

WAR DIARY

Walter Kenneth Stevens

August 1941 — early 1944

About This Transcription

This document is a transcription of the handwritten war diary of Walter Kenneth Stevens, spanning three volumes from August 1941 to early 1944. Walter served in the British Army during the Second World War, departing Glasgow aboard the troopship SS Orontes on 28 August 1941.

Walter was the brother of Sergeant John Henry Stevens (Glider Pilot Regiment), killed in action on 24 March 1945 during Operation VARSITY, the Rhine crossing. Walter survived the war and later married Margaret, a serving nurse he met in late 1943, whose father John Leonard Notley had been killed at Ypres during the First World War.

Walter's trade was laboratory technician, trained at RAF Halton. He served at RAF Habbaniya and RAF Shaibah in Iraq, and travelled extensively through India, South Africa, and the Middle East.

Transcription method: Pages photographed and transcribed using Claude AI. Unclear words are marked [unclear]. Editorial notes are shown in [square brackets].

Volume 1

August 1941 — [end date to be confirmed]

Front Matter

Cover

Plain cardboard cover with red cloth binding. No text.

Title Page

Book 1

Something heavily scribbled out at the bottom — likely name and address, deliberately redacted by Walter.

Currency Reference Notes

Written by Walter before departure as a practical reference for the countries he would pass through. The inclusion of Iran suggests Walter knew or suspected his travels would extend beyond Iraq.

India.

1 Rupee = 1/6d.
16 Annas = 1 Rupee.
Iraq.
1 Dinar = £1.
1000 fils = 1 Dinar.
Iran.
128 Rials = £1.
1 Rial = 2d. (approx.)
10 Rials = 1 Teman.

Diary Entries

Page 1 — 28 August 1941

We arrived at Glasgow by train from Wilmslow at 1.30 pm on Friday 28th August 1941. Immediately we boarded the Orontes which lay in King George V dock. It was a handsome looking ship of the Orient Line with 2 funnels. On boarding we thought the quarters were extremely good as we passed the officers dining room; but on being shown our mess deck we were not so pleased & had the impression of being herded about like a flock of sheep & treated as galley slaves. Soon we were issued with hammocks after waiting in intense heat for them. Once they were obtained, the...

[Page continues]

Page 2

...next thing was — how to sling them? The night was spent quite comfortably & it was surprising how soon one got used to sleeping in them. The food was reasonably tolerable but we soon found out that oranges, tinned fruit, biscuits, chocolates & mineral water could be obtained from the canteen. Our ration of cigarettes was 100 per week, which lasted out fairly well. After a few days we were used to life aboard ship & then on Sunday 30th August 1941 the ship was led by tugs out of King George V dock & swung round...

Page 3

...into the Clyde. It was a wonderful sight & now we could see all the ship building yards which appeared to be in full swing & many ships were under construction. We steamed slowly up the Clyde amidst cheers from crowds on the river banks. After a few hours we were in the Hebrides where we anchored until the other ships were ready for the convoy. During the night of Monday 31st August 1941 we started on our long voyage & for the most part of us an unknown destination. When dawn broke on Tuesday we saw the west coast of Ireland...

Page 4

...which was the last piece of land we saw until we reached Freetown. During the next 13 days we made headway at the speed of 12 knots. Once out at sea we joined

a fairly large convoy escorted by the battleship Repulse & the aircraft carrier Furious. There were several other light cruisers, merchant ships & 5 troopers besides us in the convoy. I managed to secure myself a job in the hospital which helped to relieve the monotony while out at sea as there was no particular jobs for anyone while on board. After a few days [unclear] it became rough & this told us...

[Editorial note: HMS Repulse was sunk by Japanese aircraft on 10 December 1941 — just three months after Walter sailed in her convoy escort.]

Page 5

...that we were boarding on the Bay of Biscay. At 10.00 am on Saturday 13th September 1941 land was sighted & slowly we steamed into port at Freetown. When we docked, the first thing to catch our eyes were the funny little canoes in which the black men paddled around & came alongside the ship to dive for pennies which were thrown into the water. They were most amusing & could speak English fairly well but using one or two stock phrases such as "Any more?" & "Glasgow Tanners." We were not allowed ashore here but from the ship we...

Page 6

...could see a very pleasant view of the town situated amongst various types of trees with rather bushy undergrowth where in some parts it had been cut away & buildings in quite a modern style had been erected. At the back of the town, were hills stretching very high, so that sometimes when the clouds were low, the tops were quite covered. While in Freetown some film shows were given on board, but owing to the weather being variable they were abandoned on several occasions. In one instance a rather heavy gale blew up & ripped the...

Page 7

...screen completely off the frame & blew into the sea. On Thursday 18th September 1941 at 1.0 pm the ship slowly steamed out of Freetown harbour & within a few hours we were out at sea again & this was the last piece of land we saw until Cape Town was reached. It was a wonderful sight to see each ship in the convoy slowly steam through the boom with the reflections of them showing up clearly on the water. For the next 12 days we sailed along merrily & arrived at Cape Town 9.45 am on Tuesday 30th Sept. Just before arriving here, the convoy split into two...

Page 8

...parts, the other part going onto Durban. As we slowly steamed into the dock we had a wonderful view of the town with Table Mountain stretching up behind. We had 3 days shore leave here & everybody had a wonderful time. The South African people showed great hospitality & made us feel very much at home. As we left the ship at 1.0 pm there were many cars waiting to take us wherever we wanted to go. The town itself was very similar to that of any English town with buses, trolley buses, taxis, cinemas, restaurants, theatres etc. They were some beautiful...

Page 9

...shops & most things were cheaper than what they were in England. Parks & gardens were very beautiful & flowers of many varieties we do not get in England were very plentiful. There was no black out here & it was a wonderful sight to see all the shops & cinemas lit up once again. All of us were able to get a good feed

which for the most part was badly needed. Oranges were so cheap that they were almost thrown at you & had we gone in the right season peaches could have been obtained for 2/- a box of 100.

Page 10

It was grand to see a picture again after being at sea for a month. It was very intriguing to us to find everything so typically English. The South Africans are very patriotic & live up to their name in every respect. There were many sites to see & so many things to do but unfortunately in the small space of time it was impossible. Nevertheless everyone enjoyed themselves & felt very much better for the break. At 3.0 pm on Friday 3rd October 1941 we steamed out of Cape Town harbour leaving behind us some very pleasant memories of the days we were [unclear] there.

Page 11

This was the last part of our trip on the Orontes because at Bombay we disembarked. We picked up the other half of the convoy off Durban & sailed onto Bombay. The water in the Indian Ocean in parts was so calm that there was hardly a ripple. As we got to the equator once again the weather began to get very warm although the heat was not unbearable & a gentle breeze helped to keep things cool. Albatrosses & many varieties of birds flew round the ship until we left the African coast. Dolphin shoals were also seen.

Page 12

On Wednesday 22nd October 1941 we sailed into the bay at Bombay. At 10.30 am we dropped anchor & stayed there until the following morning. At 10.15 am the engines were started & slowly we steamed into the harbour. From the bay we had a wonderful view of the Gateway to India & many of the beautiful buildings which were very prominent. The weather was extremely warm & carrying a kit bag & haversack onto the quayside was no easy job. The perspiration poured off us so much that I literally wrung my shirt out as though it had just been washed. While lying in the...

Page 13

...bay we had the pleasure of seeing the Fleet which was on coast duty round this part of India. After depositing our kit bags in the customs offices we went outside & were directed to a service canteen where they gave us a cup of tea & a packet of cigarettes. In a short while we were marched down to our new ship which lay in 19 Alexandra dock. This was the Lancashire which was to take us to Basra. From the dock side she looked a terrible ship for the [unclear] especially compared with the one which lay astern of her, & which was one of the latest...

Page 14

...troopers called the Devonshire. Anyway on boarding her we found that everything was beautifully clean & far more spacious than the Orontes. Soon we sorted ourselves out & had a tea & a good wash which was so badly needed. During this time my pal Ben had contacted the Sgt in charge of the hospital & we volunteered for work there & so getting our own bunks which was very nice. After tea, passes were issued & we were allowed into Bombay. Several of us took a taxi

into the town & we wandered round looking at the shops & some of the most interesting peculiarities...

Page 15

...conditions. An ice cream parlour was sighted & we went in [unclear] out of the heat & were very refreshed when we came out. We tried to get into the pictures but they were full so wandered round & had a look at the Gateway to India & had our photos taken. As we came from the photographers an English gentleman came up to us & asked if he could direct us anywhere & we asked him if he knew where the services canteen was. He said he was going near there & so we walked along with him. We left him here and went into the canteen & had a beautiful fruit salad with ice cream at very cheap rate & which seemed to satisfy...

Page 16

...us most of all. After this we decided to stroll back to the ship & on the way, noticed the very odd ways in which some of these people sleep. Arriving back at the ship we had a few drinks in the saloon & went to bed.

Friday morning we arose after a very sound sleep & started work in the hospital. After an inspection at 20s, we were allowed into the town. We took a gharrie into the town & bought a few things we required. Ben went...

Page 17

...to see some people at his firm B.W. & Co & I went to find Major Mr Wastie whom I knew from Sutton. Eventually I found him but his wife & kiddie were away on holiday. Anyway he asked me to come to his flat for a drink at 6.30 as he was not free until then & I also had to be on duty at 7.30. After seeing him I wandered back to B.W. to find Ben & found him talking to the managing director, Mr Cook. When I came in, he introduced me & immediately asked me to tea & dinner. After seeing Major Wastie for a short while I returned to Mr Cook's...

Page 18

...service flat & we had a really grand evening with him & his wife, who were most interested to know exactly what was going on in England to-day. After a grand dinner & good chat about the home country we finally arrived back at the ship at 1.0 am with remembrance of a very enjoyable afternoon & evening.

There were one or two things that struck us in Bombay & they were: the difference between the Europeans & the Indian people. Most Europeans seemed reasonably well off & could afford black servants to...

Page 19

...wait on them & cars to drive about in, although petrol was rationed. Secondly, how very poor some of these Indians really are & the conditions in which some of them lived was absolutely unbelievable. At night times, as I say, you could see them lying in the streets wherever you went. Some of the buildings & streets were very beautiful & with the native costume it seemed really wonderful in some parts.

At 11 o'clock on 23rd October 1941 the Lancashire slowly pulled out of Alexandra dock Bombay & in a very short while we were at sea again. Ben & I...

Page 20

...took up our duties in the hospital aboard & carried on in much the same way as on the Orontes. We messed in the hospital & had Sgts mess food which was 100% better than the food we had been having previously. On Sunday morning we had egg & bacon for breakfast, which was the first egg we had since we left England. There was not a great deal of work to be done in the hospital but we found the time passed fairly quickly although none of us had any money as there was not an accountant office on board...

Page 21

...and the 10 Rupees we were paid in Bombay was an insult to us all. Previously, on the Orontes, all our English money had been taken off us, & so we were all left destitute. We all shared a grievance over this & wished we had played truant & not given the money in. On Wednesday 28th October 1941 we entered the river Euphrates. We had to travel 600 miles up this river & on the way we saw some of the country where Bible History was first started. Most of the way up the river we saw all the date...

Page 22

...palms, just as one sees them in pictures & these funny little mud huts in which the natives live. This was our first view of Iraq. The next thing we saw were the oil fields, which of course is what the country is so carefully guarded. They were certainly very large & apparently the field we saw is the third largest in the world. (unknown to us it was Abadan.) We were due to get in on Thursday, but the steering gear broke down, so we were delayed a day. Anyway we arrived on Friday afternoon & were off the ship fairly quickly. We marched through the town...

Page 23

...having dumped our kit bags on the quay side. After we had marched about a mile through the town 10 Army lorries were sighted at the side of the road & the black men signalled us to get in, which we did. Actually these lorries were nothing to do with the Air Force & were intended for a Light Infantry detachment which followed us off the ship & it was not until we arrived at the camp that we found out the mistake. Anyway these lorries started off & drove 15 miles across the desert to the Army camp...

Page 24

...at Shaibah. Immediately all our visions of an Air Force camp disappeared, for all we could see for miles were these canvas tents & sand. There were no brick buildings at all. We eventually arrived at the main point of the camp & it was then we realised the mistake had been made, but nothing could be done as there was no means of communication. So we were stuck out here in the wilds & called ourselves the "Legion of the Lost." We were allocated tents to sleep in & had to make the...

Page 25

...best of the two blankets we had with us. Although it is hot out here during the day, in the night it is very cold & so most of us did not get much sleep owing to the cold & also sleeping on the sand. Water was scarce & washing facilities, well, there just weren't any. We carried a petrol tin from the one & only stand pipe to the tent

which was for everybody to wash & shave in. The food was pretty terrible, being cooked in field kitchens, & nearly everything we ate had sand in it.

Page 26

The worst of it was, that no one had any money or cigarettes & the flies during the day were almost unbearable, so you could imagine none of us felt very happy with life, & I am sure if we had stayed there very very much longer than we did, some of the boys would have gone out of their minds. After two days, a W.O. from our camp at Shaibah showed up & everybody cheered when he arrived & were thankful that they did know of our existence up at the camp. Those of us in the medical branch were...

Page 27

...told we were going to Habbaniya & we really thought that we were going to get to our destination but little did we know there were more obstacles to overcome before we eventually arrived. Anyway we were all piled into our own lorries & taken off to our own camp at Shaibah which certainly was a great relief to finally get away from the Army. Incidentally, why I say this, is because the Air Force have the Army backed for accommodation, & I don't care what anyone says, I don't mind being...

Page 28

...called a "Brylcreem boy" if it means living in a little more comfort to what these Army people do out here. After another ride across the desert we arrived at our camp in Shaibah. We were all pleased to see brick buildings again & a few hangars which made it look more like a camp. Those of us going to Habbaniya were told we would move the next day but apparently later in the day a message was received to say they could not accommodate us & so we had to stay here indefinitely. This upset us slightly, to...

Page 29

...think we had come about 13 thousand miles & then were not wanted. On the other hand we were very thankful to get away from the desert. The accommodation & food here was a revelation to the last few days, & within a few hours of our arrival we were issued with a free packet of cigarettes & the same afternoon were paid 1 dinar 500 fils. We were billeted in brick huts & issued with palliasses & mosquito nets which were a godsend from the flies which were a terrible pest. The camp was about 15 miles away...

Page 30

...from the nearest town & the only means of transport was by taxi which was 1500 fils, & so everything had to be found on the camp. There were a few shops here such as a barber, cobbler, & a clothing shop which were all fairly cheap, so we were able to get alterations to our attire which were so badly needed. There was also a nice little cafe where we could get a good meal at any time of the day. There was the usual N.A.A.F.I. canteen with billiard & reading rooms & quite a nice swimming pool.

Page 31

There was also a cinema with a change of films every other night, so in a way we had a fair variety of things to occupy ourselves. As we had nothing to do we needed something to occupy our minds until our posting came through. In the cafe, the White House as we called it, there were some of these beautiful Persian carpets which were for sale & only £1 each. I would like to have bought one as in England they would be worth anything from £10-£15 with the tax on.

Page 32

...a favourite drink out here seemed to be Russian tea, which is tea with sugar & a lemon squeezed in — in place of milk. It makes a very nice thirst quenching drink. Although it was winter time, the flies were a terrible pest & worried us ceaselessly all day & every day. It took sometime to get used to them & we were only on the camp a few days before dysentery broke out. Measures were taken to try & stamp out these pests but still they persisted & seemed to multiply in their thousands. When the flies subsided during the...

Page 33

...evenings, the bats took their place. I had heard that bats were numerous out here but never thought they would be more numerous than the birds during the day. Mosquitos did not bother us a great deal, & the figures for malaria out here seemed to be quite low. A week has passed since our arrival here & we all hope to go soon as we are still doing nothing here & most of us by now are getting a bit stale. Unfortunately, the day before the party left for Habbaniya I fell sick with dysentery. I was soon carted off to hospital...

