in the desert ever passes a NAAFI) we boarded the train and after a long wait we

moved off at 2 pm on the 100 odd miles journey to Cairo. We very soon crossed over Lake Maryat which lies south of Alexandria. Our march is actually a sort of continuation of this lake. In the distance, on the horizon of the lake we could see the buildings of Alex. After we had come to the other side of the water we began to enter country which gradually began to grow more fertile, and we realised we were entering the Nile Delta which is one of the most important agricultural lands in this part of the world. Throughout our journey through Lower Egypt to the capital the terrain was quite flat and was very similar to the Fen district of England and the green crops were a most welcome vista after our 3 month sojourn in the desert. On each side of the line as far as the eye could see were all kinds of vegetation, principally consisting of cotton, which has made Egypt almost as famous as the Pyramids have done. The cotton harvest had apparently reached its peak, as the fields were dotted with black clad women and children and natives (known as the "fellaheen") in their usual garb of "nightgowns" and the corresponding headgear, who were all (fairly) busily engaged in plucking the pods of cotton. On several occasions the railway line ran alongside canals for several miles and we were able to see how the land was irrigated. At intervals of about 200 yards was a primitive pumping arrangement consisting of two roughly built wooden wheels which were meshed together and revolved at right angles to each other, the motive power was supplied by a cow or water bison, the unfortunate animal was blindfolded and a long pole tied to his neck and as it plodded round and round taking one end of the pole, the other end of which was attached to the axle of the massive wheel, so the wheel ponderously turned, driving the other wheel, which entered a pit alongside the canal and below its water level thus lifting up the water into small channels which ran across the fields dissecting them into small squares. A less common form of pump was on the Archimedes principle and was constructed of wood in the form of a tube about 4 feet or so diameter inside which ran a spiral. One end of the tube was in the canal while the other end projected over the other side of the bank, as this was turned by handle, the water entered the spiral and climbed up it to pour out the other end into the irrigating channels. The motive power in this case were 2 "w..." who squatted each side of the handle. Apart from cotton there was maize, gypsum and sugar cane. We passed many native villages which consisted of unbelievably untidy mud houses which were just piled together anyhow, most of them seemed derelict but this did not seem to detract from their utility in the eyes of their owners. Once again, as on our first train journey in this country, we were amazed at the strange condition of the roofs of these native houses, their apparently unfinished appearance and general untidiness, they were piled with rubbish, old tins, and lumber of all kinds, while chickens, pigeons, goats and many other forms of livestock not so apparent rooted there. The train stopped at two or three medium sized towns and here hundreds of dirty children of all ages turned out to meet us, screaming for baksheesh, and running up and down the line and underneath the coaches. One town was built near a river which was probably one of the many Nile outlets, we crossed it by a fine steel bridge which as most of the bridges here are constructed, had a revolving centre section on one of the piles which would permit the passage of native sailing boats called "faloukas". I saw many of these on my leave, they are used extensively for transport on the rivers and carry huge loads of cotton, hay, timber, water jars and other commodities, these are stacked high on the decks and in the case of the water jars overflow past the bulwarks and are supported by nets which extend into the water, so that all one can see of the boat is a gigantic pile of jars rising up from the water to a height of

10 – 20 feet out of the middle of which projects a towering mast which carries the big triangular sail. The name of this town was Kafr-el-Zayat. Four other were Kafr-el-Dawar, Damanhur, Ityai-el-Barud and Tantu. Finally this interesting journey came to an end as we approached Cairo at 6.30 pm. Here we handed in our rifles and rather than wait in a long queue for accommodation particulars, Harris and I decided to try to find a place ourselves, and we were fortunate in finding a room at a hostel not far from the station. Here we tasted the delights of real beds with spring mattresses and white sheets and had our evening meal at tables with white cloths on and all the rest of luxuries of civilisation which we had almost forgotten existed.

4/10/42

After a cup of tea in bed and a shower bath we had breakfast and decided to first visit the Citadel and the Alabaster Mosque of Mohamed Aly. The Citadel is one of the most prominent buildings in Cairo and it stands on a commanding position on the hills to the east of the city, from here we had a glorious view all over Cairo as far as the Pyramids which stood out on the skyline in the distance some 12 or 13 miles away. We came here in a taxi with 3 others whom we inveigled to come in order to make the price of the trip cheaper, as we had engaged a dragoman too. After climbing up to the main gate a huge stone affair, we were stopped by a very polite Egyptian policeman who asked if we had any cameras and after continuing a little further we drew up outside the entrance to the Alabaster Mosque, a magnificent building having a huge dome surmounted by two slim graceful minarets which I should think were nearly 200 feet tall. After donning slippers we were ushered into a courtyard having a fountain in the centre where the worshippers wash their feet, from here we entered the holy precincts of the mosque itself, and were awestruck by the magnificent spectacle which it presented. It was roughly square in shape and had four massive pillars supporting the dome which reminded me very much of St Paul's, it had a small gallery running around it too. The whole floor was covered in red carpet and as there were no seats or furniture of any sort it had a very spacious appearance. Illumination was provided by several metal rings one inside the other, suspended by chains from the dome which supported at intervals the electric globes of which there must have been many hundreds altogether. In the centre hung a massive chandelier supported by a single chain which extended up into the gloomy vastness of the centre of the dome, this we were told was presented by King Louis of France. There were many Arabic inscriptions on the walls in gilt, which I believe were extracts from the Koran. A pulpit which was given by King Farouk was pointed out to us by our guide and also a convexity in the wall facing Mecca where the priests prayed to Allah. Leaving the Mosque we went to an old palace of Mohammed Aly from where we were able to see over Cairo. We left the Citadel and went to the Blue Mosque a much older one which was built in 1324 and its walls were lined with blue patterned tiles which were brought from Persia. The Citadel was begun in 1176 by Sultan Salah el Din whom Richard I defeated in Palestine in 1191 and the Alabaster Mosque built inside the Citadel in 1824-1867 with the Alabaster obtained from the outer covering of the Pyramids of Giza. Leaving the Blue Mosque behind we had an interesting excursion through the native bazaars not far distant, the streets here were not much wider than the taxi and the driver was blowing his horn continuously to clear a path through the hundreds of natives, men women and children who thronged the streets, not to mention a herd of goats and sheep and a camel laden with a heavy

burden. We left the taxi and our guide took us to a little shop up a side alley here were displayed glorious silks for which Egypt is so famous including a magnificent silk embroidered dressing-gown, black inside and scarlet outside to be worn either way, and many others. The owner of the shop, Mahmoud Abou Hozieba by name, invited us to take coffee with him while he displayed his wares, and the strong, black Egyptian 'ahawa" was brought in to us in tiny cups, about the size of an eggcup. He explained how the silver wrought bracelets were made, pointing out the various insignias with which they were engraved, such as the sacred lotus flower, the Pyramids and Sphinx and other curious hieroglyphics of the East. Also he showed us the Egyptian handbags. I would have liked to have bought some of these lovely things to sent home to Gwen, but knew that food parcels would be more useful so restraining my desires I saved my money. We took our leave of him with many salaams and thanks and wended our way through the motley throngs passing many stalls containing spices, silks, curios, foodstuffs and many more. Each step brought a different odour to us, first coffee, then incense, a dozen different spices, the peculiar scent of the Egyptian women a hairdressing saloon, (there is one of these every few yards in Cairo) the smell of goats sheep and camels and so on. Our afternoon was taken up by strolling around the "Shariahs" and resting intermittently as it was rather warm, after our camp in the desert not very far from the sea. Harris and I looked at the Empire Services Club for a trip up the Nile to the Delta Barrage on Wednesday. Wishing to keep the Sabbath like good boys we made our way to St Andrews Church of Scotland not far from our digs. On our way there we dropped into a "low dive" café for a cup of tea which was run by a very elderly Polish woman, after weighing us up carefully for some time she finally asked 'if we wanted anything'. To her disappointment we politely declined this offer and beat a hasty retreat for the Church. We were surprised to find this packed and the congregation overflowing out into the gardens surrounding the building listening to the service through loudspeakers. We were able to find two seats inside however, and enjoyed the service, the organ and the singing all of which almost made us think we were at home. Strangely enough the padre who conducted the service had until recently been stationed in Amerea and I had spoken to him several times when at the Social Hour at the Y.M.C.A. on Sunday evenings. The night was still young when we left so wishing to take full advantage of our short leave we went to the pictures and saw "Adam had four sons" and "The Face behind the Mask". So ended the evening of the First Day.

5/10/42

We thought it a good idea to see if the Pyramids were still there, but after a very long wait for a tram, we gave it up, as several had passed us overflowing in the usual Egyptian manner, with dozens clinging to the sides, riding on the buffers and the running boards, I often wondered why they didn't ride on the roof of these Cairo trams. We wandered through the shopping centre and I bought Ann some socks. Our luck was out today apparently, for after making our way to the Museum of Hygiene we discovered this was closed today because it was some Mohammedan festival day or something. After relaxing on our lily white, soft beds in the afternoon, we went up to the district of the native bazaars again, and walked round a few streets and alleys we shouldn't have done. An Egyptian cafe attracted us and as we sat having "shay", we watched the "East" go by, camels, Arabs, herds of goats, and so on ad lib. while over the wireless came the weird Mohammedan call the prayer, (that's what Harris said it was) making the whole street ring with its eerie

note. Leaving here, although it was dusk we walked slowly through the streets round the silhouette of the Citadel which reared above us. Passing many little shops and stalls, each one with some particular point of interest we came to one place which gave us an unusual spectacle, that of macaroni being made. The process consisted of pouring the "batter" (for want of a better or correct name) from a tube pierced with small holes, through which it ran on to a circular metal plate about 5 feet dia., which was heated by a coke fire underneath. The result was that the thick streams of batter immediately set in long strings which were then stacked in the window for sale. A little further along the road we came upon a pastry shop displaying the most delicious cakes which proved too much of a temptation for us, so we went in and ate half a dozen and washed down with some Egyptian style tea, with lemon and no milk. Harris and I had arranged to go to some Egyptian pictures as we had heard good reports of their unusual characteristics, so after cleaning up at our "digs" we repaired to the "Studio El-Mizra" and there we saw the local "heart-throb", (a greasy looking individual with a sickly grin and the usual fez and tarboush). It was all Arabic of course and we were only able to pick up an occasional word or two, but we followed the story alright and after a time I discovered the weird native music to have a peculiar fascination, it didn't conform to the orthodox European style of music and went up and down the scales in a queer rhythm and with many waves, but it had a spellbinding effect on me, much the same as African war drums would be expected to have. The songs were accompanied by some wind and stringed instruments which were difficult to recognise, although the violin and I think, oboe, played a principal part. The methods of wooing and love making were rather slower and more serious than ours and consisted of singing lots of love-songs and making reserved caresses. However we finally saw the young couple in bed together, so we concluded everything in the garden (or bed) was lovely. It was 12.30 when heralded with much clashing of cymbals the Wog National Air was played, to which we stood respectfully to attention, the only "Askari Englezi" there, I think.