Page 34

...& put on fluids. For the first few days I felt like nothing on earth & really did feel ill. Anyway they kept me on fluids for a fortnight & towards the end of this time I began to feel extremely hungry & at long last they started me on light diet & then onto chicken diet, which was very tasty. Fortunately for me I only had bacillary dysentery & so my inside was not infected in anyway greatly. The hospital I was in, was staffed & run entirely by R.A.M.C. Although it was supposed to be an R.A.F. hospital. Nevertheless they...

Page 35

...were all very kind & did their best for the patients. It is 3 months now since we left England & so far I have received no letters. After being in hospital nearly a month I finally got my discharge from it on 6th Dec. & proceeded back to the camp at Shaibah. Posting to Habbaniya was arranged for us the following day. That night I spent in the officers ward in the sick quarters. At 5.30 pm on 7th Dec I reported to the guard room where a van picked me up & another fellow & took us to Margil. This was a...

Page 36

...journey of 15 miles across the desert passing through Basrah & Ashar on the way. The driver of the van was a native & never before have I seen a van move as fast as this one did. Many a time when we were going through the towns we had many narrow squeaks, & I was very pleased & relieved when we arrived at the station. Before leaving the camp, we were told that we were booked for a 2nd

class sleeping berth on the train but on seeing the R.T.O. were informed that all 2nd class were filled...

Page 37

...by officers, & so we had to travel 3rd class. These were carriages with seats very similar to those in tram-cars but did not move. During the night it got very cold & I was very thankful of my 2 blankets. The train stopped about every half an hour at stations right out in the blue & miles away from anywhere. As we were travelling 3rd class we could not get anything to eat & by the time dawn broke we were both tired & hungry. Neither of us got any sleep owing to these Arabs who kept getting...

Page 38

...on and off the train. We climbed onto the luggage racks & tried to get a few hours but had to keep one eye on our kit in case it was pinched. These stations we stopped at were more or less a little hut by the side of the rail but no platform of any description. Every time we got to a station natives would come round selling cakes & buns of various types but knowing the very crude method & the way these Arabs live we decided it was safer to leave them alone. We did manage to buy a couple of hard boiled eggs...

Page 39

...which we knew could not be contaminated in any way. This was all the food we had until we reached Baghdad. The train was due to arrive at Baghdad at 9.30 am but owing to the number of stops on the way & the casualness of the whole affair we did not arrive until 2.30 pm, just a matter of 5 hours late which seem to mean nothing to them at all! By this time we were both very hungry & asked the R.T.O. where we could get something to eat. He directed us to the Y.M.C.A. & when we got there, expecting...

Page 40

...a decent meal, all they could give us, was tea & buns. The Sgt who was arranging for our transport came in & told us that it would not arrive until 5.30, & so he took us to an Army camp where we were able to get a good feed. Our transport arrived in good time to take us [unclear] 55 miles across the desert to Habbaniya. Both of us were very pleased when we finally reached the camp at 7.30 & were both ready for a good night's sleep in comfort. I was shown to my billet which was cpls only & was issued with sheets, pillows &...

Page 41

...blankets with a nice soft bed to sleep in. It was a happy relief to feel that I had finally got to my unit & would be able to start work again. That night I slept like a top & in the morning was very excited to see the hospital & my laboratory. I was given a very warm welcome by the boys whom I knew & met one of my old pals from the lab at Halton who is in the lab there. After the first few preliminaries I went to the lab & met the Sgt in charge whom I had come out to relieve. He gave...

Page 42

...me a very warm welcome & showed me the laboratory. It was a finer place than ever I expected & very modern indeed. I was very thrilled about this & looked

forward to times when I should be able to get down to some studying again. The mess was extremely nice & the food easily the best I had since joining the R.A.F. The cpls had a separate table of their own & chickos to wait on us. Bread & butter was cut nicely — table cloths, tea in cups & made freshly in tea pots. For breakfast if you did not like what...

Page 43

...was on the menu, eggs could be obtained at the cost of [unclear] at 5 fils. This was the nicest mess I had ever been in. The billets were extremely good with spring beds, sheets & plenty of lockers for your clothes. It was grand to get my kit out once again instead of it getting all messed up in my kit bag. Each billet had a chicko who cleaned your buttons & boots each morning, made all the beds & kept the room generally tidy. In the afternoon he would bring round tea at about 3.00pm for those who wanted it. In other...

Page 44

...words he acted entirely as a batman to us. He did all our washing & everything all for 100 fils a fortnight. After being out in the desert & then at Shaibah it was a great relief to come to such privileges & comfort as this. Although this camp is right out in the desert & 55 miles from Baghdad, which is the nearest town except for a little village about 10 miles off called Tolounjit. This place was definitely unsafe to go to, because when the Iraqis tried to invade the camp in May, this village was raided & many valuables were...

Page 45

...secured by our boys, & of course the inhabitants have not forgotten it. These Iraqi tribesmen are very sleuth in their methods, & would not hesitate to kill anyone of us on sight in that village. Although as I say the camp is right out in the desert, it is supposed to cover an area of 20 sq. miles & believe me when I say it is very large. It is so large that we have our own taxi service, & when you want to go to another part of the camp, you just get on the phone & ring up for a taxi. There is a large cinema on the camp...

Page 46

...& the films were quite good although we did go to some good shows. There is also a large swimming bath as large as the Galleon, & a row of shops half a mile long which is called "Cheapside." These shops vary in all kinds & one can get most things you require at any of these. There are clubs of every description & kind — cricket, tennis, football, hockey, swimming, photographic, boxing, riding & many others. There is a large lake near by where the boys spend a great deal of their time yachting. The hospital even...

Page 47

...their own horses & we go for rides at 75 fils an hour. We have our own tennis courts and our own vegetable gardens. After settling down it was Christmas time & a fairly good programme was in store for us all. On Christmas Eve we had a fancy dress polo match on donkeys. I went dressed as a schoolgirl. All the boys had a very good laugh & some of the costumes which were made were extremely good & everybody enjoyed the afternoon. In the evening there was a sing song in the...

Page 48

...canteen. Christmas day was patients day & we went round the wards doing our best to entertain them. In the evening I was invited to a party at the Buffalo Lodge which was very enjoyable. Boxing day was our day & I went for a lovely walk in the morning & played billiards & ping pong in the afternoon. Our dinner was at 6.0 pm & as usual the officers served us. This dinner was the best I had had in the R.A.F. We started off with soup, fish followed with chips & sauce, then turkey, mashed & roast potatoes, green peas & stuffing.

Page 49

...Christmas pudding. Beer flowed freely & there were plenty of cigarettes, almonds & raisins, oranges & bananas. Altogether it was a very enjoyable dinner & well cooked. After dinner we adjourned to the canteen for a concert given by members of the camp concert party which was very enjoyable. Following this we had a sing song & the officers came along & joined us. It was very good fun & they called on quite a number of them to sing songs which they did readily. As usual...

Page 50

...beer flowed freely & by the time the party broke up it was early hours of the morning. And so Xmas passed away & quite an enjoyable time was had by all in spite of the fact that we were so far away from home. I had been on the station 3 weeks by now & up to the present I had received quite large helpings of mail, although some people had not received any for months.

On Monday 5th January 1942 I was initiated into the Buff Lodge with all due ceremony. This proved, after...

Page 51

...the same manner as we do. That is to say, met a girl & start courting her & then get married. He says to his father that he wants a wife & his father goes round to people he knows & asks them if their daughter is for sale. He does not see her but ascertains how old she is & whether of good breeding. Then he takes his report back & tells his son stating the price they require for her. Usually 50, 60 or 80 dinars. If the girl is of exceptionally high class they may go over the 100 dinars.

Page 52

...a few weeks to be a most interesting and entertaining evening every Monday.

Time rolled passed & things went on in the usual way. Playing plenty of sport & quite enjoying life on the whole. Mail still arriving fairly regularly.

On Friday 20th Feb. 1942 Ben & I managed to get a week-end in Baghdad. At 3.0 pm the gari arrived at the hospital reception room for us & we piled in. It was a terrible day & a dust storm was just beginning. As we passed out of the main gates of the camp, both of...

Page 53

...which we thought had not be driven over before. Again we made a detour & went round & round in circles, eventually arriving back at the same place where we had left the lorry. All of us looked very bewildered & amazed & stopped again for further consultations. After more shouting & signs we made another effort. Petrol was running short & we had visions of sleeping on the desert all night.

After travelling for a while we came across an old Iraqi shepherd with his lantern & an old...

Page 54

...stick & who is commonly called a "Desert Rat" in that part of the world. After consultations with the driver, Ben decided it would be better if he came with us & directed the way. Luck was with us, he knew every inch of the desert & in a short time we found the main Baghdad road again. We were very grateful for his help & Ben gave him a handsome tip of 250 fils. He was most grateful & left us feeling pleased we had done him a good turn as well as he — us, as he was very ragged &...

Page 55

...stunk most profusely. After we had left him at the little village, we found out from the driver that he lived there, so the laugh was on us. Nevertheless, for the experience & putting us on the right road again, it was well worth it. This so called desert rat was one of the filthiest old men I have ever seen in my life. His clothes were very ragged & old, & by the aroma which came forth, we imagined he had never seen a bath. Soon we arrived in Baghdad & in a short while we got rid of all the sand.

Page 56

...which by this time [sandstorm] almost covered us. Ben had already booked us a room the previous week & after having tea we adjourned to our room. It was beautifully situated at the back of the hotel, with a balcony facing the river. We also had our own bathroom. Incidentally the name of the hotel was the Tigris Palace & was supposed to be exclusive to officers & S.N.C.O.s but that did not worry us. After a good clean up, we went to dinner. We had not been seated a dinner long...

[Editorial note: This is the page photographed at the start of this project — the first page Walter's diary was ever transcribed from.]

Page 57

...when a young Lt in the R.A. walked in & whom I recognised immediately as an O.C. & with whom I was at Cranleigh, years ago. We had a very excellent dinner & afterwards went to the pictures as the sand had turned into rain. The following morning we woke at our leisure & after breakfast went for a walk up the main street to have a look at the shops. They are most difficult to describe & are best done so by photos, but believe me when I say they are the dirtiest & filthiest I have ever seen. Nevertheless...

[Editorial note: Walter mentions Cranleigh School in Surrey — placing his pre-war education there.]

Page 58

...some of them contain articles which are of extreme value in England & here, are comparatively cheap. After spending sometime at the photographers & obtaining a few photos we went to the bazaar for which Baghdad is so famous. Although these shops are very quaint they had some beautiful stuff in them & many things I would like to have bought but would be impossible to get home. Some of the rugs

we saw selling at 15 dinars would bring at least £50-100 in England. Not only these but silk,...

Page 59

...& many other things were of very good value. These tiny little shops are peculiar to this part of the world & hundreds of them are all jammed together in a very confined space. They go by trades & you go up various alley ways to find certain articles. After wandering around we returned to the hotel for lunch and afterwards set out for the mosque at Cadhimain but the weather was against us, so we returned to the Suq to have a look at the shops in that part of the bazaar. We did not find so much of...

Page 60

...interest here as they were mostly eatables & looked more like a cheap market than anything. That evening we tried another of these funny old cinemas & saw quite a good show. Sunday morning was beautiful & the sun shone through the windows in our bedroom quite early in the morning. After breakfast, we visited St George's Church which is reputed to be one of the oldest in this part of the world & afterwards to the museum. Here we saw many old reliques, some of which dated back to...

[Editorial note: Walter has a photograph of himself standing outside a forces cinema in Baghdad — to be added here when located.]

Page 61

...2000 years B.C. After lunch, we took Lt Mummery & two other officers down river street to see the Amardah workers. Some of the silver ware was really wonderful craftsmanship & one was very tempted to spend plenty of money here. We passed from the Amardah workers to the bazaar once more for a final look round, afterwards returning for tea. After dinner our things were packed ready & at 8 o'clock the gari arrived to take us back to camp. We had a good run back & arrived in good time.

Page 62

...both feeling very refreshed after an enjoyable week-end. Work continued in the same routine day after day. On 29th March 1942 a new draft arrived here. Amongst them an old friend of mine from Halton, Cpl Hopps, who joined Ted & myself in the lab. We were very pleased to see him & seemed to add a new interest to life. Warmer weather approaching. 3rd April great panic. One case of smallpox isolated & consequently the whole unit vaccinated & all billets fumigated. On Saturday 11th April 1942 I...

Page 63

...was posted to Bassah. I might add that this shook me very much as I thought that I should not move from Habbaniya. At 2.00pm the gari arrived to take me to Baghdad & so once more on that long & dreary journey to Margil. Feeling very despondent I waved goodbye to Ted & Hoppy as the gari moved off. We arrived in Baghdad in plenty of time for the train which gave me the chance of getting a good feed. Tried to get a second class carriage on the train but as usual it was impossible...

Page 64

...anyway I got in with some Army Sgts who were also travelling south. They were a good crowd & we had some fun together. We managed to get into the dining car for a cup of coffee & for once the dining car attendant showed a little generosity & let us sleep there until 5.00 am so we could get a little sleep in the arm chairs. We appreciated this as it was totally impossible to get any in the carriage. At 5.00 they woke us up & gave us tea. The train arrived punctually for once in a while & the gari...

Page 65

...soon arrived to take us up to the camp. Went up to the sick quarters & met a dispenser who left Habb. a few weeks previously. He showed me the lab, which was only one small room with very little apparatus. Then I met S/Sgt Freyd whom I had heard so much about as a pathologist & who was acting as S.M.O. He greeted me cordially, & then to my great disappointment he told me that I was taking over the duties of Sanitary Assistant. I explained my position to...

Page 66

...him but unfortunately he seemed to think that it went hand in glove with lab work. The following day I met the F/Sgt who was in charge of Sanitary work for S. Iraq, & I explained the position to him & he told me he had got an A.C. to do the job. The fellows in the Sick Quarters were a grand crowd of chaps & if it had not been for them I should have been very miserable. F/Sgt Walker showed me round the camp & it was then that I realised how true the stories are about Basrah being one of the...

Page 67

...most deadly places for malaria. The Sick Quarters itself was very nicely situated on the waterfront & we could sit & watch the boats come & go as we often did. Luckily the boys managed to find me a bed in the sick quarters otherwise I should have had to sleep in one of the hangars, & I can assure anyone that this was not at all pleasant owing to the fact that they were swarming with rats & the chances of plague setting in could quite easily be foreseen. Although this station had many...

Page 68

...disadvantages, on the other hand it had advantages. Unlike Habbaniya there was not a great deal of amusement on the camp with the exception of a cinema. But it was quite easy to get into Asher by car as it was only 5 miles away. Asher was quite a unique little town & the creeks which run up in various places were called the "Venice of the East." From the photos they look very picturesque, but in summer they dry up & all that remains is a terrible smell. The bazaars here were very...

Page 69

...similar to those in Baghdad & after visiting them a few times the Arabs got to know you quite well. There was one certain Amardah worker here who was a genuine chap & who knew us quite well. He spoke English fairly well & had been to the World's Fair in New York. Every Sunday evening a special motor launch went to Asher for those going to church. We used to go to this grand old church every Sunday evening & it was very interesting going down the river.

In this part of Iraq we...

Page 70

...were able to study the life of the natives more so than anywhere else. The more you got to know about them the more intriguing were their habits. Their modes of living were so primitive & unless seen by oneself it is almost unbelievable that such conditions exist to-day. The women all wore these black cloaks which covers them completely. The history behind it is, that they are only to be seen by their husband. When a man wants to get married he does not go about it in...

Page 71

...gale was blowing which did not help matters greatly. The tent we were in, had a few forms which were to be our beds for the night. It was obvious that we were not going to get much sleep so some of us walked into the main camp & I went to the pictures. After a few very restless hours on forms we were suddenly awakened at 3.0 am Tues: 1st Sep. & proceeded to breakfast. At 4.0 am the lorry arrived & the party of 12 of us piled in with our rations. We proceeded to Tanouma & across the ferry & then to start for our 84 mile...

Page 72

...After this procedure the mother of the daughter interviews the girl herself & brings her report back. The fellow then decides that he can afford it & hands over the money to his prospective father-in-law, who with this money has got to buy a house for his daughter & any presents he thinks she ought to have. It is not until the marriage ceremony is over that the bridegroom sees his wife when they retire to a room by themselves. The bride is confined to the house for 7 days & on no account is...

Page 73

...is she allowed to come out. Now that he is married this fellow has to support all his relations, that is to say his father- & mother-in-law & and brothers or sisters in law who are not married & they all live in the same house. How they manage amazes me because the majority of Arabs only earn about 100 fils (2/-) a day. That is the way they carry on & the majority of them seem to be quite happy. A divorce suit is one of the most difficult things imaginable & the only satisfactory way is...

Page 74

...seems is for a man not to shave for a week & then make violent love to his wife. One day I had a job of going in the ambulance to fetch a patient who was a genuine rabies & in convulsions from one of these native villages. When we arrived the ambulance could only get so far owing to a wide stream & we had to walk about 350 yards through these narrow roads & between old shambles of rushwork houses to get to his house. This was the first glimpse of real native life I had had & it was not until then that I realised...

Page 75

...in what filthy conditions these natives lived. It would be impossible to put into words the sight I saw but to describe it as best I can, the least to say about it would be that the over-crowding act of England did not come into the picture.

There were rows & rows of these little rushwood houses in which it seemed at least a dozen people in each one. When anyone is taken ill, they do not believe in medicine although they do not mind us taking anyone away to hospital as long as he...

Page 76

...comes back cured but their belief is that if he goes to the big mosque in Baghdad he will get better. Eventually we arrived at his house where he was lying on the ground being held down by four people with about 20 others standing & watching. As we made our way in most of the women & children started crying because we were taking him away. The next thing to do was to get him out of the house which was no easy task. Once we did get him out we were surrounded by crying kiddies & women & the procession started back...

Page 77

...to the ambulance. Anyone could imagine what difficulties we were working under with people surging round the stretcher & trying to hold this fellow down. Eventually we came to the stream & as there were only 2 planks across it I had vivid imaginations of everyone going into the water, a thing which I did not relish knowing that this water was highly polluted but which they used for every purpose. We got to the centre of this narrow bridge & the fellow started out of his fits & it was...

Page 78

...very surprising how everyone kept their balance. All the natives wanted to tip him in the water to cool him off. At last we got to the ambulance & got him in much to our relief & started on our way to the hospital. A few days later we heard that this fellow had refused an operation & had gone to the mosque. Whether he lived or not we never heard. It may be worthy of note that this job was carried out in the heat of the afternoon & the temperature in the shade was well over a 100, so anyone can guess how...

Page 79

...the perspiration just flowed out of us. As I have said the S.Q. was situated on the waterfront & we could watch every ship dock & depart. During one week in May 1942 we watched no less than 6 troopships dock, each one full of troops. It was easy to see from this that troops were literally poured into the country. Not only troopships but as many if not more cargo ships arrived, each carrying at least 10 Boston planes from America. The Lease & Lend Act seemed to be in full swing in this part of...

Page 80

...the world as far as we could see. It was interesting to note that these ships flew flags of many different nationalities.

During this month H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester came & inspected this part of Iraq. He inspected the Levies but did not come near us, although he saw everyone at Shaibah. In the officers mess there no officer under the rank of S/Ldr was permitted in the mess during the luncheon. I thought this rather an insult & so did many of the officers concerned. Talk about fuss & ceremony. I had to take...

Page 81

...a [VD/nervous] patient to hospital that morning & believe me it was very difficult to get through as all roads were closed & military police stopped all traffic. One Iraqi officer stopped the ambulance & told us we could not proceed any further because His Royal Highness was on an inspection. I told him that I am sure the Duke would not stop us from taking a patient who was seriously ill to hospital, and after a lot more arguing he let us through. The Duke came up the river by night & was...

Page 82

...escorted by 2 high powered speed boats manned by the Navy who each had a Bren gun, & their orders were to shoot if anyone got in their way. Anybody would have thought they were guarding something which was priceless.

As the summer wore on so the heat rose but the thermometer never showed more than about 120° in the shade, although the humidity was as high as 80° on several occasions, & this, as anyone may realise is very high.

After a great deal of moaning I managed to get stuff for my laboratory, but all the same I was very limited.

Page 83

...nevertheless I got off the sanitation duties & settled down quite well & after a while I found plenty of work with out any sanitation. As I have stated previously the Sick Quarters was situated almost on the waterfront with quite a pleasant outlook & after a time one got accustomed to the routine habits of life on this station. It varied considerably from Habbaniya, where there your life was centred entirely on your unit & in the camp itself. Here life is more or less centred in the Sick Quarters, going to the pictures sometimes...

Page 84

...during the week & Ashar on Saturdays to go round the bazaars & have ice creams & a dinner at a café. Sunday was usually a restful day & in the evening we went to Ashar on the launch, to church. During the hot weather nearly everybody sleeps outside in the open & one Tuesday morning a funny coincidence occurred. An inspection parade is held on the square every Monday morning & we being medical are exempt from it. This sick quarters is very near the square & our beds in full view. On this particular morning our chico did not wake...

Page 85

...us up in time & we overslept, to be awakened by the W/O's voice yelling at the men on the square. We knew that if he saw us we should probably have to go on parade in future which was not our idea at all. The only thing we could do was to lie inside our mosquito nets which acted as good protection and was too far away for him to see into. When the chance came one by one of us (4 in all) slipped in to Sick Quarters and all managed it without being seen. I was the last one & just before I was about to go my...

Page 86

...bearer came out & stood with a mug of tea in his hand for me. I told him repeatedly to go away but he was too dumb to understand. By this time I had no

alternative but to make a rush for it and as luck would have it, got into S.Q. unnoticed.

15th July 1942 I received the bad news that Joan had died. It knocked me cold & I had to take things very steadily for a couple of days as I was afraid of ending up with a nervous breakdown, but I recovered slowly & tried hard to forget it but her memory always remained. The M.O. said I could have a holiday in...

Page 87

...Tehran but up to the moment nothing had come of it.

On Wednesday 29th July, 5 of us from the Sick Quarters were invited to dinner by the Matron of the Maudie Hospital which is a big hospital about 5 miles from here. Miss Mullows knew most of us here when we were at the old hospital (now taken over by the Army). I was the only new one in the party. We had a lovely dinner & bags of iced drinks at her house. Afterwards playing cards until about 11.30 eventually ringing up for...

Page 88

...our ambulance to come & pick us up. It was a most enjoyable evening & made such a nice change.

Now that I had my laboratory once more, although the work was fairly limited, I had plenty to keep me very busy. The time seemed to pass very quickly & I felt much happier, although there was always that longing to get back to Habbaniya to a big lab where the work is more varied & interesting. Still I suppose I ought not to be too greedy & thank God for small mercies & for a lab to work in at all.

Page 89

30th August 1942. It seemed hardly a year ago to-day I sailed from England & on the whole the time has flown by quickly, & when I look back during this past year quite a number of interesting things have taken place, most of which I have noted. To-day I was notified that my leave had been granted & that I was to start on the morrow for Tehran. It was a very pleasant surprise for me as I had not expected to go for another fortnight owing to the fact that one of my pals from the S.Q. was already on leave & it is not often they allow...

Page 90

...two of us away at once. Anyway at 3.0 pm on 31st Aug the gari picked us up for the first part of about a 700 mile journey. We proceeded to Shaibah transit camp where we stayed the night to pick up the convoy to Ahwaz in the morning. The journey to Shaibah was one of the bumpiest I have ever experienced, riding in an open waggon & on one occasion we were nearly thrown out. Shaibah transit camp was a very grim place but as we were only staying a night it did not worry us greatly. It was just a mass of tents and a fairly big...

Page 91

...ride across the desert. When we got across the ferry, the convoy formed up — about 10 lorries in all. The first part of the journey across the desert was not too bad and we made very good headway. About half way we had a break & stopped for a spot of food. The last 20 miles was the grimest journey I have ever done in my life & by the time we arrived at Ahwaz were absolutely covered in sand & felt

very much worse for wear. Arriving at the station we were told that we could not get the train until the following day, but...

Page 92

...after a bit of wangling we managed to get them to put an extra coach on the train that was going that day. Anyway the train did not leave until 7.0 pm so we had about 7 hours to wait. We found out where we could get showers and a shave and made ourselves at home on the station. If we had been in England anyone would have stared at us but in this part of the world it is quite a common thing to see people lying about in the most obscure places. Anyway we tried to get some food in a canteen & they had run out by the time we got there...

Page 93

...so we had nothing else to do but to get out our own rations & scrounge some hot water for tea. The fellow in charge of the canteen tried to charge us 2 rials each for hot water but we were wise to him & got it free in the end. He was a real swindler we found out later but we were too smart for him to catch us. It was here that most of us tried our first "Sinalco" which is quite a nice drink made from the juice of pomegranates. It seemed a long wait until our train arrived & we were very pleased when it did, seeing that we had a 24 hour journey to Tehran.

Page 94

...At 7.30 pm we slowly steamed out of Ahwaz station for a long journey through the mountains. The carriage we were in was very similar to that of any English corridor train but the backs of the seats pulled up making 4 bunks. We managed to get a decent dinner of chicken on the train which was very welcome. Soon we made up the beds and prepared for sleep. This was the first time I had really slept on a train & did so very effectively, awaking the next morning very refreshed. On looking out of the window we saw some wonderful scenery &...

Page 95

...were now right up in the mountains. It was a real treat to see green fields and pastureland again & had it not been for the high mountains one would not know it was not England. This was the scenery for the rest of the journey. We travelled on all day & from time to time running up & down to the engine getting hot water for tea. Since starting the journey we had changed engines & towards the evening we had to go up a very steep incline, & the engine would not take it. We got out & went up to the engine & spoke...

Page 96

...to the driver who was an Englishman. We learnt then that the whole railway system had been taken over by the Army & fellows who in peacetime were engine drivers & who are now in the R.E.s were driving the trains. He took us into the cab of the engine & explained why it would not take the gradient. Apparently the engine had been transformed from a coal burner to an oil burner for economic reasons, & this was its first tryout. Owing to the overload she just would not take it. I asked him what we were going to do & he said...

Page 97

...there was nothing he could do until the coal train arrived & which was due to pass this point in about 2 hours time. Sure enough it came along on time & we switched one of the engines over with ours & tried to make up for lost time. It was no good, but we arrived at Tehran at 12.0, 4½ hours late. Tehran was the first modern station I had seen since leaving England & reminded one of Waterloo or Victoria, but the point that struck us was the big Swastika painted on the stairway. We found out later that the whole...

Page 98

...atmosphere in Tehran was more pro-German than British but those who were pro-British were the people in responsible positions & the ones that mattered. The gari was waiting outside the station to take us to the rest camp at Quilchek about 6 miles outside Tehran. Owing to all the tents being full we were unable to move in until the morning when other fellows were moving off. Anyway we got down to it in the dining hall & were soon asleep. I woke up early in the morning & felt quite cold. It was grand to feel cold for a change instead...

Page 99

...of always being hot. Soon we were up & after breakfast moved our stuff to places in the tents where people had just moved out. After sorting out I found John Sanders & we soon got together in a very short time. The camp consisted of about 20 tents situated in most beautiful surroundings of the British Legation. If one could imagine a large estate in England with plenty of large trees, grass & beautiful lanes on which shadows are cast by rays of the sun through the trees, the site would be admirably described. A better & more beautiful...

Page 100

...place would be very difficult to find. One end led into the grounds of the British Legation where several lovely houses were situated & the other end led out onto the main road just at the foot of the mountains. John soon showed me all around & took me to the house owned by Mrs Smith & where all of us were invited to sit in her lounge & read & listen to the wireless, also use her iron for our clothes which was always available in the garden. She was a very dear lady & tried to make the boys at home as much as possible.

Page 101

The rest of the morning was spent in smartening up & ironing some of my clothes which had got creased up in my kit bag. As usual in the afternoon most people have a short siesta which I have found out, is very prevalent in this part of the world. At about 3.30 John & I caught the bus into town. It is worthy of note that these buses are single deckers but they are never satisfied until it is packed so that everybody is jammed in like sardines. My first real glimpse of the town was very impressive. With the exception of South Africa...

Page 102

...it was the most European town I have seen in this part of the world. The streets were very wide, large shops, traffic lights, buses & the most modern American cars. It was a real treat to see proper picture houses & shops properly decorated again. Tehran is noted for its beer gardens which I must say are very fascinating and unless actually seen are very difficult to describe, but an idea may be

gathered by this description. Imagine a garden with small trees dotted about and tables laid — either at one side or one end is an alcove and a platform...

Page 103

...where the band plays & in front a small piece cut out for those who wish to dance. In some of these beer gardens they have some fine cabarets & shows which I will deal with later. Anyway I felt very hungry & John took me to the United Services Club which is especially for British troops & we had a first class feed. The food was really excellent & so enjoyable. This was all run by voluntary workers, most of whom were well to do English women whose husbands were government officials & their part was more or less the...

Page 104

...same as the W.V.S. in England. The only thing was that the food was 100% better as I am sure half of it could not be obtained in England. This place was extremely well patronised by the troops & everybody thought how extremely kind these people were to us, & no praise high enough can be given to these ladies who help to make our life enjoyable out here. After we had a very good feed we had our shoes cleaned by a bootblack as nearly everybody does. Never before have I seen a bootblack get such a wonderful polish, & when he finished my shoes...

Page 105

...they shone so brightly that they might easily be mistaken for patent leather. We strolled round and had a look at the shops & then I noticed the number of troops there were. Besides quite a large number of British troops there were thousands of Polish Army soldiers and A.T.S. girls. Of course there were large numbers of Iranian soldiers & airmen & quite a few Russians. Never before have I seen quite a galaxy of uniforms. The striking feature about these Polish A.T.S. girls was that the majority of them were very fat & chubby built & looked very healthy girls. After walking round we went to the...

Page 106

...Café Continental which is one of the very high class beer gardens & saw an excellent concert given by the Polish soldiers. Although we could not understand the language the music was very good indeed & they had a first class orchestra. Quite a number of the items were entirely acting with incidental music & which of course everybody could understand. Owing to a curfew at 10.30 & every person in military uniform had to be off the street unless a late pass was obtained, we had to leave the concert before it finished. Nevertheless it was...

Page 107

...most enjoyable & I returned back to camp with a satisfied feeling that once again I was living in a civilized world & not continually amongst a crowd of natives.

Friday 4th Sept. In Persia, Friday is the Sabbath day & most people have the day off, the same as we do in England, & instead of taking the car out & going down to the sea for the day they go up into the mountains. John & I decided we would go also & got our rations for the day, starting off about 8.30 am. As we were only about 2 miles off the foot of the mountains we walked all the way. It...

Page 108

...was the first time for ages that I had done any real walking & after a little while I started to get tired but soon got my second wind & was alright then. After about an hour we reached a village at the foot of the mountain, called Darband. (picturesque) It was one of the most picturesque places I had ever seen. The gardens, trees, waterfalls & scenery were simply magnificent & the buildings all very modern. We rested here & then went on. The scenery now was some of the most beautiful I have ever seen in my life, amidst rocks & boulders there were...

Page 109

...waterfalls, large & small, caves, alcoves, trees, rock plants & everything which makes these surroundings so wonderful. It was very rocky & fairly steep & the climbing not at all easy. After another 2 hours we reached one of the small peaks but I am afraid a very long way off from any of the large ones. Anyway we were satisfied with our progress & sat down & had some food. We decided not to go any further as we did not want to overdo it & so we started off back to camp. Coming down was easier going than...