6/10/42

Most of this morning was spent in shopping, which resulted in my sending 2 food parcels home and one parcel for Ann. After dinner Harris wanted a bath, but when he entered the bathroom he found that it was being used by one of the native servants who was saying his prayers, salaaming low on the floor under the washbasin, so he deemed it prudent to leave him to it. In the afternoon we visited the Museum of Hygiene and viewed all sorts of exhibits sufficient to turn us off all our food for days. Some of them are not fit to mention here, but there are many models of all the various parts of the human body, male and female, showing the effect of every kind of disease, such as cancer, leprosy, syphilis, consumption. Elephantitis, cholera, sleeping sickness, malaria, typhus and so on, growing worse and worse. Childbirth was shown in detail, even to the inside of a mother's womb and an actual human embryo preserved in methylated spirits. All very interesting, but some a little nauseating. We came outside after about an hour and after filling our lungs with clean air, took a car home. At the terminus near the station we were confronted by a common sight, that of the operator of the points, having a heated argument with the tram driver. Several times we had seen this happen and it always appeared that the operator wanted to send the car one way and the driver to go the other, consequently they both grew voluble and very excited, at times almost coming to blows, but after they had decided which way the car was to go,

parted the best of friends, both smiling at the rumpus they had caused. After a substantial dinner we set off in search of evening entertainment. Passing an Egyptian picture house, the posters attracted our attention and after enquiries discovered that the picture was Ali Baba and the 40 thieves, so unable to resist the temptation we booked for the 2<sup>nd</sup> house of this at 9.30p.m. Having a couple of hours to spare we went to the Empire Theatre where Maskelyne was performing, but to our disappointment the show didn't start till 8.30 thus clashing with Ali Baba, so refreshing ourselves we strolled back to our digs to make ourselves look presentable. The picture was smashing and we were able to follow it fairly easily. It was about 12.45 when we finally rolled into our snowy sheets again.

7/10/42

After sending another food parcel to Gwen, H and I joined several others outside the Empire services club to start off on our Nile trip. A taxi took us down to the river where we boarded a rather dilapidated river boat and after a short wait we pushed off with a claxon horn blowing furiously for no reason at all and several excited 'W...' arguing loudly about the method of leaving the bank and turning the boat around. We sailed serenely downstream for about 2 hours passing on the way through country which was a replica of that we saw from the train. Outside Cairo we saw at close quarters one of the several fine bridges which span the river here and observed how one of the arches was swung round on it's [sic] supporting pillar, thus permitting the Faloukas to ply to and fro. I realised more than ever on this trip how much Egypt and the people rely on the Nile for everything, even their existence. Without this wonderful river the land of Egypt would be total desert. Egypt is the Nile and the Nile is Egypt. The inevitable beer made it's [sic] appearance after a short time and too the more inevitable boot black commenced to pester us, till eventually all our boots and shoes were a lustrous hue. Now familiar and typical scenes unfolded themselves before us, women washing their clothes on the bank, naked children swimming, stately date palms rearing up from the flat fields and silhouetting against the deep blue sky an occasional mud village and a few beautiful modern houses built on semi-continental lines which we were told belonged to farmers, for the farmer of Egypt is usually a wealthy person. About midday, we saw the Delta barrage in front of us, a long low structure stretching from bank to bank, we embarked on a green slope on which grew tress, bushes and flowers in profusion. Immediately we were approached by a group of Arabs, as usual, trying to sell us something and leading a few mangy donkeys which they tried to persuade us to ride to the Museum of models of water works, for where we were bound, although it was only 10 minutes walk. They followed us all the way there, riding their steeds, and reducing the price of the ride from the original 2P.T. in stages down to 1 1/2, 1P.T. and finally 1/2 P.T. When we arrived at the Museum, where they left us in disgust. The museum was quite interesting in it's [sic] way, holding as it did various models of dams, irrigation systems, weirs etc. which existed up and down the Nile. A very clever Arabic conjuror or Magician entertained us on the lawn outside, he did several tricks for us, including one where he opened his mouth, whereupon three young chickens popped out and started pecking on the grass. After which the chicks mysteriously found their way inside a soldiers shirt, along with a snake about 2 feet long which was promptly withdrawn. After a further look round at the locks and the barrage, we boarded the boat at 1.30 and commenced our return trip. This was somewhat slower than our trip out, partly as we were heading against the strong current and partly because the excursion was

not scheduled to finish until 5p.m which caused our guide to pick an erratic course from one bank to the other. This enabled us however, to enjoy the close proximity of the luxurious grasses and vegetation, behind which stretched the cotton fields and other crops. It was apparently time for afternoon prayers as we could see many of the agricultural workers standing facing the sun or kneeling down with their heads on the ground. If we professing Christians were half as devout as the average Mohammedan we would be a vastly better race. A large two masted Falouka had a race with us part of the way, and owing to it's [sic] vast sail area and a following breeze, was able to overtake us and pass us quite easily, much to our chagrin.

Soon we could see on the horizon in front, the outlines of the buildings of Cairo, dominated by the spires and domes of the Citadel and the Mohammed Aly Mosque, while to our right, was the unique outline of the Pyramids of Giza. During the next hour before we arrived back, we had an interesting chat with our Dragoman guide. He had been employed by Cooks for some years before the War, and had accompanied many auspicious visitors to Egypt on various trips. Most interesting though was his narrative on his private life. It appeared he had 3 wives. The Mohammedans may have as many as they wish, providing they are able to support them all. They marry very young [the girls at least] and when the seeking male finds a suitable girl, he first has to approach the girls father and start negotiations. If everything turns out according to plan, the husband presents the father with a sum of money or several goats or sheep. After the marriage the bride is provided with many presents, such as furniture, clothes etc. so in effect the husband receives back what he has given and perhaps more from his wife's family. Each wife must have a separate house and all must be treated equally. One may be kept just for ornament, while the others perform the functions of propagation. Should the husband die the responsibility of all the household falls on the shoulders of the eldest son. But most important of all, all the wives must be looked after and well cared for. It is a great sin in their eyes for a man to neglect his wives [or to steal another man's wife] which they call Adultery [strangely] . If one of the wives has been unfaithful I believe the husband is entitled to kill her, or at least throw her out. Naturally, the boys wanted to go deeper into the matter and we gathered that the more intimate relations were shared by the wives for a week at a time. A very complicated business altogether.

We landed further away from Cairo, than when we had embarked and as we were fairly close, Harris and I decided we would visit the Zoological Gardens, which are situated about halfway between Cairo and the Pyramids. We were gals we included this in our leave as we saw many animals we had not seen before, including Zebras, Emu, Ostrich, Armadillo, Giant Tortoises and many others. .Returning to Cairo we fed royally at the Pole Nord. After walking to our digs, we were so tired, we decided to have a rest before seeking our last evening's entertainment. Against our wishes we dropped into sound slumber and did not wake until 8.30 p.m. We rushed out after a brief clean-up, and once again visited a native picture house, which had an irresistible fascination for us by now. And so to bed at 1a.m.



8/10/42

Rising at 4.30 a.m. this morning we had breakfast and made our way to the station to catch the 6.30 train. We drew our rifles and soon the train left. Arrived back at Amerea at 11.30 and slowly made our way on the lorry back to camp.

11/10/42

This afternoon [Sunday] H and I and another fellow hitch-hiked to Berg-el-Arab, about 7 miles off.

Here we made our way to the coast road and walking from here over the sand hills for about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile we came to the Mediterranean. It was the most glorious deep blue imaginable and the blue sky, fleecy white clouds and dazzling white strip of coastline, which was quite deserted and devoid of any habitation, made a colourful picture. We had a grand bathe and after spending about an hour here we made our way back in 2 stages. We went on past our camp toward the Naafi near Amerea and had a meal here. Arrived back in camp at 8p.m.

13/10/42

I was peacefully working on a lorry about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from camp, when the serenity of the morning was shattered by the loud blowing of horns and several lorries careering about the 'park' full of the lads. One came up to fetch us, the driver told us to get on. So, mystified, we did. We raced all round the camp in a mile wide circle, about 12 lorries of us. Some said the war was over, but we knew this was too good to be true. We finally all rolled up at the cookhouse and the Colonel stuck his head out the roof of his car and made us his farewell speech.

[I guessed this was what it was.] He was leaving us for Malta. We were sorry to see him go as he had been a decent old stick. So after 3 cheers we returned to our work.

18/10/42

I saw Brackenbury today, who had just returned from leave in Cairo, where he had met Colin Bellam. The news he gave me came as a great shock. Trevor Anderson had been killed in action. It brought home to me, for perhaps the first time, how easily we, at times, forget we were so close to death. Trevor, the carefree happy-go-lucky fellow of about 22, who, along with Colin had been such good friends of mine on our voyage.

It seemed difficult to realise at first that he didn't exist any more. After I had pondered on it for a while and then inevitably cursed this bloody war with all my heart, I wrote, as best I could to Colin, who, I understood had been wounded.

22/10/42

The Colonel addressed us this lunchtime and gave us General Montgomery's message to the Eighth Army. The big push, for which we have been waiting so long, is to commence tonight at 10p.m. This is the first time in history, I think, that a

commander has told his troops the hour of the attack. Although it did not affect us very much in our position, we did, nevertheless feel some sense of excitement and expectancy. But the night passed without any incident to mar the sleep of the camp.

9/11/42

The battle, as all the world now knows, has gone well for us. I hear that the church bells are to be rung in England in celebration of our victories[a little prematurely I think] The Americans have landed many troops in West and North Africa and it seems at last the tide may be turning in our favour. The Air Force have done splendid work, for the last fortnight we have watched formations of bombers accompanied by fighters cross over our camp about every half hour throughout each day. Most of the other camps round here have moved up, but we are told that we have to stay and clear up. I don't mind. We are quite content here. I have just sent Gwen a food parcel.

16/11/42

At 8a.m. we said goodbye to our old site. We had packed up the previous day and were formed up, widely dispersed, and ready to move off. Our journey was interesting, only, I think, in as much as we were travelling along one of the busiest, longest and most important roads in the world, the coast road of N. Africa. The scenery was not attractive enough to make it exactly of interest, except occasionally for instance when the road ran over the crest of a range of hills, and we were able to see the Med. To our right and the vast wastes of the desert stretching away into the distance on the left. We enjoyed this view for some time during this morning and at about 3p.m. after having done about 100 miles we parked for the night at Daba. I was travelling as drivers mate in a Dodge recovery truck and I spent an hour or two at the wheel. After passing through El Alamein we witnessed many signs of German and Italian occupation, crashed planes, burnt out lorries and an occasional cemetery marked by small white crosses, some surmounted by a black Maltese cross or a German helmet. We were very hungry most of the journey. Yesterday we had drawn the inevitable bully and biscuits, and this was our only means of sustenance for 2 and a half days apart from the tea our cookhouse made for breakfast, or what we had made ourselves by the roadside in an old tin over a fire made by pouring petrol into a tin of sand.

17/11/42

We left Daba at 8 a.m. and continued our journey which was very similar to yesterday's as regards scenery. I recall that we had one splendid view after climbing for some 500 feet. When we looked back there was a lovely bay and the road stretching quite straight across a valley, while to the South lay the desert which was quite flat here and formed an sweeping horizon which must have been 30-40 miles distant. Again we passed many wrecked planes and M.T. About 1 p.m. we came to Mersa Matruk [Marsa Matrouh] and after driving for about 10 miles, turning slightly inland, we struck off across the desert and finally came to the site chosen for our camp. I was not very impressed with it. It was stony ground dotted with scrub and quite flat in all directions without even a bump to break the

monotony except one slight dip in the north through which a small tantalizing patch of sea could be seen, much too far to walk, perhaps 10 miles, but close enough to see.

20/11/42

After a stay of only 3 days we heard we had to move off again and tonight we cleared camp and formed up to move off tomorrow.

21/11/42

We set off this morning at 7.30 on the road to Sidi Barrani which was 77 miles distant. Most of the journey was through dead flat desert with only an occasional glimpse of the sea. The road was dense with traffic and it was impossible to believe that so many lorries existed. On the many stretches of straight road could be seen the never-ending procession of vehicles dwindling into the distance. A few shattered stone buildings marked Sidi Barrani and after carrying on for about another 20 miles we camped for the night.

22/11/42

This stage of our journey proved more interesting. We were fairly high up and were able to see for a tremendous distance all around us. Particularly striking and impressive was a huge flat topped plateau which stood some 1000 feet above the rest of the country which was fairly flat and which stretched away to the south until it dwindled into the purple distance probably 50 or more miles away. I thought at first it was the sea on the previous day as it was so level and couldn't understand why it lay to the south when we were travelling roughly west. The road turned toward the sea and soon a large bay came into sight, backed by the hills rising up the plateau. There at the foot of the hills lay Sollam [Sollum] , marking the border between Egypt and Libya. We passed a road branching off to the left which led through the hills to Halfaya Pass. I thought we were to have gone through here, but after going for a few more miles along the road fringing the bay, I saw the alternative route we were to take. Up above us was a massive headland rising up from the sea and up this zig-zagged our road. As lorries were only allowed through a few at a time, we had to wait for some time and we watched our vehicles among others crawling up the side of the mountain. Our turn came eventually and although we were towing a broken down car, we made it alright with a gear to spare. The gradient averaged 1-in-6-8 about, but the several hairpin bends were a bit tricky to negotiate and at times the edge of the road dropped sheer away down to the town below. The view was magnificent, we could see far out to sea and also back the way we had come for a long way. After passing 2 or 3 lorries, wrecked or stuck we reached the top at last and passed some barracks on the summit, which had had a lot of holes blown in them. A few miles further on we passed through Ridotta Capuzzo, which was marked by piles of stones which had presumably been buildings at one time. Here too were many graves marked by little white crosses, steel helmets or German crosses. How foolish it seems for so many men to have to die for a country like this which has practically nothing to offer that is useful to humanity, no crops can grow, no water [or very little] and apparently no minerals have been discovered, just hundreds of miles of wilderness, some covered in

stones, some dotted with scrub and some just plain sand. Passing through Bardia we had to make a detour to avoid a bridge which had been destroyed by the enemy. From here on the road grew increasingly worse and our speed slowed to around 10 mph. in order to avoid the potholes and ruts and bomb damage. We stopped at sunset about 30 miles from Tobruk.

23/11/42

During our approach to the now world famous port of Tobruk we passed many reminders of the fierce battles that had been fought there, dozens of wrecked planes, lorries, guns, tanks, bomb craters and of course the inevitable cemeteries. Cresting a hill I saw in front of the harbour, full of sunken ships and the town, was quite a fair size for this part of the world, but small comparatively by European standards. The road wound down rather steeply here and just in front of us, one of our lorries missed the road and toppled over the embankment onto it's [sic] side. Fortunately, no-one was hurt and a breakdown was sent for it later on. Just after Midday we reached our destination about 10 miles past Tobruk, approximately 220 miles from Mersa Matruk and perhaps 400 from Amerea. According to instructions we started to dig in case Jerry came over although he was more than 200 miles away. Our task was a hard one [literally] as after a foot of sand we came to solid rock which we hewed out laboriously bit by bit. We were rewarded for our efforts by the first decent meal we had had for a week, in the evening.

2/12/42

We have settled down fairly comfortably to the dreary routine broken here by trips to the sea about once a week. I went yesterday and had a good bathe and afterwards some of us fired a few rounds along the beach at pieces of wood and bottles. We have a homely sort of 'bivvy' complete with electric light run from the Dodge. It got a bit damp during the recent rain, but this only comes under the heading of minor discomforts.

10/12/42

The ferocity and speed of the 'big push' has abated somewhat. Our efforts in the workshops seem to have abated too. From what I can gather, at least, production does not seem to have reached the high peak it did in Amerea. I can only attribute this to a general feeling of 'browned-offedness' in the unit together with a certain amount of stagnation. It has been a constant source of amazement to me that the troops out here put as much effort in as they do. We have been literally dragged from our homes, wives, mothers, sweethearts etc., forced into the Army and, to add fuel to the flames, have been brought across thousands of miles of oceans, to a God forsaken country consisting of 99% of arid desert, some of it even uncharted, and then expected to assist in the destruction of another Army. Made up of men we have never seen personally, and who have most probably been unwillingly forced into it, as we were. How can any intelligent and right thinking man be expected to take a keen interest in such seeming madness.

"When wilt thou save the people O God of Mercy, when? The people Lord, the people, not thrones and crowns, but men. Flowers of thy heart thy children they: let

them not pass like weeds away, their heritage a sunless day, God save the people.”

I can only hope that soon, the prayers of millions of people throughout the world will be answered. Although little good is to be derived from this life normally, I believe my character to be improved slightly as a result of it, if it has only made me appreciate , even more, how happy I was with Gwen and baby in Nottingham and how fortunate I was then. Often at odd moments during the day and in the quietness of the now long evenings I let my thoughts travel back to those pleasant days when I would come home in the evenings, and Ann, hearing my bicycle bell would run to meet me with a smile of sunshine on her sweet little face, how we had tea, after which I would take Ann to bed [in later days she would consider it undignified for me to carry her upstairs, but would struggle up laboriously on her own with me following], how we sat afterwards, listening to the wireless, reading or talking. Gwen on one side of the fire, me on the other. I know she often must think of me too, although it would be difficult for her to imagine me in my present surroundings with any degree of accuracy. I know too, that she prays for my safe and speedy return, as I do too. Soon, I hope , our patience will be rewarded and then will come that wonderful reunion which we have tried to visualise so often but failed. I am blessed by having with me always, the memory of the two grandest little women in the world, which assists me in retaining my sanity in this insane world and gives me the courage and faith needed to carry on under these unnatural conditions.

#### Xmas Day 1942

We have a holiday today, the first for some time. After a service in the morning, held at the North end of the camp and overlooking a wide Waddi beyond which lay the blue Mediterranean [it seemed strange to be singing carols under a warm sun and blue sky amid such un-Christmassy scenery] , I was able to complete some much needed washing and various odd jobs about our 'desert home'. The first Christmas dinner I had in the Army was on quite a grand scale. An extension had been put onto the mess tent for the occasion and after seating ourselves at 3 long rows of tables, our dinner was served to us by our senior N.C.O.s and officers, consisting of Turkey, Pork, sausages, peas ,potatoes and Xmas pudding followed by nuts and oranges. The inevitable beer was provided on the tables before we arrived, one bottle per man. The Colonel read out General Montgomery's message to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and added a few words of his own and then we received a pair of socks or a scarf each and some cigarettes from a comforts fund [a S. African one I believe] . The quality and quantity of the midday meal was sadly offset by the quality of our tea, bread and jam [one slice] and cake, which sported a little icing halfheartedly. However the best was yet to come when at 7.30 our concert, which we had produced ourselves opened with a chorus and carols from our choir[including myself] .After this followed one good turn after another, short sketches, songs, monologues, music and the irresistible cockney, Kimberling who gave his story of the fire at the officers mess at Amerea, and various humorous ??? impersonations. Even the Officers did a sketch for us, the Colonel taking the part of a nurse, much to the delight of the audience. An excellent stage had been fixed up, including footlights, curtains spotlight and even a microphone and amplifiers. The show was compered brilliantly by Capt. Cathie who displayed to those who were

not already aware of it, his pleasant and dynamic personality. He had worked hard and patiently at our rehearsals and I think he was satisfied his efforts were not in vain, when at last the entertainments drew to a close near to midnight.. We wended our various ways across the desert illuminated by an almost full moon, satisfied with our Christmas Day, but all, I think, fervently hoping that this would be our last Christmas away from home and that 1943 would see us where we rightly belonged, with our loved ones sitting round our own fireside, singing carols and exchanging presents and enjoying all those things which Christmas at home has to offer. I wonder, I wonder??

26/12/42

This morning brought with it a hangover for some who had taken too much of their favourite liquid the previous day, resulting in only about half the unit turning up for breakfast and parade. In the evening the Naafi people entertained us with quite a good show incorporating quite a lot of 'hot' music, a good singer, an excellent accordionist and several other good turns, Although extremely good in a professional sort of way it did not compare with our concert yesterday, not even counting a kind of sense of achievement which we derived from our own show.