Page 110

...& when we got to Darband, managed to get a bus back to camp. After a short rest and a wash and change we set off for the town & went to the Services Club for a good meal. As we were walking round, just by chance I bumped into an old friend of mine, Arthur Cassett who was stationed here at the Aircraft Factory & whom I had not seen for 2½ years since we were rookies together at Manston in March 1940. The opportunity was too good to lose, & so I arranged to meet him on Sunday night after the service. We left Arthur &...

Page 111

...his pal & went to the Charanfoul, another beer garden, which incidentally is the most popular because all these Polish A.T.S. girls go there, and had a drink & then went to the pictures & saw Pinocchio. The picture house we went in was as good as an English one & we had an excellent seat upstairs. It was a real treat to sit in a decent cinema once more. After the pictures there was just time for a coffee & then catch the bus back to camp.

Saturday 5th Sept. In the morning I made full use of Mrs Smith's iron, & washed...

Page 112

...& ironed quite a few clothes. Had a good rest in the afternoon & at 4.0 pm set out with John for the town. First call to the Services Club for a good feed. Then we had a wander round, paid a short visit to the Charanfoul & then decided to go & see a cabaret at the Astoria, which is perhaps the most aristocratic beer garden. We had just taken our seat here & ordered beer when the Chinese Foreign Minister walked in. The cabaret was quite good but not as good as some I have seen in England. We just managed to see the end of...

Page 113

...it & catch the bus in good time.

Sunday 6th Sept. There was a church service at the American Mission at 11.15. John & I went down to it. It was held for the forces & conducted by an Army padre. The hymns & psalms were all ones we knew & so it went down very well. It was too late to go back to the camp for lunch so John & I popped into the Café Europe or Polish Café as it is called & had a very nice lunch there. After lunch we returned to camp, had a rest & came out again & had a high tea at the Polish...

Page 114

...café again. We went to the American Mission again at 6 o'clock & heard an American service — this was the first one of its kind I had ever heard. After the service I met Arthur but he had some friends with him & as John was with me, I decided to meet him on Tuesday as John was going back. We had a quiet evening then, & had a spot of supper & returned to camp.

Monday 6th Sept. This was John's last day with me but as usual in the morning we did a spot of washing & ironing. After a siesta we set off for the Services Club and...

Page 115

...the Services Club and as always had a good feed. Afterwards we wandered round the town for a little while, eventually finishing up at the Karanfoul. It was fairly packed here that evening with troops but we managed to find a table. Thought I would have a dance with one of these Polish girls which I did but my progress was impeded by the fact that she could neither speak English or French. I tried one or two of them but found very few who could talk English, so gave it up as a bad job — anyway they are all very poor dancers! After a little while at the Karanfoul we decided...

Page 116

...to finish off the evening at our little coffee shop. It is worth of note that the coffee in Persia is really excellent & the best I have tasted since leaving England.

Tuesday 8th Sept. John left for Basrah early in the morning. A party was organised to visit the one and only cigarette factory in Iran, the director of which was Mr Smith. We set off about 10 o'clock & had to get about 3 miles the other side of the town. At first we found it difficult to make anyone understand where we wanted to go but luckily found somebody who...

Page 117

...spoke French & who directed us most of the way. A bus took us most of the way & brought us to the native part of the town where we had to walk about ½ mile. It seemed incredible that within 3 miles of a, shall we say modern European town, there could be a native village with the same old filthy habits, stinking shops & untidiness of dress that I have seen so much of at Basrah. Anyway we trudged through these dirty streets & came to what seemed to be a better part and a sort of ending to a main arterial road. Laying back...

Page 118

...from the road was an enormous building in its own grounds. This masterpiece of architecture (obviously German design) looked more like a hotel than anything but actually was the offices of the factory. Behind this great building was the

factory & we were shown all round it by the manager who was an Iranian but had studied in England for 3 years & spoke very good English. This factory had some 3,500 employees & their own hospital, dentist & a marvellous canteen. As I have said before it was very modern & they turned out quite good...

Page 119

...cigarettes, but naturally did not have as many varieties to choose from as we do. Nevertheless they made two good grades of cigarettes & one poor grade which most of the natives buy. Cigars were also made and quite reasonable too. The price of both cigs. & cigars was ridiculously low compared with any English brand, their price being about 4d for 20 cigs. After spending the better part of the morning wandering around this enormous factory we felt quite tired & caught a bus back into the town & had a snack in the NAAFI...

Page 120

...and then returned to camp for a rest in the afternoon. In the evening I arranged to meet Arthur & we decided to go for a short walk around the town. Then he went to collect his photos & I thought it so good I had mine taken also. After this we went to the Karanfoul & had a good talk about old times, leaving in time to catch the bus back to camp.

Wednesday 9th Sept. Woke up feeling grim — glands & a sore throat, so stayed in bed all the morning. As I was not meeting Arthur, did not hurry myself but got up late in the...

Page 121

...afternoon & after a wash & shave I felt better & ambled slowly down to the Services Club for the usual feed, afterwards went to the pictures & saw a film, but it was in French & I was rather bored with it & fell asleep in the pictures. Had a coffee & returned to camp.

Thursday 10th Sept. Went down to Mrs Squires' house in the morning, wrote a letter & listened to the wireless. It was grand lying on the big settee out in her loggia & just listening to the birds in the trees. Very pleasant morning. As usual went to the Services...

Page 122

...Club for dinner in the evening, & met Arthur & went to a Polish concert at the Astoria. This was the second one I had seen & I enjoyed it more than the first. Unfortunately we had to leave early in order to catch the bus.

Friday 11th Sept. Spent a very pleasant morning at Mrs Squires' house, wrote my diary & a letter. Met Arthur at 2.30 and went to the Olympic Games Stadium & had a look round. It was a marvellous place and one of the finest stadiums I have ever seen. After a walk we went to the Services...

Page 123

...Club & had a feed & had some very good games of table tennis. As usual we paid a visit to the Karanfoul & finished the evening off by going to the pictures.

Saturday 12th Sept. Went down to Mrs Squires' house in the morning and listened to the wireless. Went out with one of the boys in the evening & stayed at the Continental to see a cabaret. Not very good.

Sunday 13th Sept. Had a lazy morning in bed. Came into the town about 5 o'clock & went to the Polish Café for a meal & then met Arthur and went to the American Mission for...

Page 124

...the American Service. Afterwards we were invited to one of the American ladies' houses where we had sandwiches & coffee & then hymn singing afterwards.

Monday 14th Sept. Wrote up my diary & did a bit of washing in the morning. In the evening as usual went to the Services Club & then to the pictures.

Tuesday 15th Sept. Went down to Mrs Squires' house & listened to the wireless & read some papers. Met Arthur in the evening, went for a walk & then to the pictures, calling in at the Karanfoul just...

Page 125

...before catching the bus.

Wednesday 16th Sept. Went on the lorry to Derbham Tappen & went to the S.Q. & saw the M.O. whom I knew at Habb. After, went & found Arthur who took me all over the Aircraft Factory, very modern place & all the latest types of machinery. As usual in the evening, went to the Services Club for a good feed & then wandered round to the Karanfoul & met Mac. Had a drink with him & finished off the evening by going to the Polish Café for another feed, only just made the bus back in time.

Thursday 18th Sept. Had a good...

Page 126

...lay in in the morning & directly after lunch went up to Derbham Tappen & met Arthur. Had a drink in the NAAFI with some of the boys & then strolled down to the Services Club with Arthur. Had a game of table tennis, then did a bit of shopping & went to the pictures afterwards just popped into the Karanfoul & then a feed in the Polish Café before catching the bus.

Friday 19th Sept. This was our last day at Tehran so I had to make the most of it. Packed up my things in the morning & met Arthur in the afternoon went & had a feed at the...

Page 127

...Polish Café & then wandered round the shops & did a bit of shopping — bought some lovely coffee & brought back with me. Finished up as usual at the Karanfoul & then said goodbye to Arthur catching the bus back for the last time after a very enjoyable leave. Saturday we were up early & the lorry took us down to the station to catch the train. The train journey did not seem too bad going back & everyone had something to talk about. We arrived at Ahwaz 9 o'clock Sunday morning & were taken up to the rest camp where we had to spend...

Page 128

...the night before catching the convoy in the morning. We went into Ahwaz in the evening & I was sorry I had no film in my camera as there were some good photos to be taken. Went & had a good feed & then to the NAAFI & had some Canadian beer which was the best I have tasted since coming overseas. Met quite a number

of Yanks who seemed very decent chaps. Monday morning saw us on the move by 6 o'clock. & then convoy formed & moved off at 7 o'clock. We were all very thankful when this part of the journey...

Page 129

...was over and eventually arrived at Tanouma 10.30. We had to wait here sometime for the ferry. Eventually it came & soon we were across & not long before we arrived back at Basrah. We were all very thankful to get back again after the long journey & were able to get cleaned up once again. Soon settled down to work & got into the routine of things & then after a fortnight I went sick with Sandfly Fever & had to have a week in hospital. Soon got over that & once again settled down to work which went on quite steadily.

Volume 2

Front Matter

[Cover] W.K. Stevens. Official RAF stationery notebook: S O No. 3, Code No. 28-96. Published by J.D. & Co. Ltd (T. 4659, Wt. 13367, 12,000 Bks.). Handwritten above: practice Arabic/Persian script.

[Front notes page] Heading: Amman. / Mohamman. / Iranian. / SIA, Persian. Book 2. Currency exchange rates noted: N.A.F. 200(m) = £1. (Bank of Alg[eria]); Egyptian 98 (piastres or acres) = £1.; Italian lire 400 = £1.

Diary

Page 1

November showed signs of the cool weather coming along & how thankful everyone was. I had been out here just a year now & on the 3rd Nov. had orders from the S.M.O. to proceed to Abadan for one month as an epidemic of malaria had broken out and they wanted me to do the blood slides in order to get the patients diagnosed quicker. Anyway, I got the M.O.'s car & collected up my apparatus & set off by road to Seeba where I got the ferry across the river to Abadan. Arriving at the S.S.Q. I met even the boys I knew at Habbaniya & a Cpl who was with me at Basta until a short time previous. They soon made me comfortable &...

Page 2

...found a billet for me. The following morning the blood slides started rolling in and my work had started. I met the M.O. (F/Lt. Sword) who gave me an extremely kind welcome & who took me up to the A.I.O.C. Hospital & introduced me to the pathologist (Dr Marsh) & his chief assistant (Mr Wilson). Perhaps at this stage it would be advisable to say a little about Abadan.

Abadan is an island 28 miles long & 5 miles wide & is more or less a big oil well. The whole island is nothing else but an oil refinery & incidentally the 3rd largest in the world.

Page 3

The whole place is controlled by the Englishmen at the head of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Everything on the island, including cars, buses, lorries, cranes, engines & every bit of machinery belongs to the A.I.O.C. Every person practically on the island works for the A.I.O.C., & the best way to describe it is to say that Abadan is the A.I.O.C. Altogether there are about 2,000 English people on the island most of whom work for the A.I.O.C. Besides these people there are thousands of natives who also work in the oil company & the rest is, just, well, troops, troops & more troops including a large number of...

Page 4

...Americans who think they know everything. It would be quite appropriate to say that Abadan is a "white colony in the East." Although there were all these English civilian people out here who lived in beautifully air conditioned bungalows & in one sense of the word were not feeling the pinch of the war too greatly, or at least not half as much as the folks at home, were in no way very hospitable to the troops. They may have been at one time & possibly somebody spoilt it for the rest, & the impression I got from most of them while I was there, that we were not...

Page 5

...wanted at all, & yet we were the people who were protecting not only their lives, but their jobs & the whole island & valuable oil from falling into the hands of the Nazis, who would jump at the chance if it came their way. The island & the refinery were extremely well protected & in the event of an attack from the air, the whole place could be camouflaged by means of big oil burners which when set alight, covered the whole island in a smokescreen. In addition to the other obvious defences there was quite a large balloon barrage surrounding the whole area. The refinery itself was a magnificent piece of modern machinery & the first I...

Page 6

...had ever seen & I must say was greatly impressed. To describe it would be an impossibility, but to say the least, it covered 10 miles.

Having been introduced to Dr Marsh, we had a long chat & then Mr Wilson showed me the laboratory which I must say was a grand place. They gave me complete liberty & freedom there & I could use or do what I liked. I went up there every day for the first fortnight & it was a great thrill to work in a big laboratory once again. After a while the malaria died down considerably & my next task was to blood group all the R.A.F. personnel of about 1,200 & only about 200 having already...

Page 7

...been done. This was a big task as all the units were split up and men dotted all round the island. During the next fortnight I worked like a trojan doing about 150 B.G. every day & then doing all my slides at night. Thanks for the loan of apparatus & tubes from Mr Wilson, I was able to get through a good part of them a great deal quicker than would otherwise have been possible. Nevertheless I had to travel about a good bit & on different days went to Kasbabad, Kuramsha, Seeba

& all round the balloon sites. My month having come to an end I was recalled to Basrah & very...

Page 8

...thankful too on the whole, because the last fortnight's work was showing on me a bit & I was ready for a few days rest. Nevertheless on the whole I enjoyed it & it was a nice change, & not only that I gained some very useful knowledge from Dr Marsh & Mr Wilson's long experience out in this part of the world.

28th Nov. I left Abadan & went to Kuramsha & caught the naval launch up to Ashar & so back to Basrah. The M.O. at Abadan thanked me for the work I had done & my own boss was pleased to see me back again. Once more I settled down in my own lab & by this time...

Page 9

...the weather had turned quite cold & we wore blue at nights. On the 9th Dec. F/Mr. Davies offered me the chance to take a commission as a malariologist but I declined the offer. It meant studying Entomology & Archaeology about which I know very little & probably being i/c a party of men trying to find the breeding place of mosquitoes which did not excite me a great deal. I was glad to have had the chance but preferred to stay in my own work & carry on as before. It is very nice to have a commission but not much use if you are not interested in your work.

Page 10

By this time it was getting near Christmas & we were preparing for the festivities. A show was being produced & I was asked to take part in it. For the next week or so rehearsals were fairly frequent & most spare time was given to it. We had arranged to have a party in S.S.Q. on Christmas Eve & I had the job of getting most of the stuff for it. Just to crown everything on the morning of Christmas Eve the M.O. told me I was posted forthwith to the M.E. This shook me somewhat as it came at a most inappropriate time, but nevertheless I was really very pleased & everyone...

Page 11

...said how lucky I was. Anyway by a certain amount of influence, I managed to get the posting held up until after the show.

Christmas Eve arrived & we all thoroughly enjoyed the meal Les & I had got & which consisted of — cold salmon, roast goose or duck with chip potatoes, tomatoes & bacon, followed by Xmas pudding, trifle & fruit jelly. Then if anyone could eat anymore, there was biscuits, cheese & coffee & Christmas cake. I know quite a number of people would have been glad of a good meal like that. Naturally, afterwards we all sat round the fire with beer & had a sing song.

Page 12

Christmas Day. No body was up very early after the previous late night. Les, Ginger & myself went for a walk about 10 o'clock & returned in time for the Christmas dinner in the Airmen's Mess, which was quite good but not so enjoyable as the previous evening. Most of us went to bed in the afternoon & slept the dinner off. We had a quiet evening spent round a large fire & listening to the wireless. Boxing

Day. Rushing around preparing for the Show & then went out after lunch & saw a picture in the afternoon. Went to bed early. 27th Dec. Dress rehearsal for the Show...