4/1/43

We are off westwards again today. I was drivers mate in Staff Bottomlys truck. We moved off about 9a.m. and after only one short stop, arrived at our destination about 3p.m. It was only 45 miles and the place was known as Tmimi , just south of the Gulf of Bomba and about halfway between Tobruk and Dernu. Our site was much more fertile than any we have occupied since being in the desert. Large areas were covered with bright green grass with a few bushes dotted here and there and much of it covered with a carpet of very pretty little flowers, blue, white and yellow, something similar to our night –scented stocks or Virginia stock. These areas proved very treacherous for or lorries however as they were very soft ground. The remainder of the ground was dotted with the common 'camel scrub'.

Drew Lamb [my sleeping partner' and I soon erected our 'bivvy', dug in about 3 feet with a step, 'carpet' and electrical installation and completely waterproofed [we hoped] with the canvas sheets we had at our disposal. No work had made it's [sic] appearance, except when we were caught for road-making,[ filling the soft parts in with stones] so we were able to spend some time on our house and make it very comfortable the next day, when we had finished it we were extremely gratified with our efforts.

8/1/43

Once more we are off, this time on a much longer journey. I am riding with Staff Bottomly again on the breakdown section of the convoy. We were held up by several minor breakdowns the first day which resulted in us and the last 2 or 3 vehicles spending the first night away from the rest of the convoy.

9/1/43

Today we passed through country which was entirely different from any other we have seen in N.Africa. It was very fertile and covered with grass and dotted with bushes and trees. The road wound out through hills and valleys and reminded me very much of Derbyshire or Devonshire. Towards evening we saw we were approaching one of the escarpments, typical of this part of the world, the hills seemed to come to an end ahead of us and a little further on we could see over the edge and across a huge flat plain, over which the road ran in a thin white ribbon. The pass wound down tortuously round the edge of the hills with precipices on one side and cliffs the other and negotiation of the many hairpin bends made for careful driving. We passed several wrecks of the less fortunate drivers who had missed the road and the debris of their vehicles remained as grim reminders to those that followed them. Situated on the plain in symmetrical rows and separated each from its neighbour by about a quarter of a mile were square single storied buildings, designed in the orthodox Italian style of white stone. These turned out to be farmhouses and spoke a great deal for the foresight and planning of the Italians who had designed them for colonists. They made us excellent quarters for the night, each house being allocated for a section of the convoy. We soon had a roaring fire going and made ourselves some much needed tea and also heated some water and had a good wash. To my delight I discovered a spring bedstead and after supper I spread my blankets and enjoyed a good sleep assisted admirably by the softness of my bed and the long drive throughout the day in a car without a windscreen.

10/1/43

The excellent soil of this farmland proved our downfall as half our lorries were stuck in the mud, some axle deep, and it was nearly midday before we had finally pulled them all out and started on our way again. I had persuaded Staff to let me drive and soon after leaving the base of the hills we passed through Barce, a pleasant little town with native huts and houses, a few donkeys and Libyans here and there and several date palms. It had apparently rained a good deal as the roads were badly flooded in parts. After about an hours riding we suddenly came upon another escarpment which we had to descend. From the top we had a magnificent view, another flat plain stretched away for several miles and beyond that lay the vivid blue of the Mediterranean, dotted with white horses, the horizon of which, due to our height, melted into the haze of the sky. The road went down and down around the face of the hills far below us, probably 1000 feet below to the base., and with a slight qualm in my stomach, I changed down and with my foot near the brake commenced the descent. On reaching the sea the road turned left and followed the coast for about 50 miles and after passing through 2 or 3 small towns we approached Bengazi towards evening. This was the biggest town we have yet seen since leaving Cairo and though rather primitive in parts, was very interesting. A large number of our troops were stationed there. Some of the buildings had been knocked about somewhat, but what we saw of it, it would have proved very fascinating in peace time, I think. Shortly after leaving Bengazi it began to grow dark and as we had no idea where our camp was we turned off the road for the night as we were some hours behind the rest of the convoy.

11/1/43

We arrived at our camp site this morning which lay at the foot of some hills from where we could see Bengazi in the distance and the sea. The ground was very soft and muddy and in later days many hours were wasted through lorries sticking in the mud.

23/1/43

Today was notable in 2 respects. Firstly it was announced over the wireless that we had captured Tripoli. This news, to say the least of it, was very encouraging to us, and I hope to those at home, too. Secondly I was given a half day, the first since Christmas. Making full use of the opportunity I decided to pay Bengazi a visit, so shortly after dinner, I set off in the company of another fellow. We hailed a lorry on the main road and after about half an hour were passing through the tree-lined outskirts of the town. We dropped off near the archway over the road at the eastern approach to the town and near the Italian hospital.

Turning down a side street we purchased a few maps of the town and a little further along came upon the native market. This was a huge conglomeration of rubbish, included in which were much captured Italian and British stolen Army stuff. The following were some of the things displayed on the rickety stalls, or the ground or in little cubby holes:- bottles of ink, hinges, nails, sections of water melon, pieces of meat, matches, [Bryant and May's] sweets, baskets of charcoal, pepper and sundry spices, all kinds of haberdashery, hair oil, tea, pen nibs and so on ad lib.

Over all this swarmed a dense mass of flies. Old women, bare footed and ill clad, squatted on the floor selling odds and ends, and dirty half-naked children ran about among numerous stray dogs. One's proximity to various stalls or persons determined the particular smell. The currency used was either Egyptian or Italian and piastres and lire mixed together in the hands of many races, from dusky Sudanese to Egyptians, Italians, Arabs and the Senusi. Leaving this noisy rabble we walked along several streets, many of the buildings which had suffered considerable damage in air raids, but here and there were one or two small shops with the counter facing the street like most round here and displaying various wares. There was a small covered in market devoted to greengrocery and we passed 2 hairdressers. One enterprising place had a board outside, announcing in badly formed capitals the fact that eggs and tomatoes were to be found inside. We investigated this and discovered the eggs and tomatoes went down very well with native bread and Egyptian coffee. We passed close to the docks and were able to see several half sunk ships and other sound ones unloading. I imagine this must have been a very beautiful place in peacetime with its [sic] white buildings, palm lined roads and its [sic] Moorish style architecture giving of arcades on the pavements surmounted by semi[circular arches supported by round pillars, making a very picturesque scene. The fine Catholic cathedral had 2 large domes which can be seen from our camp 16 miles away. Several Italian civilians were walking about quite well dressed and their children who were playing in the streets were very attractive with their dark hair and eyes and seemed in good health and spirits. It was now after 5 and not wishing to be out after dark we made our way to the Benina Road and picked up a lorry which dropped us back in camp before 7.



20/1/43

Today I had a shower bath, the first for 4 months, so I think it worthy of mention. A number of us went in lorries this afternoon. It was situated about 4-5 miles from the camp on the top of the hills rising up from our site. The view from these hills on the road at the top was magnificent. Below us lay our workshops and beyond the great flat green plain, across which the road ran in a thin white straight line, dwindling into the hazy distance where we could faintly perceive the buildings of Bengazi nearly 20 miles away, and finally beyond that the misty blue line of the Med, the horizon of which blended away into the sky. In the opposite direction were rolling hills and through the valley's of these could be seen another distant flat horizon which I suppose could be desert, far inland to the south-east. On the highest point of this band of hills was built a fort and the rough stone dwellings of a small native village, known as Regina, straddled outside the walls. This fort had apparently accommodated an Italian garrison, inside it were some stables and various buildings, one of which served as shower baths. The circumference would be about one mile, it was rectangular with typical buttressed walls and round towers at each corner inset with firing slots at intervals as were the walls.

11/2/43

Today was the commencement of a short rest in hospital as a result of the loss of one wisdom tooth. I came out on 19/2/43 and had 7 days light duties, a very welcome holiday. We are moving again soon up to Tripoli, a distance of nearly 800 miles. This time I have been promoted to driver proper, driving S/ Bottomley's Morris breakdown, it will be a long drive and by the end of it I should be a pretty good driver. The last couple of months have been particularly unpleasant regards weather, a continual cold wind blowing from the North at times reaching gale force and bringing much rain with it. As Drew Lamb has been detached from us, I now have a little 'bivvy' of my own, complete with electric light., and facing the cookhouse: it's [sic] interior is enhanced with the latest photo of Ann, which makes her presence almost a reality. How I wish it was.

9/3/43

We commenced the longest journey we have done in Africa today. We left our camp this morning. I am now writing this on 15/3/43 and tonight we have arrived at a point about 50 miles west of Tripoli. So far the trip has been devoid of any noteworthy event. The first day we covered about 60 miles, mostly flat desert. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day we did about the same distance and passed through a small town, Gedabia, which was just a few stone houses and a mosque or two. On Thursday we came through el-Agheila where the famous battle of the salt marshes was fought, and soon afterwards we drove under the equally famous Marble Arch: a very fine piece of monumental architecture about a 100 foot high and straddling the road. From here on was nothing but hundreds of miles of monotonous desert, a windswept and bleak and desolate, some stony, other parts dotted with camel scrub or occasionally grass and patches of flowers, the road crossed this open expanse in an endless straight line, undulating up and down over the rolling country, but very seldom turning left or right, as soon as we crested a height, on and on stretched out ahead, the dwindling ribbon, flanked by hundreds of telegraph poles which could be seen for many miles until they were lost in the distance or behind another range of hills. Yesterday the monotony was broken as we went through Sirte, another small town or port. Most of the names of places on the map are nothing more than

names as there is nothing there whatever. For instance all yesterday afternoon we were passing milestones [or really Kilostones] for about 100 miles [we did 140 altogether] to a place called Tauorga, and after all this distance, instead of finding a small town as we expected, all there was, was a half collapsed stone building and six small square huts, not even a palm tree or oasis, the country was flat here and a strong cold wind carried stinging sand, the road stretched on without the slightest waver, and two old 'W...' huddled in their blankets looked mournfully at us as we passed by, "this is Tauorga, that was " a fine example of the civilization of Libya. In the evening we passed through Misurata and this was much more like civilization, there were many miles of date palms and quite a fair sized town. We parked just outside the town for the night and were immediately stormed by the half starved native population who begged for army biscuits and were willing to pay 5/- [BMA currency] for 2 cups of sugar or one of tea. At breakfast in the morning they stood around in groups, while dozens of ragged, half naked little urchins grabbed in the sand, fighting for any little piece of leavings we had thrown away. Today we passed through many small towns, including Zliten and Homs, the country has improved much too, being quite fertile in places, and here and there were farmhouses representing the colonisation of the Italians. It is very hilly too and we could see the Med quite close several times.

16/3/43

We were very disappointed today to find we were bypassing Tripoli, we had hoped to see this city. Instead we went to the south by Castel Benito. After a halt in the afternoon for several hours by an Italian farmhouse we started off and after driving until nearly 10pm. We came to the small fishing town of Zuara.