Page 13

...which went very badly. Monday 28th Dec. Rushed around all the morning getting clearance cert. signed. Prepared the stage in the afternoon & in the evening started to get ready for the Show about 7 o'clock. Everyone was feeling a bit nervous but when the time came it went over very well & everyone thought it was a good show. Tuesday morning started my packing & had to go down to the airport in the afternoon to get all my kit weighed. Second night of the Show which went even better than the first night. Said goodbye to everyone after the Show & got to bed about 12 o'clock. Up at 4 o'clock & left Basrah at 4.30 by transport to the...

Page 14

...airport. From here onwards, I was treated as a gentleman for the rest of the day. First of all I was shown to the dining hall & had a very nice breakfast with the captain of the flying boat. 6 o'clock the party of about 20 of us left by launch for the B.O.A.C. flying boat which lay out in the river. For the first time of flying I had the privilege of going in a Sunderland flying boat. Punctually at 6.30 the 4 big engines roared & before you could say "Jack Robinson" we were in the air. At 9.15 we landed at Lake Habbaniya and a launch was ready to take us to the jetty where we went...

Page 15

...into the Airport Hotel & had tea & cakes. At 9.30 we were off again & this time had a 4 hour flip to Kallai which is not far from Palestine. We landed here & were taken ashore in a little launch & cars were ready to take us to the airport hotel which was only a matter of 500 yds! Here we had a marvellous lunch & it was grand to be treated like a real person again & waited on wherever we went. We had exactly an hour for lunch & then the little party proceeded down to the launch again & once more we were soon in the air, on the last lap of our trip. It was a marvellous sight as we circled over Cairo & we saw the...

Page 16

...perfectly. For the last time we made a perfect landing on the Nile (1,000 miles in 11 hours). A launch drew up alongside & we were taken ashore. At the same time all our luggage was taken off on another launch & placed in the Customs office. We then proceeded through the customs & it reminded me of the time when we went through the customs at Ostende. Having got that paraphernalia over I was taken in a lorry to A.H.Q. Cairo where they were supposed to fix me up with transport to go to 22 P.T.C. which I found out to be at Almaza, a matter of 10 miles outside Cairo & just the other side of Heliopolis. On arriving at...

Page 17

...A.H.Q. I found them to be the most miserable set of lads I have come across & they would do very little to help me except get my money changed from Iraqi to Egyptian so that I could catch a train. I left that building feeling very miserable in a large city & not the foggiest idea which way to go, & rather that it was a bad way in which to finish such an enjoyable day. Anyway luck was on my side. I wandered

along the road a little way & met a couple of Air Force lads & asked them how to go out to Almaza. They immediately said they were going that way & a pal of theirs was just...

Page 18

...bringing a gari around & would probably take us all the way, which he did. When I found out how far it was, I was thankful. By this time it was getting on & quite dark & I was feeling very hungry. Anyway they soon found me a tent to sleep in & a good feed which I thoroughly enjoyed. Next morning I reported to S.S.Q. & I was supposed to work there until my official posting came through. That morning the ambulance was visiting the various hospitals in Helio & Cairo. On the way round we called in at Station Sick Quarters at Heliopolis & here I...

Page 19

...met Harry Harding who used to be at Halton with me. I fixed up to meet him in the evening. 5 o'clock came & I got a lift down into Helio & met Harry. He showed me all round & we went & had a good feed which I thoroughly enjoyed & then went to the pictures & saw "That Night in Rio." Helio is more or less a suburb of Cairo where the more aristocratic people live. It is quite a nice little town & was a treat to see decent shops, houses, buses & trams etc. again.

1st January 1943. Did a few odd jobs in S.S.Q. & then met Harry in the evening. First of all...

Page 20

...we went to the Services Club in Helio which is well known by the troops here & which is probably one of the finest in the world. Afterwards we went to the pictures & saw "The Thief of Baghdad" which amused me rather being so highly fantastic & taken from the stories of the Arabian Nights.

2nd Jan. Did nothing all day & getting a little browned off with sitting around doing odd jobs here & there. Asked the S.M.O. if I could be attached temporarily to S.S.Q. Helio so I could help Harry in the laboratory. Met Harry in the...

Page 21

...evening & went into Cairo. Trams run between Helio & Cairo and are similar to those used in Belgium & Holland & are supposed to be the fastest in the world. Had a good look round Cairo & did some shopping. Some of the shops were really marvellous & as good as any in England. Naturally enough we visited a restaurant & had an excellent feed & also for the first time in 18 months, went into a pub & had a drink. Decided to get back to camp early & caught the tram back to Helio. About a mile outside Cairo it broke down & we waited in the hopes of it being mended. In the end...

Page 22

...we gave up in vain & started on what we thought to be a 5 mile walk back to Helio. Anyway we got about 1/2 mile along the track & they managed to get a by-pass going. The tram was absolutely packed & people were riding on the top, in between the carriages & on the steps but somehow I managed to get on. It was a perilous ride & I thought if the tram was to crash or tip over, there would be very

many casualties. Anyway we got back to Helio without any further hitch & then I started to walk the remaining 2 miles out to Almaza. By this time...

Page 23

...it was getting late, it being about 12.30 but luck was with me & I got a lift in a car right up to the camp. I was really thankful as I was very tired having walked all round Cairo & then part of the way back.

3rd Jan. Sunday. Went into Cairo in the afternoon with Harry. Had some tea & went to a service at Cairo Cathedral. This cathedral is one of the most modern I have ever seen & looks comparatively small from the outside, but inside it is quite large with the main dome more or less in the centre. After service we had a spot of supper & returned to camp.

Page 24

4th Jan. S.M.O. managed to get me attached to S.S.Q. Helio so that I was able to work in the lab with Harry. Wrote letters in the evening. Lady Tedder killed in crash on aerodrome.

5th Jan. Tues. It was grand working in the lab with Harry & the S.S.Q. was just next to the Aerodrome & we could see all the kites take off & land beautifully. Booked seats for the Metro Cinema in Cairo & saw Greta Garbo in "Two Faced Woman." This was the best cinema in Cairo & really a lovely place. As good as any in England. Thoroughly enjoyed the show & finished the evening off by a good feed & then back to camp.

Page 25

6th Jan. Wed. Received a telephone message about 9.30 to report back to 22 P.T.C. I knew immediately that my posting had come through. Arrived back at the camp & reported to the movements office to find where I was going but they did not know at the time & could only tell me I was flying somewhere & that I had to take 5 blankets with me & only 40 lbs of kit & to be kitted out with battle dress straight away. I knew then, that I was going out on the desert & probably moving up the line. Anyway when I got my kit packed & weighed, I found that I could not take much stuff with me & had...

Page 26

...to leave a lot behind, including all my treasured photos, the first part of this book & one or two other things which when I got out on the blue, I wished I had been able to bring. By this time they had found out my unit which they told me as 25 M.R.S. Naturally I was not much wiser as I did not know where they were. That evening I was allowed out of camp & went into Helio to see Harry before moving off the next day. I told him all the news but he could not help me. Anyway we decided to have the last night out in Cairo & went to the pictures & saw...

Page 27

...an excellent film called "The Invisible Agent" also a War Pictorial & on it we saw pictures of the "Marble Arch." Little did I think then that the very next day I should be standing by & pass right under it. We had an enjoyable evening & I returned to camp finding out that I had to be up by 4 o'clock the following morning. Now comes, perhaps, one of the most interesting chapters in this book to date.

We were up at 4 am Thursday 7th Jan & had breakfast & left Almaza for the airport at 5 am. On arriving at the airport we found out for the first time somewhere near the vicinity which...

Page 28

...we might be going, & they told us we were flying to Marble Arch by the 7 o'clock plane. Punctually to time the twin engined Lockheed Hudson took off & we were in the air. I had been very disappointed at not going to see the pyramids while I was here, but on gaining height was able to see them beautifully & in the early morning with the sun just rising, made a perfectly wonderful picture. We had the pleasure of seeing Helio from the air & I could pick out certain landmarks quite easily. So we flew on and for most of the way kept near the coast. After two & a half hours travelling we came in to land at a place called El Adam...

Page 29

...& for the first time I realised what devastation we caused when the big push started. On approaching the aerodrome we could see for miles all around burnt out German & Italian planes, lorries & vehicles of all sorts. On landing we spoke to one of the lads there & he told us the place had been heavily mined & it was dangerous to wander around too far. After 10 minutes we took off again with another passenger on board making 11 of us in all with a crew of 3. We crept out to the sea again & followed the coastline along. I dropped off to sleep & the next thing I remember was coming in to land...

Page 30

...at a place called Derna. We had a chat with one of the boys here & told us that the Jerrys had only been pushed from here about a fortnight previously. Again we took off & I dozed off again & missed seeing Tobruk & Benghazi as we must have flown over them or near them. I woke up & found that now we had come slightly inland & were following the long road which the Italians built & which must stretch the whole length of the Libyan desert about 2,000 miles. It is the only road & the only other alternative for traffic is to take desert tracks...

Page 31

...which have been built recently, & from the air it was a marvellous sight to see the lorries in an endless stream going up to the front lines. At 12.30 we came in to land, & the picture I had seen the previous evening came to reality & sure enough we circled right round & landed just beside the Marble Arch, where only about 10 days previous a terrific battle was being fought. A few words on the Marble Arch. It was built by the Italians in commemoration of some big battle fought there years ago. It is just an enormous arch across the road & made of marble with numerous inscriptions...

Page 32

...which unfortunately I could not understand, being unable to read Italian. There is a figure on either side of a wounded man, representing the battle. On the inside of the pillars, there is a winding staircase which leads to the top & from which a wonderful view can be seen. On one side you can look out over Cyrenaica & on the other over Tripolitania, the Marble Arch being the dividing line between the two

countries. Having viewed the Arch for a few minutes we tried to find out where our unit was & how to get to it. We went to...

Page 33

...the Signals office & they told us it was about 45 miles up the road & the best way, was to hitch-hike it. We did this easily enough & had a ride in the back of a South African waggon on top of a whole pile of shells which was none too comfortable. Anyway I approximated the mileage & sure enough we spotted the Red Crosses on the tents & the ambulances easily enough. We got off & thanked the S.A.s very much for the lift & went up to the orderly room & found the F/Sgt i/c who took us around. He told me there was no lab or equipment for me...

Page 34

...& took us to the Theatre as the other chap I came with, was an O.R.A. Here I met a chap who was a radiographer & was at the hospital at Halton the same as I was. They soon made us as comfortable as possible, & so we finally made ourselves at home with 25 M.R.S. That evening we received a case of a chap who had triggered one of these booby traps & got his hand blown off. I watched the operation & saw his hand amputated & thought how lucky he was to get away with his life. I learnt too that these mines of all descriptions had been laid all up the lines & in fact everywhere where...

Page 35

...Jerry was retreating. It shook me somewhat & I learnt my lesson there & then, not to wander away from the camp & refrain from picking up souvenirs off the ground, because these traps had been laid in all kinds of places, & most of them most innocent. Cases have been reported of people picking up Jerry water-bottle cans which are most useful in the desert; & no sooner than they touched it, the whole thing blew up. Anyway I went to bed feeling none too happy about the state of affairs. The following morning after breakfast, I was able to look around the camp & find out...

Page 36

...where everything was. Naturally enough as one would expect a mobile hospital, everything was under canvas & the various tents were the theatre, medical & surgical wards, reception room, orderly room, officers mess, Sgts mess, airmen's mess, cookhouse & stores, comprised of most places. All the ambulances & vehicles were scattered about the place at various dispersal points. The unit comprised of 6 officers, 6 Sgts, & about 80 men. It was entirely self contained & in a very short while were known as "Culliman's travelling circus." I found out our...

Page 37

...position which seemed to be about 10 miles from Nufilia. W/Cdr Culliman was the C.O. & hence the name of the travelling circus. Met F/Sgt Smilies who was to be my lab officer & he tried to get me a plane to fly to Benghazi to get some lab equipment, but luck was out & nothing could be arranged. I hung about all day feeling very miserable & found out that cigarettes, razor blades & any NAAFI requirements for that matter were very scarce out here & very difficult to obtain being so far away from a base NAAFI. I kicked myself for not...

Page 38

...obtaining a fair supply while I had the chance in Cairo & also wished I had all my kit with me but that could not be helped. In the evening one of these mobile NAAFI Cinemas came round & gave us an excellent show & we saw Marlene Dietrich in "The 7 Sinners." This was most enjoyable & a great success. All the boys thoroughly enjoyed it & wished they would come round more often.

Sat. 10th Jan. Managed to get a waggon to take me to Benghazi & a party of 5 of us set off about 11.45 for a 250 mile journey. The road had...

Page 39

...been strafed very heavily & bomb holes were very numerous, so the going was pretty heavy. Anyway we made fairly good headway & got to a place called Agedabia by nightfall. Here we stayed for the night & spent quite a restful night in the back of the gari. Cooking the breakfast out on the desert next morning (bacon & beans), one of the few natives left in the village came up to us with eggs. She would not take money for them but tea & sugar. We found out that tea was practically unobtainable for them & if they had the money to buy it, cost 10/- a lb. After...

Page 40

...breakfast we started off again & the brakes ceased up on us. Managed to get those alright & then the big end broke about 60 miles from Benghazi. We had to give up here & sent on for help, so I hitch-hiked in & arrived about 4 o'clock. Found out there was a big captured Iti lab which we were using & met Norman House who was working there & who used to be at Halton with me. He showed me around this most wonderful laboratory which when working in peace time must have been a magnificent place. It consisted of 4 very big labs & everywhere white...

Page 41

...tiled & beautifully finished off. A bomb had been dropped on one half of it but even so it was quite usable. The apparatus, chemicals & glassware there must have been unlimited & the library was one of the finest I have ever seen. Unfortunately all the books were in Italian but nevertheless appeared to cover every type of science. I certainly wished I could have stayed there & thought what a crying shame that such a beautiful place as this should be ruined. It was found out from some of the natives, that in peace time this public health lab had a...

Page 42

...staff of about 80. 20 doctors & scientists & 60 technicians. After looking round I met S/Sgt Aitken, the pathologist whom I knew in England & had a long chat with him. He gave me the necessary permission to get fitted up with a mobile lab. Went round & saw the Q.M. & handed over the vouchers. Norman made me at home & we slept in the offices of the lab. Shortages of everything appeared to be just as acute here & cigarettes were just unobtainable. I did manage to get a few razor blades.

The following morning I started sorting out lab equipment &...

Page 43

...saw the trailer, which was doubtful as to whether I should have, but after much debating the W/Cdr decided to let me have it. Had supper with Norman & went to bed early.

Wednesday. Still getting the trailer packed & told the D.O. who had come up with us that I would be ready to move off next day.

Thursday. Waited for a gari, but usual bungling & it did not arrive. Told it would be round in the morning. Had a bit of a look round Benghazi in the afternoon, but could not see very much...

Page 44

...except a lot of shattered ruins. The Cathedral was a beautiful place & completely untouched. From the top of the lab we could get an excellent view of Benghazi & in peace time I should say it was quite a picturesque place but now it is very heavily bomb scarred. In the evening Jerry paid us a visit & the Ack Ack fire was terrific & reminded me of the old 1940 blitzes on London. Anyway it only lasted about an hour & then everything was quiet again.

Friday. Gari turned up at 11 o'clock & we started on our long...

Page 45

...journey back to the unit, with the trailer, which cut our speed down to 20 m.p.h. all the time. It was heavy going & we only managed to do 90 miles the first day, and picked a suitable spot & made camp. The following morning we were off fairly early & had a fair day's run. All the way up the road were notices such as these: "Keep 100 yds apart" "Do not brew up on the road, get right off" "Don't be a bloody fool. Keep 100 yds distant" "No overtaking" "If Jerry straffs you, you won't

laugh. Keep 100 yds distant” & on an old lorry which must have been blown up sometime or another it had written on it “I was not...