17/3/43

Today we crossed into Tunisia and after a very hot and dusty ride, halted at a point about 40 miles from Medenin [about 30 miles from Jerry in the Mareth Line]. We stayed here for a day and on Friday 19/3/43 moved off once more and after a roundabout journey over sandy tracks, during which our section got lost, came finally to our journey's end, over 800 miles from Bengazi and about 15 from Jerry, the closest we have ever been to him.

19/3/43

Our camp site is well dispersed over sandy country, parts of which the natives have attempted to cultivate. In the distance, about 20-30 miles away is a range of mountains in the west, while in the east can be caught a small glimpse of the sea, not very far away. We have all feverishly dug ourselves in. Tonight is the start of the big push to drive Jerry from the Mareth Line, and as I write, enemy planes drone overhead and a few minutes ago, several whistles announced the arrival of shrapnel quite close. It is a bright moonlit night and any minute we are expecting the artillery barrage to start, there are to be something like 80,000 rounds to be fired on a front 2000 yards long, so it is a pretty hot one. There are many distant rumblings now and a nearby Bofors battery has just had it's [sic] fling. I think I will go to bed and try to dream of home.

24/3/43

The battle still rages. Every night this week the ground has shook as the barrage has opened up, usually about 9-10 p.m. Fortunately we have been spared up to now an attack from the air. The position looks a bit hopeless for Jerry and we are all hoping this will be the end of the war in N.Africa. I fervently hope so anyway. I am getting thoroughly browned off with this nomad existence, and would welcome a return to base for a spell at least, where one could have a bath daily, or go into a café and have a good meal of one's own choosing, visit the pictures and see a little civilization generally. I was even reduced to shaving off my moustache yesterday simply for the sake of doing something different and changing the endless monotonous routine. I have just had my supper of two scrambled eggs and fried bread [the first bread we have had for a few weeks] the eggs are bartered from the Arabs for biscuits. I have a very cosy little 'bivvy' here, I have dug in fairly deep [about 3 feet] and the hole is only a little wider than my bed so should be good protection from the missiles of the enemy. I have an old battery for light and with photos of Ann and Gwen it is made quite homely if a hole in the ground can be called 'homely'.

11/4/43

Jerry is on the run and we have captured Sfax. Yesterday we made a short move from our present location to a position a few miles beyond Gabes. On the way we passed through Medinine and Mareth. The country was semi-desert and hilly in parts. Our new site is situated on a sandy plain bounded by a range of hills to the S.W. ending in an abrupt headland and to the N.E. by the sea a few miles away. The main road runs S.E and N.W. between us and the sea. Our camp is split by several small Waddi's, one of which has water at the bottom, this is about 50 yds across and 20-30 feet deep. These form ideal sites for our bivvys and mine and several others are situated in a very small waddi about 10 feet deep by 10 feet across, we are well sheltered from the wind and also from anything that Jerry may decide to drop. Another happy feature is that only 100 yds. down from our 'grand canyon' is the cookhouse. This afternoon we were graciously given a half day plus the addition of lorries to take us down to the Med. for a swim, which was most welcome. I was on guard tonight and on deciding to return to the guard room at nearly midnight suddenly discovered we were hopelessly lost and it was not until over half an hour later, during which time we had wandered round the desert in circles and eventually woke someone up and enquired the way, that we arrived back safely.

15/4/43

We quit our camp this morning and took to the road once more. This journey was one of the pleasantest I have had in N.Africa. By this evening we had gradually left all traces of desert behind us and we were travelling through green rolling country, partly cultivated having many plantations of Olive trees and interspersed with wide grassy areas which were a carpet of flowers, white daisies, yellow dandelions and scarlet poppies making a welcome blaze of colour. We camped for the night near the sea halfway between Mahares and Sfax.

16/4/43

Today was another pleasant repetition of yesterday. During the morning we passed through Sfax, an interesting little town with a mixed population of French and Tunisian Arabs. The unaccustomed sight of French girls provided a happy spectacle for the majority of the lads. The buildings here were mainly of white stone and we passed many pretty houses with castellated roofs and picturesque Moorish arches with Cactus hedges bordering the road. In the afternoon we came through a small town called El Djem and I was surprised to see a huge Roman Coliseum looking almost exactly like the pictures of the one in Rome that I have seen.

I understand it is one of the best preserved Roman remains in the world and must be a few thousand years old. We reached our destination in the evening a few miles beyond M'sahen. and were delighted to pitch our bivvies under olive trees which abounded here planted in long straight groves separated by open spaces covered in grass and flowers. Apparently we have left behind us the desert for good and needless to say we are all heartily thankful. The road here from Gabes was in fine condition and contributed to the enjoyment of the run. There were only two or three diversions caused by bridges which had been destroyed, but the remainder was undamaged and had a beautiful surface which enabled me to do 40mph. for long stretches. Presumably, Jerry's retreat up here was so fast that time did not permit of him damaging the road as he usually has in the past.

23/4/43 [Easter Saturday]

I had a half day this afternoon and lorry's were provided for those wishing to pay a visit to either Kairouan or Monastir. I chose Kairouan, hearing that it had many historical associations, and being a holy city, seven pilgrimages here being equal to one to Mecca.

It lay 40 kilos away inland to the west and the excellent road enabled us to reach it in about an hour. It proved to be a walled town, as many are round here, the old castellated wall built of grey stone rising to about 20-30 feet and presumably built to exclude the invading Turks or Arabs in 'ye olden days'. Within the confines of this wall was a typical Eastern native town, consisting of squalid broken down buildings and numerous little alleyways and enclosed arcades which contained many shops, mostly mere holes in the walls as usual. The trades carried on here proved quite interesting, a section of the town being devoted to each. In one quarter the Arabs were busy making bags and notecases, in another the blacksmiths were busy, shoeing donkeys and making the thin curved knives with a serrated edge which are used for cutting grasses. There were several watchmakers, one 'Pharmacie' and quite a large section of the place given to weaving, which was done on primitive looms. There were of course the inevitable hairdressing salons and then the food section where sausages and livers were being grilled and eaten, and various little cakes and fritters made [which taste foul], the usual type of "w.." brown bread was abundant too. Over all these proceedings swarmed a dense black mass of billions of flies sometimes entirely obliterating the articles of foodstuffs. There were many Mosques large and small, I believe I have heard it called the 'city of the 1000 Mosques' but I am sure there were not nearly as many as that. We climbed up the tower of one to the little balcony that ran round the domed-

shape prayer 'box' at the tip and were able to command a fine view of the town and the surrounding country to the range of mountains further inland known as the Tebessa Mts. And which rise to over 6000 feet in parts.

Outside the wall had sprung up a more modern part of the town and holding a fair sprinkling of French population. Here the road was wide and lined with pleasant white buildings and palms. It was now 4.30 and time to return to tea. I hope to do Monastir if I have a chance soon, it is about the same distance but in the opposite direction on the coast just south of Susa.

1/5/43

This afternoon was one of the most enjoyable I have had for some time. Harris and I hitch-hiked to Susa. This was 14kilos distant and was a very picturesque little port. It was similar to Benghazi in some respects and about the same size only the houses were much pleasanter being built of white stone and surrounded by pretty gardens. The old town near the docks had a huge stone wall round it , but we didn't stay to explore this merely passing round it in a lorry we had picked up. There was a large French population here and many attractive girls, the first we have seen for 9 months. Leaving here early in the afternoon we had a lift to Monastir 21 Kilos away down the coast. This place too had a high wall all round the older part, access to the town being through several arches protected by massive metallated gates. In here were the usual native dwellings and shops and little alleyways. We stuck our heads through a doorway and met a terrific babble of sound, it was a school and a crowd of children were all reading aloud in Arabic. On the seaward side the surrounding wall rose up grimly only a few yards from where the waves beat on a rugged and rocky shore. About a hundred or more yards out to sea, lay a small island on which was built a rambling stone prison. South of the old town was a promenade, one side leading onto the beach, and the other were the more modern French houses. There were quite a few French people here, all quite smartly dressed and seemed pleased to see the British soldiery. Their children were particularly attractive and one little girl of about two caught my attention she was sitting on some steps eating some bread and what were probably her two young brothers were near her. The gave us the customary salute and 'Bonswar' . I bent down to speak to the little girl who gave me a sweet little smile, so this encouraged me to pick her up. She seemed to take a liking to me for she put her chubby arms around my neck and gazed at me with big blue eyes. This touched me on a soft spot and I recalled that the last baby I had in my arms was my own little Ann. Reluctantly putting her down we waved goodbye , I tucked a 5 franc note in her pocket as I left.

We wandered around for some time, looking with interest at the buildings, the 'W...' the camels and donkeys, the waves breaking on the beach, the girls, the children playing and all the fascinating things to be seen in a N.African town. It was 5.30 before we made in the direction of the road which we judged led to M'saken. As it turned out we would have been better to have returned via Susa. After a very short lift we were compelled to walk for several miles along a lane lined with cactus hedges behind which lay miles of olive trees. After passing through a native village , we came to a main road and were rather confused as to which direction to take, there was hardly any traffic on the road but after a few minutes, along comes an American Staff car driven by a Colonel, he was going to Kairouan via M'saken. 'Jump in Laddies' he said, so in we jump. We were in his car for nearly an hour and he was doing 40-50 most of the time,

so we must have been very much further from 'home' than we thought. We passed through several villages and after passing through M'saken, he insisted on bringing us right to our camp, which was 2 miles out of his way. If it hadn't been for him we would possibly have been forced to sleep out all night , but American democracy saved us where English democracy might not have done.

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1943 was one of the most important days of the war. Tonight the battle in Tunisia ceased and the N. African campaign was finished. It is difficult for us to realise yet. I expect our people at home are very happy and relieved about it. We are all wondering now where we are going next and many are the rumours prevalent amongst us. We are all looking forward to a spell of leave somewhere. It has been very enjoyable here near M'saken and I have been either onto Susa or Monastir each time or usually both. The climate seems to be much better than Egypt or Libya too, it has been neither too hot or too cold, but each day brings a cloudless blue sky and a pleasant cool breeze to temper the heat of the sun, it has only rained once. Although this is by far the best place we have camped in, we are all still looking forward to the day when we may partake in the pleasures of civilization, once more, cafes, cinemas, shops etc. However charming Susa or Monastir or any of the other villages and towns might be they do not boast these amenities. Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli or even Cairo or Alex , will no doubt satisfy these demands, consequently the possible leave in one of these places is eagerly discussed. Jerry has lost close on 200,000 prisoners and a huge amount of material, it is a wonderful victory and despite my usual cynicism, I feel somewhat proud to have been part of it. Tomorrow, Sunday, has been proclaimed a national day of Thanksgiving. It is nice to know that M.E.F does not stand for Men that England forgot. We do not forget England and all that it stands for and my most fervent wish is that I shall be there soon, although I am afraid I have other countries to see first and many faces other than those I want

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to see. I wonder if I shall be home this year?!! 7 months to go??