Page 46

...a 100 yds distant — Are you?” Although all the notices were very crude, in my opinion they were extremely witty in most cases & if abided by, served their purpose admirably, as Jerry has no easier target than thousands of vehicles all nose to tail & straffing & bombing convoys seems to be a very common thing out here. Again we camped for the night & got well past Agedabia. The next day we managed to get to Marble Arch by lunch time & went to M.T. & R.U. to pick up a vehicle which of course they knew nothing about. So we left there with a sorry feeling & carried on to...

Page 47

...Nufilia cross roads. We found out here that while we were away our unit had moved on 60 miles inland. We stopped here for some tiffin & the D.O. caught us up in a jeep having left Benghazi 24 hours after us. He had the gen on the vehicle we were supposed to pick up & went off in search of it. We got out onto the blue, & by this time it was packing up time as no lights are allowed after dark & so we made camp again. The next day we made Nufilia which was about 30 miles out in the desert & which at one time used to be an Italian. We stopped here for information but no one knew where our unit was. We went to...

Page 48

...the water point & got plenty of supplies of water & got an approximate bearing as to the way we should go. We travelled on over the desert & in the afternoon got bogged in the sand up to the axles. We tried every way possible to get out but the trailer was too heavy for the lorry. Eventually I went off in the lorry with the driver to find help & we came across one of our garis in the desert so they came & with the extra lorry on the front & a tow chain we eventually got out after 3 hours. By this time most of us were a bit irritable & tired so we decided to pack it...

Page 49

...in for the day & try to make our destination the following day. The next morning we seemed to get right on top of a plateau & were sailing along merrily when one of the boys saw our own water trailer coming towards us. We signalled them & stopped to find out how far we were away from camp & apparently only about 30 miles but we were going slightly in the wrong direction & had to cut inland a bit

more. We said we would wait for them to come back so that they could show us the way. While we were waiting I had the bright idea of trying to get some NAAFI...

Page 50

...which would come in useful when we got back to the unit, so the driver, another chap & myself set off on a road with an arrow pointing to the NAAFI & when we got there it was for Army personnel only as our supplies were furthered up the line. Anyway I was not going to be beaten, so asked if there was anywhere where we could get rations & the M.P. told us of a transit camp about 3 miles across the blue. When we got there, I saw the Sgt i/c & told him the story of how we had to get back to Benghazi. So he immediately said "Ah you are the very people we have been..."

Page 51

...looking for. We have 50 German prisoners here — will you take some of them back in the lorry." I was dumbfounded & did not know what to say, but he changed his mind luckily & said it did not matter, & would get someone else. Oh boy! was I relieved. He gave us a chit to get rations & after queuing up for about an hour we got them eventually including cigarettes, so we did not do so badly after all. Found the trailer again & had tiffin. Shortly afterwards the others arrived & led the way back to camp, but not without an incident. We were about a mile from the camp & had to...

Page 52

...go up a steep escarpment & once again we got stuck, but with the aid of the water lorry we got out in a very short time. Eventually we did arrive back at camp & very thankful we all were too. The next few days I spent preparing my trailer & making all solutions up. Very few patients at the moment but anticipating a move further up the line. Friday 24th Jan 1943. We heard the news over the wireless that Tripoli had fallen to us although unofficial news came through two days previously stating that we had got Tripoli. Everybody hoping we shall move in. By 31st January we were still in the...

Page 53

...going area & no move was absolutely imminent but the C.O. told us that we should be moving on as soon as the Squadrons moved up. NAAFI supplies during the whole of this time were still very short & very few cigarettes could be

obtained, some weeks relying only on our issue which was 50 cigarettes a week. Up until this time bread had been non-existent but somehow some was obtained & so we had bread for a few days, after which we went back to the old biscuits once more. Fresh meat was unobtainable being so far out in the desert & naturally all our food was tinned. We were fortunate enough to find out that there was a good gazelle hunting ground...

Page 54

...about 30 miles away from the camp & so parties of about 5 were organised by the C.O. I went out gazelle hunting. We found that we could get these quite easily & so kept up our fresh meat supply. I managed to go out one afternoon with one of the officers & a couple of other lads & we did quite well getting 5 between us. I got the biggest one of the lot & felt quite pleased with myself. These gazelles go about in herds in the desert & can run faster than any other animals I've seen. They can not only run fast but keep it up for long periods at a time. We chased...

Page 55

...one buck for fully half an hour & at one time he was level with the car & was travelling at a speed of nearly 50 miles an hour. It was good fun but really poor sport in a car, nevertheless it would be impossible to get near enough to shoot them on foot. Funnily enough the rifle I was using was a German which had been captured & was a very nice one too. As a result of these shooting parties we were able to have fresh meat nearly every day & roast gazelle is really lovely & some of the most tender meat I have ever eaten. It tastes very much like venison. After 3 weeks here, we finally got the order...

Page 56

...to move & on the day before moving, a mobile NAAFI came round & we were able to replenish our very much depleted stocks of cigarettes & such things as tinned fruit, soap, shaving cream & any other necessity. That same evening a mobile Cinema came round & we saw George Formby in "Spare a Copper." The following morning, all tents were taken down & we moved off about 11 o'clock. By nightfall we reached the outskirts of Sirte having travelled only 50 miles but across some of the roughest desert I have yet seen. The next morning we were off about 8.30 & got to the advance party by lunch time. After tiffin we were on the road again & made Tauorga by...

Page 57

...direction & then smoke started coming out of his tail. I said to the boys "If he drops his bombs now we've had it" but he seemed to come on down & passed right by us. At that moment there was a terrific explosion & my tin hat was blown off my head & I was thrown right across the building I was standing in & the next thing I remember was bricks & mortar falling on top of me. I got up & felt myself all over & found much to my relief that I was entirely unharmed. I immediately shouted out to the other chaps to find out if they were all right...

Page 58

...& at that moment I could see a chap lying on the ground amongst the debris & pulled him out. It was not sufficiently light to see if he was hurt or not so another chap & myself carried him into the hospital & found that he was only suffering from severe shock. We were ordered to go down the shelter until the raid was over, & then we went to see where the bomb had dropped & what damage had been done. When we went to look, we found a huge crater big enough to put a house in just at the back of the building I was in, & another smaller one, so 2 bombs had...

Page 59

...been dropped. The crater itself was not more than 10 yards away from where I had been standing & had blown the whole of one side of the wall in which was scattered all over the place. It seemed an absolute miracle how no one was even hurt & I thanked God for my life. It was a very close shave indeed & I never want one as near as that again. Had the bomb dropped another 20 yds up the pathway, no doubt it would have hit the hospital & there would have been hundreds of casualties. It was estimated from the big crater that the bomb was a 500 lb...

Page 60

...& the small crater a 25 lb. After the raid was over we had to move our beds out of that building as it was unsafe. Quite a number of fellows had a job finding them amongst the debris — mine was alright luckily. That night I spent very restlessly in the Q.M. Stores. The next morning we further investigated the damage & found great lumps of bricks & mortar thrown 25 yds away. I got my serum & oddments from Dave & directly after tiffin made for camp as quickly as possible. We made it in good time & arrived back...

Page 61

...at 6 o'clock, & very thankful I was too. We heard in the morning that we had brought down 10 planes from the raid which I thought quite a good effort. That day we made haste to get back to camp again & thankful was I to have a good night's rest. Life went on in much the usual way & the work steadily rolled in. The start of the final push began & patients were being evacuated to us from the front. On March 26th the D.G. came round on a visit & inspected the whole camp. By this time we had been at El Assa just on a month & had really got settled in.

Page 62

...my turn came round for leave & so once more I went to Tripoli. We had a record run down making it in 3½ hours & arrived in time for tiffin. Afterwards my pal & I walked round the town & had a look at the shops & took a few photos. On the whole I was very disappointed with the shops & most of them were much of a muchness & contained little souvenirs which were very expensive & not really worth buying. We walked all along the beautiful promenade amongst the palm trees which was really picturesque. Unfortunately I could not take any photos as the harbour was on one side & the...

Page 63

...chances of taking military objectives by mistake, were too great. We visited the Cathedral which really is a fine piece of architecture also the Bank of Rome & many other beautiful buildings. After a good look round we returned along the promenade & called in at the Union Club on the way, which is a fine building, which in peacetime was a civic centre or possibly the Town Hall, & now is a rest room & NAAFI for the troops. We had a cup of tea here & then walked back to the hospital where we were staying. The following morning (Saturday), my pal & I set out after breakfast & had another walk & decided we would go & see an ENSA show in the...

Page 64

...afternoon. We got in easily & had the front row in the upper circle. It was a grand feeling to sit in a real theatre once more & we thoroughly enjoyed the show. We played bridge in the evening & a message was received for us to return to camp first thing in the morning. This cut our leave short by ½ a day & we were disappointed about it because we anticipated taking quite a number of photos. Nevertheless we were on our way again. Directly after breakfast we started on our journey back. It was a glorious day & the beautiful smell of scent from the mimosa trees was very exhilarating...

Page 65

...We arrived back at camp by tiffin time to find everything packed up ready to move off. So directly after tiffin we were on the road again & had to make Medenine by nightfall. In a very short while after starting we saw the tri-colour French flag on the border & soon we passed it & were then in Tunisia. We travelled on steadily over very bumpy roads & made Medenine just before nightfall, which was 90 miles. The C.O. found the spot where we were to pitch camp which was just 5 miles out of the village. I was very tired & thankful to get to bed that night having travelled...

Page 66

...just over 200 miles that day. The push was still going on steadily & as fast as the Army were pushing on, we were following them up. Gabes had just fallen to us. Monday 5th March 43. Once again we were putting up tents, & had most of the camp up by the afternoon. We were very busy here but our stay was not long & on the 14th March we had orders to move again up to Sfax, which had only fallen to us a few days previously. We packed up again & at 7.30 am on 15th March we were ready to move off. This was one of the worst journeys I had...

Page 67

...nightfall. Being on the main road made a considerable difference & we were able to do 160 miles that day. Here we made camp again. The following morning we got into the green belt & passed through some quite pretty country. On nearing Misurata we passed many very well built dwelling houses & were all part of Mussolini's colonisation of Libya. Each of these houses had a certain amount of land to it, which the owner had to cultivate & sell the produce to the government. Once again we saw the palm trees & groves & at 11 o'clock we arrived at Misurata. At one time I should say it was quite a decent town, but now looks rather battle scarred...

Page 68

...from the fighting which took place only about 3 weeks previously. We had a short stop here & then made Zliten by tiffin time. This was near the area where we had to make camp & so the C.O. set off to find a suitable spot. While we were having tiffin numerous natives came up with eggs & lemons which we were able to buy off them very cheaply or swap for biscuits. After tiffin we moved off inland to find the spot the C.O. had chosen & expected to go about 15 or 20 miles inland; instead we had to go about 40 as most of the way had been heavily mined. So we eventually arrived at a spot where the C.O. had chosen in a sandstorm.

Page 69

Nothing could be done that night owing to the wind & sand. And so once again we were right out in the desert in a part known as the Bisdofan Davak area & about 100 miles from Tripoli. Friday 12th Feb. 43. We tried to put up the tents but owing to the terrific wind & then rain, we had to give it up. By the afternoon it had died down a bit & we were able to get some of the tents up. That night a terrific sandstorm blew up & we got absolutely smothered in sand. Anyway by the following morning it had died down considerably & we were able to put up the remainder of the tents. I was very thankful too when they were all up, as it is a very tiring...

Page 70

...job, especially when there are big marquees besides many others. Sunday 14th Feb. brought quite a restful day & once more we settled down to camp life & the patients had already started coming in from various units surrounding us.

Desert life carried on in much the same old way & I quite enjoyed it here in spite of sandstorms. The main thing was, plenty of work to do which made you feel that you were not altogether wasted in the desert. 3 weeks passed & during that time we saw quite a bit of the ambulance planes which land on a flying field we made on the camp.

We were just over 100 miles...

Page 71

...east of Tripoli here & several people got the chance to have a couple of days leave but I did not unfortunately. Nevertheless 3 weeks passed very quickly & once more we got orders to pack up & move. The old game of packing up & taking the tents down started, & on Fri. March 5th we moved off. It was rough going across the desert until we got to Zliten once again, & then we made good headway along the coastal road. By this time we got into what is known as the green belt. We passed through many little villages on the way to Tripoli & for the first time on the whole trip up from Cairo, it began to look a bit more civilized again...

Page 72

...from the continual drab of the desert. The land appeared to be more & more fertile as we went on & we passed through very many lovely orange groves but unfortunately it was the wrong time of the year & there was no fruit on them. Eventually we reached Tripoli at 5 o'clock after a very good run of 144 miles. We

drove right round the town & this was the first I had seen of it although quite a number of others had been for a couple of days. As we passed along the streets we could see where some of the bombs had fallen also the strafing & bullet holes which showed up...

Page 73

...on the walls of many of the buildings. Some of these buildings were magnificent, particularly the Cathedral which is truly wonderful. Some of the shops were open & the civilian population seems to be coming out of their hiding places, but the price of things were very high.

We spent that night with 24 M.R.S. who had the hospital in Tripoli & were just next to the race course. The following morning we were off again at 8.30 & had another very pleasant day's run. Again we passed through one or two small towns & after travelling about 60 miles...

Page 74

...we left the coast road once more & made for the desert to a place called El Assa. This was about 30 miles inland & over some of the roughest desert I have yet travelled. We got stuck on several occasions with the trailers & it was rather a long & tedious job getting them out. Anyway, eventually we arrived at our destination & found the C.O. had really picked a grand spot for us this time & was quite nice & green which helps to break the glare of the desert. By midday the following day, the tents were all up & the camp complete. & so once...

Page 75

...again we settled down to camp. Our position was fairly far forward now & C.O. estimated us to be about 50 miles behind the front lines. Once again I got my laboratory set up & within a couple of days we were in full operation.

After a week or so, I had to go to Tripoli to get some serum. Arriving in Tripoli about 6 o'clock I met Dave Summers & we had a chat & he found me a bed in his billet. About 9 o'clock the sirens sounded & we knew there was going to be a big raid. Sure enough, about a quarter of an hour later the guns opened up & I saw one of the biggest barrages...

Page 76

...I had ever seen. The Beauforts were firing tracer bullets & it looked like one big firework display. Radio location seemed to be excellent & as they were picking up

the planes well & almost immediately the searchlights picked them out. I saw several picked out by the searchlights & when the guns were trained on them, you could see the bullets hitting the planes & really I did not envy the pilots & know I should not like to have been in their places. We were watching one bomber which was caught by the searchlights & which seemed to be heading in our...

Page 77

...ever had but nevertheless we made the 150 miles by nightfall. After our hours journey we got to the Mareth line where such a big battle was fought only a couple of weeks previously. The little village of Mareth was absolutely gutted right out & there was not a soul about anywhere. Shortly after passing this village we had a puncture & had to put the spare wheel on. Having done that we sailed on merrily & caught the others up by tiffin time. All the way along the road were mines which Jerry had left behind & I have never seen so many in all my life. The whole way along the side of the...

Page 78

...road was absolutely littered with them. The sappers had dug them up & left them on the side of the road. They are very deadly things & we all had to be very careful not to pull over to the side of the road as one poor chap did & was blown sky high by an anti-tank mine which must have been missed. We were getting on well & then all of a sudden the carburettor started sputtering & our lorry just came to a standstill. The fitters did everything to put it right & managed to get her going in the end. Our luck was out that day & altogether she knocked out about 4 times. The last time the fitters...

Page 79

...decided to draw on to the side of the road & fix on a new pump & carburettor. There were some big "macks" about 100 yds up the road which had pulled on to a green patch & seeing them we decided to pull on there out of the way. We managed to make the gari go that distance & pulled in on a little pathway which had been made. Instead of keeping to this pathway, my driver swung right round so we were level with the road again leaving the "macks" about 20 yds away. All of a sudden I saw 2 of these Army lads waving frantically to us & immediately jumped to the conclusion that we were on a mine field. In those few moments...