25/5/43

After a very happy 5 weeks we left here this morning and went to the first time backwards, retracing our steps as it were. We passed again through El Djem and came to Sfax before lunchtime. We set up camp about 10 miles north of Sfax. We are supposed to be here for refitting but after a few day the work begins to roll in.

30/5/43

Each evening this week we have been able to hitch-hike into Sfax. The town is very similar to Susa only a little larger. It consists of an old walled native town, which is out of bounds and a fairly big modern town having a large French population. The army authorities have arranged a picture house and there is also a club. Yesterday afternoon a party of us went into town, and after visiting the pictures Harris and I walked round the town. It had some very fine buildings many of which had been badly damaged by bombs including the municipal theatre. There were many pleasant gardens filled with flowers, palm trees and other tropical plants. The docks

area was out of bounds but we could see many half sunk ships in the harbour. There are one or two little cafes here where one can have eggs and black coffee and bread at exorbitant prices. I am gradually picking up French which is very useful if one wishes to converse with any of the locals or even say 'howdy' to the mademoiselles.

5/6/43

After our officers had tumbled to the fact that we were thoroughly 'browned off' by reason of having no leave or even a short rest, it has been arranged that a third of the unit at a time shall retire to a leave camp of our own making. I was on the first party and at midday we arrived here at a point on the coast 70 miles north of Sfax. It is a grand spot situated in a huge bay; Mahdia is situated on a promontory about 10 miles to the north, and to the south is another small town. We have pitched our bivvies about 50 yards from where the breakers wash the beach, amid white sand hills dotted with grass and flowers. The Med. is the usual matchless blue, a light sapphire blue for about a mile out and then changing to a rich darker vivid colour, the whole dotted with snow-white-horses, the curve of the coastline being picked out by the dazzling white foam as the waves break on the sands. The sky is a cloudless blue vault and if it were not for the fact that we are only here for two and a half days we might really settle down to an idyllic existence, however we must make the best of it. I had a short swim before lunch and I am writing this in the mess tent. The fierce heat of the sun is tempered by a delightfully cool sea breeze. I only wish Gwen and baby were here to share with me this little Tunisian paradise.

7/6/43

Yesterday I visited Mahdia. The native part was built on a narrow peninsula, and was a maze of little alleys and passageways running backwards and forwards parallel to the sea, which lay on either side. On the south an extensive fishing industry flourished, and the small harbour was full of various types of boats and 'falouka' type sailing boats. A fair sized French population mingled with the numerous Arabic people. There were one of two small cafes serving eggs; fishes and tomatoes, which we sampled. Also the usual trades such as weaving, woodworking and etc were carried on and hairdressers establishments were dotted here and there. During the heat of the afternoon the place was fairly quiet, but later on the populace turned out in force to enjoy the comparative cool of the evening. 18. The French girls were met with the usual ill-mannered stares, whistles and shouts and as in England of an evening, 'La Mere et Pere promenade avec' offspring, some of whom were very attractive. I had one small baby girl of 18 months on my knee playing with my wrist-watch for some time. She had gold curly hair and a lovely milk and roses complexion despite the climate. The French are all smartly dressed and seem in good circumstances. I should think they have a fair amount to eat as the surrounding country is very productive of a large variety of food. Dates, figs, tomatoes, apricots, marrows, melon, wheat and etc, not to mention, multitudinous frogs (a local delicacy) all abound in profusion in the spaces not devoted to olive trees which I should think occupy at least 50 percent of the fertile coastal belt of Tunisia. I have since learned that Mahdia has quite a history. A Turk with a name something like Margut had this place as a base from where he raided various countries in the Med. his grave is in Tripoli. It was attacked in

1550(?) by a British force sent by King Charles who chased Margut away. During our afternoon meanderings Harris and I noticed a small crowd of our lads (could I say comrades?) at the end of a narrow little alley. "Ah" we said. "It's one of the two B's, Booze or Brothels". We investigated and found it was the latter. Round a door which opened onto the street was a cluster of our Empire's Defenders, all trying to peer through a grille at the top of the door. Through this (when we had elbowed our way to the fore) we could see a small room from the back of which an opening led off into a courtyard. Squatting on a shelf a few feet above the ground were three very ugly, repulsive, aged and dirty women (am I insulting the sex by saying women?). These creatures were regarded with hungry eyes by my sex-maddened fellow countrymen, and after one of Gallic blood had had his breath smelt he was admitted to the coveted precincts, much to the envy of his friends. So much for our day in Mahdia. The remainder of our leave was spent in camp, swimming, reading, writing and having a peaceful time in general. After three complete days there we set off back on the morning of the fourth day somewhat reluctantly and arrived at camp at mid-morning.

27/6/43

Much to my surprise and pleasure I was informed today that I, among about a dozen others, was to proceed to Tripoli and bring some vehicles back. We all set off at 1.30 in a 3 tonner and followed the familiar road southward. We kept up a good average speed (60-70 k.p.m.) which enabled us to reach the hills north of Medenine about 7 pm where we camped for the night. The route so far was just as I have described it previously with one exception, that was when we passed through Gabes. Coming up we had by-passed this town. It was a very pleasant little place where very profuse vegetation flourished and many square miles of date palms grew quite thickly. The medium which made this possible was a small running stream which meandered through the town and had been made to flow through irrigation channels among the palms. This is the only running water I have seen so far in N.Africa apart from the Nile. Where the road crossed the brook, native women were washing clothes on the bank and children were bathing in a rocky pool which had formed there. Between here and Medenine the road was very uninteresting passing through desert country.

28/6/43

We set off early this morning and after an interesting ride reached the outskirts of Tripoli by 5 pm (We had crossed the border of Tunisia about mid-day). Tripoli is a fine place with some truly magnificent buildings of very ambitious architecture. There were many troops stationed here and the streets were crowded with them and civilians too. There were several fine statues and monuments typically Italian. We continued through the town and along the beautiful palm lined promenade round the

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harbour which was full of ships, sunken and otherwise. Passing through the suburbs to the east of the city we eventually arrived at the famous Grand Prix race track and passed alongside the impressive grandstand on the right and the pits on



the left with the lofty observation tower and indicator board. It was a fine wide road lined with graceful eucalyptus trees and palms, the curves being banked steeply. We followed the track for some little way and then turned off to the beach where we stayed for the night. I had a swim and visited two nearby NAAFI's.

29/6/43

We picked up our lorries this morning at a vehicle park alongside the race track and spent the morning checking up. I thought we might have been allowed to stay tonight and see a little of Tripoli, but I was disillusioned when our officer in charge decided we would start away about 3 pm. I was driving a 15 cwt Bedford which ran very well. We passed through Tripoli slowly and had a good look at everything, rather sorry that we hadn't had more leisure to see it properly. It was similar to Alex. In a way the buildings were if anything more imposing and futuristic, trust the Italians for that! The Banco Di Roma was a particularly fine building built of a greenish stone and having many hemi-spherical domes and situated facing the harbour. We reached Zuara that night and after a meal I had a short walk around the place which is simply a native fishing village.

As usual a few of the lads were seeking diligently for 'bint' or beer. I think they were unsuccessful in both quests.

29/6/43

Today proved very hot and as for the majority of the way the road was some distance from the sea so we lost the benefit of the cooler breezes, but we were amply repaid when we reached Gabes where I had a grand swim and after dinner had a walk round the town which turned out to be a fair size with a number of French there. I had a haircut and a good meal at a clean little café.

30/6/43

We passed through Sfax this afternoon and continued on towards Sousse. The unit had moved the day after we had left and it took us some time to find the new site which was well off the main road. We didn't arrive till about 9 pm which, my speedometer told me I had done just over 400 miles since leaving Tripoli.

5/7/43

All this week it has been unbearably hot. The 'Sirrocco' (equivalent to the Egyptian 'Kamseen') has been blowing. The temperature at midday and in the afternoon has been terrific, and sweat is the order of the day, and night. If any tools have been left in the sun, they have to be dipped in water before they can be handled and as often as not any exposed water is too hot to bear ones hand in. Fortunately a truck runs to the sea in the evenings and this affords us the only relief. But as soon as we are out of the sea the sweat starts running again even though it is after 8 pm and the sun is setting.

10/7/43

Today we heard of the invasion of Sicily. All last night scores of bombers with gliders attached had been passing low over our camp. One broke away and made a forced landing near our camps.

20/

20/7/43

The news continues to be good. Mussolini has cleared out and the invasion of Sicily goes well.

11/8/43

The last few weeks have passed fairly quickly and pleasantly and have included a visit to Kaivouan and Monastin and many bathes at Sousse in the evenings. We left our site yesterday and assembled at a point near the docks, and at about midday today we drove our vehicles on board the boats allotted to us. These boats had huge doors in the bows and a ramp led to the dockside, there were tow decks with a lift connecting, on these decks the vehicles were parked in four rows, about 8 in a row. In the afternoon, we pulled out and lay off Sousse till the evening waiting for the rest of the convoy. At about 8 pm we were under way and the last I saw of the continent of Africa was the long low strips of coastline between Monastin and Sousse and beyond, which showed as a dark line in the light of the three quarter moon.

12/8/43

I slept on the lorry (a 15 cwt Morris, I was drivers mate) that night, and when I woke in the morning the sea was dead calm and on the port horizon was the hazy outline of Lampadusa. After breakfast we passed close to another island, which I think was called Lamosa. There were two peaks of about 1000 feet and on a small sloping plain in between the hills and the shore was nestled a small town of flat-roofed white houses. At the side of the town were many groves of some fruit growing and more on the eastern slopes among which were dotted white farmhouses. On the rocks on the eastern tip was a little lighthouse. The small island looked very romantic, picturesque and peaceful in its setting of vivid blue sea and sky.

The journey, I have been told, will take about 30 hours, so we should sight Sicily early tomorrow morning. I look upon this as the first stage in our journey home, I hope it is. This afternoon we passed close to Gozo, behind which lay Malta. Gozo had several towns and two or three very fine churches including one splendid lofty temple which could be plainly seen through 'binos.' The remainder of the day passed uneventfully and I turned in early as reveille was 5 am.

13/8/43 (Friday)

We were up before dawn and along our port side lay a high, still shadowy, coastline, as the sun rose, a flaming red, over the starboard horizon, the shore

could be seen more plainly and in the distance to the north a dim hazy peak, difficult to distinguish from a cloud, rose very high into the sky, only the top half was plain, the lower half still blended with the morning mists and the distance too rendered it obscure. This was the famous volcano, Mt. Etna. It is an exciting moment really, comparable to approaching Durban, or seeing the Pyramids for the first time, to be sailing along the coast of Sicily which we have so recently conquered, (news came through last night that the Germans have started to evacuate the island). Before 9 pm we had docked at Pt. Augusta, a large harbour holding many naval vessels and cargo boats, several wrecks and also some big Italian seaplanes. Most of the morning was occupied by disembarking. From here we drove for about a mile to an assembly area to await the rest of our unit who were on other ships.

21/

14/8/43

We have moved about another mile and most of the unit are here now. This seems a very pleasant fertile country, the drawbacks being the flies by day and the mosquitoes by night. Many kinds of fruit flourish profusely, there are acres of grape vines, to which the lads have helped themselves, wantonly and extravagantly sparing not the owners feelings. Oranges can be bought 15 for 1/-, while lemons, nuts, pomegranates, prickly pears, olives, figs etc. are all abundant. The country is very hilly and I have seen several streams running through rocky gorges, although we have barely penetrated the island yet. The climate is very much the same so far to what we have been used to.

There are lots of lizards and probably snakes too, and also some very fine large butterflies. We are parked among some trees close to a farmhouse, the privacy of which was naturally invaded due to the inquisitiveness of our mob. It is a very squalid stone structure, numerous children of all ages overflow from the lofty kitchen, where chickens and dogs run about and out into the yard where all the refuse is thrown among which 1000's of flies buzz happily. Cactus bushes grow between the house and the steep rocky road and behind is a well and some orange and lemon trees, which are not yet quite ripe. It is fairly high here and from a point down the road a view of the harbour can be had and the town of Augusta, while inland has a high rocky plateau.

15/8/43

We left for our destination this afternoon. The roads were very bad mostly, rocky and steep with many sharp bends. We passed through several small towns, Villas Mando, Carlentine, Catania, Misterbianco and to near our site a few miles from Belpasso. Several of these towns were built right on the top of a hill and to approach them, the road wound round and up, through the town and then down again. From the tops of these hills were some of the most magnificent views I have seen since leaving home. On the road to Catania we could see the bay, 100's of feet below us on the right and inland were ranges of mountains and before them a huge flat plain, while in the front towered the majestic bulk of Mt. Etna. I was rather surprised at the welcome the Sicilians gave us. They seemed very pleased to see

us as we passed through their towns, little toddlers gave us the V-sign, while others threw grapes and nuts to us. Most of the people seemed to be agriculturally employed, which is not to be wondered at, considering the island's fertility. After passing Catania, we climbed for several miles and here were great outcrops of black lava rock, although we were still a long way off Etna. Further along we passed through what may be termed a 'lava field', a huge area consisting of great jagged lumps of black rock, which would be quite impossible by foot, horse or anything. Our camp site was in a thickly vegetated area, masses of cactus [prickly pear type] were everywhere, among this grew olive trees, wild grape vines, orange and lemon trees, almonds, figs, pears and many others, in between which were masses of lava stones and rocks. Our vehicles were put in the small clearings between which ran many little connecting paths, which wound in and out between the trees and cactus. The insect life here consists of ants, the usual varieties of spiders and beetles, not too many flies, not many mosquitoes and a lot of very interesting lizards, which dart about among the rocks and up the tree trunks, also there are some fine big butterflies.

There will be some grand walks round here and some glorious views to be had. We have evolved a grape-squasher out of an old tin with holes in, after collecting vast mountains of grapes, we put them through this and make a delicious drink.

22. 18/8/43

I went for a short walk last night and there are several little rocky hills quite close to the camp and from these can be had the most magnificent views I have ever seen. The camp is already very high above sea level and from these extra heights it is possible to see for a tremendous distance to ranges of mountains and before them a huge flat green plain which I think would be Catania plain and in the foreground miles of wooded rolling country. On the road, which passes through the camp and runs between Belpasso and Paterno were many farmers in their gaily decorated carts which have beautifully painted pictures of the Virgin Mary and similar scenes on the sides. One of them stopped and gave us some pears and another some grapes and passed on with a friendly 'Sierra'. I even heard one of them singing something that sounded like Italian Opera as he went on his way slowly homewards, a delightful accompaniment to the sun setting over the distant mountains.

21/8.43

I had a half day today and was able to go swimming in the river which ran through the valley about 10 miles from our camp. On the way back we came through Paterno, a small town consisting mainly of one long street, a few squares where the menfolk were sitting at pavement cafes and one or two churches.

23/8/43

Tonight I decided to summon up my energy and walk to Belpasso about 5 miles away. There was a narrow rocky track behind the camp which climbed steeply for several miles until, on looking back I could see half Sicily [or so it seemed]. On reaching the main road I came to Belpasso after a couple of miles. I walked along part of the way with

a Sicilian named Pepito, who was very friendly and bought me a glass of wine when we reached the town. A glass was about ½ pint and cost 4 lire [2 d] . After a walk through the streets and a look inside one of the churches, I bought some views and retraced my steps, calling at the wine merchant's again to slake my thirst. The wine was stronger than it looked, as I discovered on starting to walk back again, but fortunately I got a lift most of the way and reached camp before dark.

27/8/43

Most of our company left today to do waterproofing of vehicles. We spent 3 days on the Catania plain and did over 1000 vehicles working from dawn till dusk.

31/8/43

We rose at 4a.m. this morning and loaded up our bivvies and moved off before breakfast to a place called St. Teresa di Riva, which lies towards Messina. After passing through Catania the country became extremely pretty and reminded me of N Wales or Derbyshire. The hills rose up steeply from the sea and the road and railway wound around the slopes with the sea below, the water being exceptionally clear, the coast forming rocky coves and inlets. Every few miles was a small village built in a row on the coast road and high up on the hills above us were perched some beautiful hotels and big houses, some being built on the edge of a steep cliff and several hundred feet above the sea. Just before reaching our destination as we rounded a big headland ,we saw Italy, a mountainous coastline, still rather hazy, but becoming clearer as we travelled up the coast. In the Straits of Messina were several of our battleships, including the Rodney and Nelson, as I was to hear later, they were steaming along the coast northwards, only a few miles offshore and soon after we first saw them they began to shell the mainland. It was a magnificent sight. A flash of red flame, followed by cloud of smoke, preceded the terrific boom of the guns by several seconds and we could actually see the shells bursting. It seemed strange that there was no opposition or retaliation of any kind, either from the Axis Navies or Air Forces and later when the ships had finished their bombardment they sailed placidly away.

3/9/43

I had a very interesting day. Apart from being the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war and nearly Ann's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, the invasion of Italy commenced. We had a few vehicles to finish in the morning and we had soon cleared up and in the afternoon went for a swim. On the beach we had a grandstand view of the invasion and we sat there in the sun all afternoon and watched hundreds of boats passing to and fro, some only a few hundred yards off shore. They were loading up from the beaches a little lower down and along most of this coast. It reminded me of a regatta in the Solent, the sea was calm and blue and the sky flecked with fleecy clouds and all through the day the invasion boats passed backwards and forwards. Most amazing of all was the fact that there was no opposition that we could see. No Luftwaffe above and no enemy ships at sea. After tea I had a walk by the riverbed to a small village which lay on the hillside. There were no streets here at all, as the slopes on which the houses were built were too steep, instead, rough rocky tracks wound at all angles between the stone houses, these being so steep in places that we had to scramble up from one ledge of rock to another, several feet higher up and coming down was accomplished by a series of jumps and quick runs. The church was

built on one of the highest points and the old priest showed us round. We went up some steps to a small pipe organ at the back of the church. I played a few notes, while the priest pumped a handle at the side. Then we went up higher still past a little platform where the mechanism of the clock and chimes rested, to the tower where the bells were. Here we had a fine view of the village below and around us, the deep gorge through which the river flowed in the wet season, the hills the other side and to our left, out to sea and the mainland where our craft were still sailing to and fro. After leaving the church we sat on a high terrace on which were built a short row of houses, chatting as well as we could to a family who were quite pleased about the invasion. As it grew dusk we set off down the hill to our camp.

4/9/43

We returned today to our old camp near Paterno after a very interesting morning ride via a different route from which we came, which took us through several towns and villages.

11/9/43

As of old, we moved off completely again on the road to Messina. Instead of going via the coast we took a road inland and right round Etna. It was about 130 miles, and the road took us over mountainous country, climbing sometimes to over 400 feet. One village, which we passed through on the 12/9/43 was 1108 meters altitude and we continued to climb for several hours after that. The views were grand. Deep valleys below us and high peaks above and Etna higher still. The air was very cold and I had my overcoat on. About midday on 12/9 we sighted the sea off the north coast while we were still a long way off and very high up. The whole route had dozens of hairpin bends and looking up the steep slopes we could see part of our convoy almost overhead and directly below were those in front going in the opposite direction to us. We arrived at Messina in the evening, which was a fine city before war had passed it by. From the high mountains behind it we looked down on the harbour and the narrow straits. On the other side was Italy, which we could see plainly. While we have been on the way here Italy has surrendered, the news was received with great enthusiasm.

13/9/43

We are billeted in some barracks, much of which have been bombed or shelled, but quite a lot of buildings are alright and these we have turned into workshops and sleeping quarters. 24. Spring beds were lying about and these were soon put into use and as a result we are very comfortable. There are shower baths in the camp and soon, I hear, there are to be some pictures just across the road. There are many brothels adjacent to the barracks and these and the vino to be had form a great attraction for the majority.