Page 80

...I went hot & cold all over & am sure my heart beat went up to 120 per minute. With God's good grace we avoided all the mines & drew back on to the track quite safely, & oh boy was I thankful. When I got out & went & spoke to these lads they told us we were on a mine field & only 2 days previously a lorry had blown up not 50 yds from where we were. Sure enough when we looked round we could see the remains of the lorry still lying there. By this time it was getting late & we still had about 40 miles to do & I was feeling really sick & bad after the experience...

Page 81

...I had just been through & being the second near thing I had had seemed to react on me worse than the first. After 1/2 hour they got the gari going again & as we all hoped for good. Our luck was still out & we had no done more than a mile & she refused to go again. This time they gave it up as a bad job & decided to tow us the rest of the way. Eventually we arrived at Sfax when it was dark & we did not know where to go then because we knew that the camp would be made some miles out of the town but in what direction we did not know. Anyway we decided to go up to the...

Page 82

...main cross roads to see if there was anyone about. Our luck was in this time as the C.O. had sent someone back to wait for us until we arrived, so he showed us the way. It was only another 10 miles & we made that without further trouble. A hot dinner was waiting for us when we arrived but I felt so bad that I went straight to bed with some aspirins. The following morning I felt a lot better for my rest & once again we started putting up the tents. We were in rather pleasant surroundings here & all amongst rows & rows of olive trees for which Tunisia is so famous, & when I...

Page 83

...say rows & rows I mean to say endless square miles of olive trees. The name of the place: Tringia. Apparently each tree is valued at £10 a year when partly grown & £20 a year when fully matured. After getting the camp set up once again we settled down to work & as usual it was not long before patients started to arrive. As we were near Sfax they started running parties into the town to see a variety show which had been put on by the Army. I went in with the first party & enjoyed the show very much. Afterwards we had time to look round the town which at one time I should imagine was a very...

Page 84

...pleasant holiday resort but now is a bit of a shambles. Much the same as Tripoli, Sfax has rather a pleasant promenade along the front lined with palm trees. Some of the magnificent mosaic buildings in the main street had been hit badly & it seemed a wicked shame that such beautiful buildings should be subjected to such damage. During the next few days we were kept very busy & had heard that this was to be our last move in this campaign, but another move was a head & within 5 days we were on the way again but this time...

Page 85

...only a matter of 45 miles further on to a place called El Hencha. This was an easy move & we took it in stages & did not rush it. The country we came to now was a bit more open with beautiful fields of poppies & many kinds of wild flowers. The colouring was really wonderful & one could almost imagine being on the Scottish moors in England. Monday 19th March. We seemed to get the camp up quicker than ever & by tiffin time we were in full operation. We had not been here more than a week when a case of smallpox turned up & we had to make...

Page 86

...a part of the camp isolated. The only way to do it was to move the majority of the camp to the other side of the road & build a fresh camp there which we did. After the quarantine time elapsed the others moved over with us. It was an extraordinary coincidence that it was in early April last year that I was in a smallpox epidemic just as I was leaving Habbaniya. Life went on steadily in the same old way & we soon got settled in. We made a cricket pitch & had some good games with the surrounding units. Everybody was getting excited about the fall of Tunis which seemed...

Page 87

...imminent any day & we knew the day before that it had fallen, but was officially announced on the wireless on May 7th that Tunis & Bizerta had fallen. A few days later the remaining Germans were captured & so the terrific battle that had been fought out here finally finished. Now that this campaign had finished we had to sit back & wait for us to move to the next theatre of war & naturally everyone is making wild guesses as to where we are going. 20th March. Up to date none of us knew. We were still at El Hencha & had really settled down well. Although there was a great number of moans from most of us (which is an airman's...

Page 88

...privilege). The unit had worked well & we were congratulated on the fine work which had been done on our long journey following the 8th Army all the way.

June 1st. I was granted a day's leave in Tunis & so 12 of us set off in a gari about 10 o'clock. The road was good & we made speedy headway & soon made El Djem. It was a 200 mile journey & we passed through one or two small towns but nothing of real interest. The country was much the same all the way & there seemed to be endless miles of olive trees. We reached the outskirts of Tunis by 4.30 & went on to Carthage where we stayed...

Page 89

...overnight at 30 M.F.H. On the way to Carthage we passed the Cathedral & here we were waved off the road & told to stop. Within a minute or so a large convoy appeared led by S.P.s of motorbicycles & armoured cars. At once we knew it was some celebrity. As the cars went passed we were all greatly surprised to see as plain as anything — Mr Churchill & Anthony Eden who waved to us as they went by. In the car behind them was General Alexander & behind that General Eisenhower & also numerous other higher rankers whom I could not recognise. On arriving at the hospital we found out that had we...

Page 90

...been there about 2 hours previously we should have been able to see him speak in the central auditorium.

The lads at the hospital made us very welcome & we were glad to have a good wash & a meal after our long run. As I was going into dinner I met the Flying Officer Q.M. who was the W/O at the I.P.T.M. when I was there. I was so surprised to see him & we had a long chat. Shortly after dinner I was sent for by G/Capt. Lipscomb who was there at the time & who was my old C.O. in England. We went for a swim that evening in the Bay of Carthage & I was very...

Page 91

...struck by the surroundings & one could imagine you were at some seaside resort in Devon or Cornwall. There were cliffs most of the way round the coast & to get on to the beach we climbed down a narrow pathway to a very pleasant alcove where on one side there was a refreshment house & on the other little bathing huts, more after the style of a chalet. Naturally the refreshment house was closed down, but one could well imagine what a lovely place it was in peacetime. We had a lovely swim & returned to the hospital & I decided to try & see the G/Capt. but he was out & so I had a look round the lab & then went to bed.

Page 92

The following morning I saw the G/Capt. after breakfast & he seemed very pleased to see me again. I was very thrilled to see him again & only wished I was still under his command. We had a long chat & he wanted to know everything. After I left him I made my way into Tunis as the boys had gone on before me, & got a lift with the Brigadier Commanding the 1st Armies Artillery. So I was well in with the big noises that day. I forgot to mention, that some of us were up at 6 o'clock that morning & went for a dip before breakfast which was really grand. The Brigadier dropped me in Tunis & I walked up the main street to...

Page 93

...find some of the others. It was not long before I found a party of them coming down the road & joined up with them. Tunis being a French town, there were very many French girls walking about the town, & were they smart! The dresses & costumes they wore were some of the smartest I have ever seen & I should imagine that they got them from Paris somehow. Not only that, a large number of these girls were extremely pretty, or at least I thought so, but probably no prettier than any average English girl. Not having seen a really pretty & well dressed...

Page 94

...girl for such a long time, I suppose it struck me more than it would normally. Tunis itself had not been damaged much & most of the shops were open again now, although there was not a great deal to buy except powder & lipstick etc. Nevertheless, I bought a few things to send home. It was nice to see a real pub again & to be able to go in & get a drink & the wine which is made here is not at all bad & very cheap. The French use it mainly as a cheap dinner wine. After looking all round the town, we returned to the hospital for lunch. We...

Page 95

...were all disappointed at having to return & wish we could have had a week's leave. Nevertheless before leaving on our 200 mile journey back to camp we visited the Brewery & bought a few bottles of wine at 5 francs a bottle which was very cheap. After visiting the brewery we went for a final swim & then started back for camp about 3.30 p.m. We had a very good run home & arrived back at 10 o'clock, which was very good going.

The next day we were packing up camp again as we had orders to move back to Ben Gardene. We took things easily & the camp was soon...

Page 96

...down. June 4th. Once again we were on our way on another 200 mile journey in convoy. We passed back over roads which were familiar to us this time & once again passed over that terrible area by Sfax that was so full of mines. Nevertheless everything was all quiet now & in working order & we went on merrily & soon made Sousse, Sfax & then Gabes, & of course once again passed through the Mareth line, which was as desolate as ever.

We reached Medenine by about 6 o'clock & drew on to our old "spot" for the night. It was strange to see our old site again &...

Page 97

...everyone went round to where their old tent used to be. The next morning we moved off about 8.30 & made Ben Gardene by tiffin time. We were only a mile from the sea here & after the camp was set up we were able to go for a swim nearly every afternoon. We were only partly operational here & were able to get a good rest which was what a great many of us needed. We were lucky to get one or two concerts & cinemas in the area & I saw Mickey Rooney in "A Yank at Eton" one day, & 2 days later, 14th June — Ralph Reader & his Gang Show came round. This was a 1st class show, one of the best I have seen in the desert.

Page 98

We stayed at Ben Gardene longer than anticipated & after a time most of us got very browned off with nothing much to do. By 1st July we were still at the same site & I had the chance to go to Tripoli for the day with one of my pals (Reg) & the C.O. We set out about 10 o'clock & got to Sabratha by tiffin time. The C.O. had a few things to do here & so Reg & I were able to look round the old Roman ruins which were really interesting. These are some of the oldest Roman remains to be seen in this part of the world & the amphitheatre is supposed to be dated back to 200 B.C. We took quite a few...

Page 99

...photos here & had a look round the old town. Most of the ruins were in good preservation & obviously had been looked after. We started out again after tiffin & made T. [Tripoli] by dinner time. After a scout round the town in the evening we returned to the H.Q. & saw quite a good show given by 24 M.P.H. The following morning we went into town again & bought a few things & then set off for Sabratha again which we made in time for tiffin a second time. We left fairly soon

after tiffin & I had one of the most unpleasant journeys since being on the desert. Reg & I were riding in the back of the C.O.'s car & the track was none too good — the C.O. seemed in a great hurry to get back & we...

Page 100

...bounced all over the place. By the time we did arrive back at B.G. were covered from head to foot in sand. Once again we were glad to be back in camp & it was not long now before our orders came through to move. With a week or so of camouflaging tins & sorting out parts, we finally got everything packed up & were on the road again by 20th July (Sicily invaded 10th). This time 4 of us travelled in the trailer & we set up a record by brewing up chai while the convoy was actually in motion, so that at one place we stopped, our driver came to see how we were getting on & was somewhat shaken by being given a cup of chai on the spot.

Page 101

Eventually we arrived at Tripoli race course once again at 1900 hrs. A hot meal was already for us & very thankful we were. By now everyone knew we were going to Sicily & once again were following the 8th Army as we had done in the previous campaign. There was a certain amount of excitement shown by everyone & all eager to get over the other side. That night we saw a film on the race course called "The First of a Few" which was the life story of Mitchell who designed the Spitfire. It was an excellent film & everyone went to bed feeling quite contented that night.

July 21st. A frig arrived & we fixed it up in the trailer. Although...

Page 102

...at first we had a little trouble with it, we did get it going eventually & proved invaluable to us. As 21 were also on the race course Harry was with them & so Harry, Dave & myself were altogether for the first time since we were at Halton together just about 2 years ago.

In the afternoon I went for a swim with Dave. We had a sing song in the trailer in the evening.

22nd July. We were allowed in the town in the afternoon, so Reg & a few others & myself set out & had a look round the shops & managed to get tickets for the miniature theatre for the 5.15 performance.

Page 103

After having a few iced lemonades & a few sandwiches we went to the show & thoroughly enjoyed it. The show was called "Highlights." Came back in the evening & had a good feed up in the trailer.

23rd J. Again the ban was dropped & we were not allowed out owing to the anticipated move. Some of the lads were beginning to get browned off with waiting about & were anxious to get on with the job. As we could not go out of camp I went for a swim in the morning & had a good rest in the afternoon. There was a football match in the evening & I really enjoyed watching & the first one I had seen for a long time.

Page 104

24th July. Felt bad all day & had a bad attack of diarrhoea, laid on my bed all day but got up in the evening & saw a show at 24.

25th. Went to church in the morning & went swimming in the afternoon.

26th. Our Advance Surgical Section left, in a hurry as usual & flew over by plane. Played in a football match in the evening.

For the next 3 days we just hung about & began to get very fed up with doing nothing. Anyway, they signalled for me urgently & so I had to pack my microscope & stains in a box but we had to wait a day then for the plane. Anyway F/Sgt Smiles decided to...

Page 105

...come with me & so we had everything in readiness. That afternoon I went for a swim & a very rough sea & lost my ring coming in over the rocks. This upset me very much & for the time being seemed to take all the edge off the excitement of flying to Sicily.

30th. Final arrangements were made & without further delay F/Sgt Smiles & I set off for Castel Benito Aerodrome where we were to catch the plane the following morning. We left T. race course at 6 o'clock & in 1/2 hour arrived at the 'drome. Here all final arrangements were made for the following morning. We stayed overnight in the transit camp.

Page 106

31st July. Up at 5.30 — Breakfast at 6 o'clock & on the 'drome at 6.30. Here we had some considerable waiting about & by the time we were weighed in & everything checked it was 7.30. A gari turned up & took us out to the kite which was a D.C.3. Standing on the runway. Altogether there were 12 of us plus a crew of 4 & by the time we got all the baggage etc. on board it was close on 8 o'clock. Punctually on time the pilot taxied to his position & on receiving the signal we were airborne before

you could say "Jack Robinson." After about 1/2 hour we were over the sea & saw nothing for the next 2 hours...

Page 107

...but waves after which time Malta came in sight. This was the first I had seen of Malta & we circled twice & could see the whole island. We were flying quite low & could see what a wonderfully fertile place it is. There seemed hardly a square yard of land which was not cultivated & it certainly gave a wonderful picture from the air. We landed on one of the 'dromes (Luga), which are all joined together by long runways. Having made a perfect landing at 10.30 we were told we could get out & walk round for 1/2 hour. Some of us found a tea shop & went & had...

Page 108

...a cup of tea. I had just finished mine when F/Sgt Smiles came running in & called out for me & said the plane was taking off straight away. We had to run hard & just caught it before the doors were closed. Within a few seconds we were in the air again & out over the sea, this time flying low so that we could not be picked up by German radio location. In 20 minutes we got our first glimpse of Sicily & in 1/2 an hour had landed once again at an 'drome at Cassibile, 5 miles from Syracuse. Having flown over that short distance between Malta & Sicily it is not surprising how easily the...

Page 109

...Germans bombed Malta when they were in possession of Sicily. Our advance party were only a matter of 200 yds from the 'drome so it did not take very long before the gari came to pick us up & once more I was with the advance party. The camp was situated in an almond grove right in the farm lands, surrounded by some of the prettiest scenery I had seen for sometime. So far there were only 12 of us across & the rest were still in Tripoli. I set up the few oddments I had in a tent & at the moment there was not a great deal of work to do. In the evening Reg took me for a walk all round some...

Page 110

...vineyards which were quite near at hand & we picked grapes & ate them until we looked like them. Never before have I seen such big grape vineyards with almond trees intermingled. Our surroundings here were really beautiful & one could almost imagine oneself back in England again, somewhere in any farming district. It was grand to see real soil once more & no sand which we were used to

by now. There was a farm in the next field where they kept horses, cows, goats & chickens & it was a wonderful sight to see the cows coming in in the afternoon for milking.

Page 111

The Sicilian farmers were quite friendly & were very willing to do our washing for us. As in most country farms in England, this one had a well where we used to draw most of our water. And so, I went to bed that night feeling very satisfied with the situation & can honestly say that the first week here was one of the happiest I had spent on the unit. As there were so few of us & only 3 officers, there was no discipline & we were allowed to do more or less as we liked & led a comparatively free life until the main party arrived, which was nearly a fortnight from this date.

Page 112

1st Aug. As I have said life was very pleasant here & everyone went about their jobs & when you finished, walked down to the sea which was only 1/2 mile away. It was lovely bathing here but no sand! Instead, there were the famous Sicilian coral rocks which we were able to dive off into about 15 feet of crystal clear water.

As time went on we began to get more busy every day & the Air Sea Rescue parties flying in the Walruses were doing some grand work in picking up our pilots who had come down in the drink. We received quite a large number...