14/10/43

Little has happened in the past month apart from the usual routine. One Sunday afternoon about 3 weeks ago we were told that Gracie Fields would be entertaining, so we boarded the lorries provided and took a nice long ride of about 20 kms over the mountains on the Palermo road and down to the sea again on the north coast, but after waiting for about 2 hours, during which time we had a bathe, there was still no Gracie so

we had the ride back again. I considered it worth it if only for the outing and the splendid views from the tops of the mountains over to the straits and Italy. The next high spot came a little later on when Monty addressed a crowd of 30 corps, (including a representative number from our ships) and told them he was trying to get us all home. Since then rumours of all descriptions have been flying thick and fast. We have been ready to move several times and now it seems that Monty's implication is a fact as several units are as good as home already. But for us it is not to be, as we later found out. Last night and the previous one we produced a concert. A good stage had been erected in the mess and we had practised for several days beforehand. We are fortunate to have in our unit at the moment a coloured saxophonist and his brilliant playing in the band filled even me, who am no lover of jazz, with admiration. They had four encores in succession last night when some civilians were invited. An Italian girl gave us two songs, one, 'South of the border' seems to be an Italian tune as it is quite popular with the natives here. Our inst. shop did a turn, (the Hill-Billies – a quintet) dressed in chaps and old hats and neckerchiefs. At the end of the show the first night the colonel got up and broke the news to us, - " Now has come the time for us to leave 30 corps and follow on with the Eighth Army in Italy". This announcement was met with groans and boos by most of us present, but on reflecting on it, I don't think I am sorry. Much as I want to see Gwen and baby again, I don't want to go home only to be sent to France after a short time, which I am sure, is what would happen. I would rather go on to Italy, and I must admit I would like to see more of that country than just a range of mountains ever the Straits of Messina, and then return home for good, not having to say goodbye again. So I think it is for the best, and I don't think it will be so very long in any case before I am home. The news continues to be good, Italy had declared war on Germany and the Russians are setting a fine example which is a pity England is not following by making an invasion instead of leaving all the fighting to them and the Eighth.

18/10/43 Monday

Today I experienced once again the thrill of standing in a new country. We crossed over this morning from Messina to Reggio Calabria and before midday had moved off in convoy up the west coast of the 'toe' of Italy. We only covered about 40 miles today passing through several small towns and villages along the coast. At one point we turned inland and crossed over some mountains, coming on to the coast again further north. All along this route we could see out to sea the high peak of Stromboli, which I hear has been in eruption for some time. On the third day, Wed., just before reaching Belvedere the route took us inland and here we climbed for many miles round tortuous bends until we eventually crossed a narrow ridge connecting two peaks which rose up on each side just above us. They were about 6000 feet and were shrouded in mist and clouds. It was very cold up here and rather damp, the views were of course, grand. Far below lay the road along which the vehicles behind us were crawling till they were lost in the distance, beyond lay the sea, a shimmering silver and blue and in front was a deep gorge which dropped almost sheer away to a river bed which wound along to the sea. We descended by a pass and spent that night in a valley surrounded by high peaks. Most of the country here was well cultivated and all the people seem to be farmers. The women do a lot of heavy work and we passed many on the road carrying huge bundles on their head or their back. They are dressed very quaintly in red or black shirts and have them twisted up into a kind of bustle behind, some of them had a black hat, which looked something like a nurse's veil. Most of them were barefooted. The villages had not

been damaged at all and they didn't seem as if they had seen much of the war. The multitudes of ragged children cheered us, gave us the V. sign and asked for 'biskots' all in one breath as it were, while the men begged for cigarettes. On Thursday we reached the opposite coast at the N.W. corner of the Bay of Taranto. From here the road was very bad, it had been good up till here. The country was fairly flat and we followed the coast all day and stayed the night near Sarracene where we had a bathe and after dinner walked up a hill which had a very old watch-tower on the top, something like Old John.

22/10/43

We arrived just outside Taranto this afternoon where we picked up petrol. We had covered about 350 miles since landing at Reggio. During the morning we passed what looked like an old Roman remnant consisting of two rows of pillars, 15 in all and about 20-30 feet high. On Saturday we crossed the 'heel' and came onto the Adriatic where we followed the coast northwards. Early Sunday morning we passed through Bari a fairly large town and a port, which boasted trams, which I didn't see actually running, and some fair sized buildings, churches and etc. The people here seemed a bit more civilised than those further south and dressed better although the standard of cleanliness and hygiene was still pretty low. I noticed that the men don't seem to do much work. There were crowds of them in some of the towns just loafing about and staring at us. They are a very easy-going race on the whole and except the farmers, don't seem at all inclined to exert themselves sufficiently even to keep the streets or their houses reasonably clean. I think the English must be the most industrious race in the world, although I often wonder if they're proportionately better off for being like so many busy bees. Apart from the interest point of view, scenery and etc, I was a bit browned off with this trip. I slept out each night and as the dews were very heavy my blankets were damp. Our cookhouse provided us with breakfast and dinner each day, but for tiffin we were given 1 tin of bully and 2 pkts of biscuits which had to last for 5 days, and we would have been rather hungry if it had not been for the apples, oranges, nuts, figs etc which we were able to buy or barter for cigs. But on Monday we reached our journey's end about 40 miles north of Foggia. Foggia was the only town I saw which had been badly damaged and it was, or had been, one of the biggest and best which we had passed through. The Plains of Foggia, which had seen much fighting, were very flat and uninteresting, something like the Fens. Farms were dotted over here at regular intervals and must have produced much agricultural stuff. At night-time, there were millions of mosquitoes. So far, Italy has been very interesting. The people and the country will give me much to talk about when I get home. The fruit and vegetables are much the same as Sicily, figs, apples, oranges, lemons, bananas, nuts, onions and etc. although I think it is a little more fertile on the whole. There are many olive plantations, the trees being much older, bigger and closer together than in Sicily or Tunisia thus forming practically large olive forests. Even high up on the mountains there are many fir and oak and chestnuts, (the sort what are roasted) and plenty of pasture land everywhere which support large herds of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. The majority of these animals have bells tied round their necks. To be high up in the hills and hear the cattle bells tinkling and perhaps a couple of ragged bare-footed boys doing shepherd duty, while lower down in the valley a plough is being drawn by a pair of oxen forms a typical and very rural scene. Grapes are of course in abundance and the 'vino' industry was being carried on strongly. In some of the villages we passed through on the latter



part of our journey, great barrels about 6 ft high stood in the streets and the whole place smelt of wine, while on the roads were many carts taking in tubs full of grapes.

3/11/43

Our camp is situated on high ground overlooking the Adriatic. To the N.W. lies Termoli, which can be seen in the distance on the coast. This town was evacuated by Gerry, a few days 26. before we arrived here. All around is rolling hilly country. This morning a trip to San Severo was arranged for those who wished to buy anything to send home for Xmas. It was about 25 miles away on the road to Foggia. There were not many shops but I was able to buy a jumper and some slippers for Gwen. Some parts of the town were indescribably filthy, great piles of mud and refuse cluttered up the gutters and pavements. I am beginning to learn that the Italians are as bad as the W..s. Some of the children are dressed in rags and have sores and dirt all over them, it is a common sight to see a woman sitting at a doorstep with the head of one of their large families, in her lap, searching, like some she-ape scratching at their youthful offspring. I had a glass of vermouth and bought some nuts and we returned to camp in time for dinner. We have had a bit of rain since we have been here, which apart from damping our spirits, has damped our bivvies, blankets and most of our kit and turned the camp into a mass of mud. It is at times like these that I see the advantages of a dry climate as in N. Africa. There, each day was the same with a few exceptions, it was always fine and warm and existence in a bivvy was quite endurable, but now we all have colds, and I don't feel as fit as I did in Africa. When I return to my bivvy at night, to the little things that crawl, jump and bite, to damp, rough and dirty army blankets, it is then that I think most often of a fire and an easy chair, slippers and a hot cocoa and a bed with white sheets and a pillow so soft and a wife quite close. Roll on happy day, no more bully and Burma, no more cookhouse tea, no more pips and stripes, or guards at night, queues for V.s or irritating bugs and fleas. When time's my own and the world is sane, a world of proportionate work and leisure, pictures, theatres, cafes, trams and buses, music and walks in quiet lanes with rustling autumn leaves or Spring's buds and flowers. A little hand in mine, ceaseless, childish chatter and no more worrying for dear ones far away.

20/11/43

About a week ago we moved a few miles to our present site, which is right on the coast near some station buildings and one or two farmhouses. Our wagon is parked under a corrugated iron shelter near one of the farms. Here live two little girls named Anna Maria aged 8 and Lina aged 11. They have become very friendly during our short stay here and they come in and out all day, chattering away in Italian. They sell us nuts and vino and Mama does our washing and on occasions Lina even sweeps up for us. We provide them with tit-bits of buckshee grub and in return they have given us various dainties they have concocted. Although they are both of the usual peasant type they are remarkably bright and intelligent as well as being attractive with their black hair and big dark eyes. Needless to say, wishes have been expressed for about 5 or 6 years on to Lina's age, but then I am afraid our workshop would not be such a safe place for her. The weather still continues cold and wet with only a fine day occasionally, but the site is better than the last, as it is sandy ground mostly here and not so muddy as a little way inland. One day this week we were suddenly machine gunned by a lone Jerry plane, which opened fire almost over our wagon and shot off over the camp only a few feet above the ground. No damage was done, so the excitement it caused was almost worth it, I think, as it

served to break the monotony. The war news is good. On the wireless we have heard of the terrific bombing of Berlin and the Russian advance. Over here our bombers have been going backwards and forwards all day and we can sometimes hear the bombs dropping in the distance, while at night can be heard the continuous rumble of gunfire. 'On to Rome!' is the cry, I wish it were 'On to Home!'

27/12/43

We are still in the same site and very little fresh has happened in the last month. We are now in 180pdv tents, which protect us from the elements more efficiently than bivvies did. Our Xmas was fairly good under the circumstances. We had the day off and a good dinner. At night I took part in the concert, which was a great success and was held in the theatre at Serra Capriola. We gave a second performance on Boxing Day and afterwards went with Q Pring to some friends he had made and had an unforgettable supper. They appeared to be quite a

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good class family and were certainly not short of food. Numerous dishes were placed before us and pork, bread, cheese and a cross between an onion and a leek, sweetbreads, figs, nuts, apples and oranges, all of which were piled up in huge quantities. All this was washed down with pints of vino. One of our chaps could speak Italian well and he told us that this was only a hastily prepared snack and if only they had known we were coming they would have got us something to eat! Q. Pring told us that on his previous visits he had sat down at 7 and eaten till 10 and then been asked, "When are you going to have something to eat?" The Italians are notoriously big eaters. Rumours of going home are gathering in strength and frequency and I believe they are not without foundation. The weather here has at times, been atrocious. For three days after Christmas, for instance, a terrific gale blew and it was bitterly cold and still is, although the wind has dropped slightly. Apart from that we have had rain, hail and snow and intermittent sunshine.....

*This is the last of my Father's journals. He didn't finally go home until 1946. During that time he served in France and was in Germany after the war.*

*In 1955 he suffered two brain haemorrhages, which, we were told were a probable result of stress during the war.*

*He recovered from these, but with memory impairment.*

*He died on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1982 aged 65 after suffering from lung cancer for two years. An illness quietly and bravely borne.*