Page 113

...of casualties from this source & by the 8th Aug. we were full up & our little advance party had all its time cut out coping with all the patients. Malaria had got a hold on some people by now & we were receiving quite a few cases of it which kept me very busy.

10th Aug. The majority of the main party arrived & it was not very long before our little camp was turned into a big field hospital once again.

11th Aug. The P.M.O. informed me that I was to go to Catania to pick up some equipment I wanted from the University. We set off early morning & soon...

Page 114

...passed through Syracuse & was not long before we were up in the very high hills surrounding Lentini & Carlentini. The views we had on the way were some of the most wonderful I have seen for sometime & if anyone saw the hills & valleys as I

did, they must realise what difficult ground our men had to fight over. All the way up it was nothing but hills & dales which were surrounded by orange, almond & lemon groves. On the way we called at Augusta & it was here that we saw where the fighting had been heavy. Most of the places all the way up...

Page 115

...were practically unscathed & no one would have known that there had been heavy fighting there only a few weeks previously. The port at Augusta had been very badly damaged but there were still Italian seaplanes floating in the harbour which to all outward appearances looked untouched. As we carried on we got to the plains of Catania & passed over the famous bridge which was the Germans' strong point in their last effort to save Catania. It was while taking this bridge that Headley Verity the Yorks cricketer lost his life. We had been warned of the...

Page 116

...heavy mining the Germans had done around this area & we had proof of it here alright. The sappers had done their stuff again & everywhere along the side of the road was strewn with mines which they had dug up. We had a wonderful view of Mount Etna from here which seemed to stand majestically behind Catania. Before entering the town we passed what was once a German air base, but the Americans had bombed it so much that it was just one mass of bomb craters. On entering the town we had to pass through some...

Page 117

...of the worst areas where street fighting had been worst & the place was in a terrible state, Catania having been in our hands only a week now. Soon we passed into the better part of the town & could see at a glance that in peacetime, was quite a nice place. We also learnt that the front line at this time was only 25 miles north of Catania & so as you can guess we were very near to the Jerries. We soon found Area H.Q. & told them we had come up for medical supplies. They directed us to the University of Catania where we got in without much trouble. This place was an eye opener to me...

Page 118

...& the whole place had been left just as it was & by the looks of it had been evacuated in a hurry. The equipment I saw here was some of the finest I have ever seen in my life & in one lab we went into there was a photographic microscope set up already for use & must have been worth a great deal of money. It was

practically a brand new place & it was wonderful to see a first class lab such as this. Anyway, our job was to pick up a balance which we did & as many other things as we could lay hands on. Time was short & we were afraid the officer might come round &...

Page 119

...catch us piling all this equipment in the lorry. Anyway we got some very useful things & cleared off quickly. We stayed the night at M.T. & R.U. & they had taken over a big Fiat works in the centre of the town. We had a good show here & something to eat & then went for a stroll in a beautiful park. We had not been out long before we were caught in a raid & had no option but to take shelter at the nearest tree. We made one just in time before the shrapnel from the Beauforts came clattering down all around us. We stood hugging that tree for ½ hour which seemed like years to me.

Page 120

All the time, shrapnel was falling all round us & was hitting the trunk of the tree just above our heads. It was a miracle how none of us were touched & for a second time I thanked God for my life. As soon as the raid was over we went back to M.T. & R.U. & it was not long before I got down for the night & was asleep!

We started off back to camp after breakfast the following morning & had a very enjoyable run back. We stopped at a place called Florida on the way & had some very nice ices & drinks. We got back to...

Page 121

...camp in time for tea after a very enjoyable trip. I reorganised my lab & by now was coming into shape very nicely. The work was piling up & everybody was very busy. I myself was extra busy & for the next fortnight had very little spare time. Jerry visited us occasionally but never dropped any bombs on our camp.

1st Sept. We had our orders to move to Catania & take over a big Commercial Institute which we turned into a hospital. Having done the run to Catania, it was not fresh to me, but nevertheless I enjoyed the beautiful scenery for a second time. We arrived at the new hospital at 2 p.m. & were...

Page 122

...when we saw what a wonderful place it was, looked forward to getting down to some useful work. The building itself was built in a triangle & the whole of the

ground floor on one side was various different experimental laboratories, lecture rooms & museums. All the upstairs rooms were at one time lecture rooms & were turned into very good wards. The Army had got the place when we arrived & the mess it was in was indescribable & with the aid of about 30 Italians it took us 3 or 4 days to get the place anything near approaching a hospital. Anyway, in a week we were completely organised...

Page 123

...& the whole place looked as different again. The P.M.O. came round & was amazed at the work we had done & was very pleased indeed. It was not very long before I got my lab straightened out & made a very nice little place for myself. I was very pleased with all the extra equipment I was able to get hold of & could get down to some good work now that I had an incubator. It was grand to be in a decent lab once again & a change from the trailer, but the thought entered my mind, that if ever I had to set up again in the trailer, I should have a job with all the extra equipment I had.

Page 124

Anyway the days rolled by & within a fortnight we were up to 300 patients. Everyone had to work very hard & with very little spare time off. I was doing 50 specimens a day in the lab which was more than I had ever dreamed of doing on a M.R.S. I really enjoyed it & felt at last that my presence was felt. Again the P.M.O. (G/Cpt. O'Malley) came round & complimented me on the good work I was doing & told me that he was doing his best to get my third.

The hospital was situated almost in the centre of Catania & so when we got time off we were able to get out to the pictures...

Page 125

...& ENSA concerts which by now were in full swing. We were also able to look round the shops which were beginning to open up & life on the whole returning to normal.

The P.M.O. managed to commandeer a hotel up at Mt. Etna which we used as a convalescent home. I managed to get a week-end up there which I enjoyed immensely. The hotel itself was in peacetime a place where tourists stayed on mountain expeditions, on the mountain, & was situated about 5000 feet above sea level, Mt. Etna being 10000. Some people climbed to the top but I did...

Page 126

...not feel inclined to & I could see sufficient from the grounds of the hotel. It was the first week-end in October that I was there & snow was just forming on the peak. Unfortunately all the films I took did not come out very well & were not worth printing & I was very disappointed as they were really beautiful views.

We settled down to a good routine in the hotel & my week-end in the mountains refreshed me considerably & I enjoyed the dance immensely. The hotel was designed on very modern lines with every modern convenience, & what I hated which...

Page 127

...was icy cold came down off the mountains. We had all the civilian staff employed to wait on us & managed to get some drinks & open up the bars. The ballroom was a grand place & on the Saturday night got a dance band & invited about 30 sisters from the surrounding hospitals & our own & had a really good dance. I was serving the drinks in the officers' bar & needless to say, did very well for myself. It was a grand evening & I think everyone enjoyed it.

When I returned to the H.Q. on Monday, as expected I found...

Page 128

...a whole pile of work waiting for me but soon got through it & once more straightened out the place.

Work had slackened off by now & we were able to get out into the town to have a look round & see a few shows. From this time onwards, life became more normal & NAFIs & canteens in the town were well organised by this time & we could go out in the afternoon & have a good feed & listen to a band & then either to go to a variety show or cinema. Altogether there were 3 cinemas running & a variety show, so you could choose what shows you wanted to see & if you usually managed to get in...

Page 129

...if you got there about quarter of an hour before the performance started. Of course all the shows were free & you could sit where you liked. Catania being quite a large town had about 6 cinemas, 2 of which had opened up again for the civilians who had managed to get films from somewhere.

Some of the shops were not bad at all although none of them very large. Still there was quite a variety & on the whole the prices of things were quite reasonable. We were able to buy plenty of little cakes & creams which they seemed to go in for a great deal out there.

Page 130

On the 11th Oct. I was told I had to fly to Bari - Italy to 30 M.F.H. to set up a laboratory for them. One of our sisters came with me & we arrived at Catania airport at 6.30 - were weighed in and went out to the plane which was a D.C.3. We took off at 8.0c & I had the best view of Catania I have ever had & also of Mt. Etna, but unfortunately it was very cloudy & most of it was covered by the clouds. I could pick out our hospital quite plainly & could follow the road all the way along. We flew up the coast to Messina & it was not long before we could see the Straits & the...

Page 131

...4 mile stretch across to Italy. We flew across the Straits & followed the coast of Italy. We had been flying for about ½ hour when we ran into a terrific thunderstorm & the plane was pitched & tossed about like a cork in some waves & many times I had visions of coming down in the sea & having to swim for it. Quite a number of people soon began to feel very sick, but I felt quite alright. We continued on a little further & then the pilot decided to turn back & said it was too risky to go any further, & so we landed at Catania again at 9.30 & were back where we started.

Page 132

The weather was really bad now & the pilot said he would not attempt it again that day, & instead our passages were booked for the next day.

We returned to the hospital & as I was up early went to bed in the afternoon and slept right through till dinner time.

The following morning I was up early again & this time we had a lovely day for the trip. We went through the same procedures at the airport & finally got out to the plane at 7.45. We had accumulated more passengers but this time & when we finally got sorted out had a major general, a brigadier & an air commodore & many colonels & majors...

Page 133

...there were altogether 28 of us. We took off at 8.0c & were soon airborne once again. This time, instead of following the coast line, we flew out to sea. It was not long before we ran into large numbers of air pockets which made the kite pitch & toss all over the place. Some people felt very ill, but I was quite alright. We landed at Taranto at 10.30 & stayed for about ½ hour & then took off again & landed at

Bari at 11.30. Phoned up for transport which took us to 30 M.F.H. about 5 miles down the road. The C.O. seemed very pleased to see me & said there was plenty of work for me to do.

Page 134

30 M.F.H. at this time was situated in a building which used to be a school right on the sea shore of the Adriatic & about 5 miles from Bari itself.

For the next week I had to work hard in their laboratory straightening it out & finding out what equipment they required & generally clearing up the place which was in a filthy condition. Not having a trained lab asst. there made things worse as the chap who was there, had very little idea of how to run a laboratory & it took hours trying to teach him different things.

During my stay here I was...

Page 135

...able to get out into Bari quite a few times & soon found out what a wonderful place it was. The Italians consider it "their Blackpool of Italy" & I must say that it nearly comes up to any of our seaside resorts in England. Bari is still run entirely by the Italians & has not been taken over by the British Authorities like all the other places that have been captured - not only that - it was by-passed by our troops & in consequence has suffered very little war damage. On first entering the town, one does not get a good impression but on entering the main St., the whole place seems to...

Page 136

...change & you have large buildings & shops on either side of the road, trolley-buses, trams, buses & everything in full swing. Unlike most other places we had been in, all the shops were open & had plenty of stuff in them. If we had had sufficient time & knew the right places to go, we could get things very cheaply & some most obscene prices compared with what they are in England. For instance you could go into a tailors & buy a full suit for 10/6 or an overcoat for 15/- & trilby hats were standard price at 2/6. On passing through the main street, one's general impression was that these people did not...

Page 137

...know there was a war on & did not seem to feel it in any way.

The main street led right on to the promenade which was most picturesque which went round the cliffs & formed a bay, so that at one point you could look right into Bari & along the front where most of the big buildings were situated.

Food was not short here as one might expect & we were able to go into beautiful restaurants & have a first class meal & sit and listen to an orchestra playing, very much in the same way as you might do in any Lyons Corner Houses in London.

Page 138

All the Italian cinemas were open & showing quite modern American films with the dialogue changed into Italian. There was one theatre reserved for British & American troops which was an enormous place right on the sea front. It was here that I saw Wee Georgie Wood & Dolly Harmer in a very good variety concert. That same morning I was wandering around the town & sat down in a café for an ice cream & he came walking along the street with Dolly Harmer & came & sat down at the same table as us. We soon got into conversation & told us they...

Page 139

...had done 68 shows in the last 32 days, travelling from Cairo right through to Algiers & then around Sicily & finished up here. He was most interesting & wanted to buy us drinks or anything although we had finished, but in order not to be rude we had another ice with him & then bade our leave & finished our wander round the town.

Although I was able to get in Bari fairly often & enjoy myself, I was very fed up with the unit I was on & had very little co-operation from anyone & considering I had come to help them out, thought it a very poor show.

Page 140

I had been there 5 days when my C.O. turned up on his way to Foggia which was to be our next move. He came & saw me & I told him straight out that I was fed up & wanted to get back to our unit as soon as possible. He fixed it up & made arrangements for me on the Tuesday morning, which I was very pleased about as it was my birthday on the Wednesday & I knew my pals were arranging a party for me. On Tuesday morning I was up early & ready to leave by 6.30 & very thankful to see the end of that unit — not one person gave me a word of thanks...

Page 141

...for the work I had done for them during the last week. I was very disgusted & told my C.O. about it when I returned who was annoyed to think that he had ever let me go when there was work waiting for me.

The kite took off from Bari just after 8.0c. We had a very smooth & comfortable journey back & landed at Catania once more at 11.0c. It did not take me long to fix up transport & I was back in the hospital by 11.30.

The following day being Wed. 20th Oct., my birthday, I did not do a great deal of work.

Page 142

Finishing at 12.30, I went for a walk round the town after lunch with my pal John Walker & bought a few things for the evening. The dinner was arranged for 7.0c & my other pal had fixed everything up marvellously & had arranged everything. Reg certainly made an excellent job of it — even down to the finest detail such as toast with the soup & iced coffee to finish up. The chicken itself was beautifully tender & most enjoyable. Not for many a long day have I seen such a spread as we had that night & by the time we had...

Page 143

...finished the dinner, we all had to sit still for about ½ hr & let it digest. The cooks made me a lovely fruit cake & had even iced it for me which none of us were able to touch until later in the evening. Of course we had a few bottles of wine which went down very nicely afterwards. As usual we had a very good sing song & finished the party about midnight, everyone having thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Having got over the effects of the party, I had to get down to some work which had mounted up, but I soon got through it & once more got down to normal. Work started slacking off...

Page 144

...considerably now & we had rumours of moving over to Foggia, Italy to join our advance party which was already out there. Anyway nothing came of it at the time & it all fell through. Having a fair amount of spare time now we organised a football team & were able to get matches with other units twice a week. By this time Catania had got back to normal again & the streets were always very crowded, nevertheless we went for some very pleasant walks & got out to the pictures every week. We were able to get a good dance hall & a band & the entertainments committee got busy...

Page 145

...& organised some good dances which we held once a fortnight. I will say that the sisters from the Army hospitals turned up in force & we always had plenty to dance with — not only that they seemed to join in with the spirit of it & made some very pleasant evenings.

Rumours were still going round about moving & we had been in Catania nearly 3 months now which is the longest stay we had at any one place. Most of us had got well settled down by now but at the same time would like to have another move & if we were going to move let's get on with it so that we should be settled...

Page 146

...in our new quarters & have everything straight by Christmas.

November came along & we started rehearsing for a show which we hoped to put on for Christmas, but made an early start in case a move came off in the meantime so that we could put it on wherever we were.

All the original arrangements about going to Foggia seemed to have been squashed on the head & the rumours floating around now point to Naples.

During the second week in November we had a mild earth tremor which shook the building. I was sitting in my laboratory & quite expected all the windows to come...

Page 147

...in at any moment. It was a horrible sensation & if that was only an earth tremor — well all I can say is I would not like to feel an earthquake.

At last on 17th Nov. '43 we received our orders to move to a place called Torre del Greco which was about 6 miles south of Naples. Once again we packed everything up & I left with an advance party at 0900hrs on 18th Nov. Our first day's journey was supposed to take us to Messina, which by the coast road was about 75 miles, but owing to one of the pontoon bridges being u/s, we had to make a long detour inland via Patù & Barcelona & the mountain passes, constituting us doing nearly...

Page 148

...another 100 miles. By nightfall we had travelled 108 miles over very hilly country & with trailers as well, we considered it a very good effort. We were still about 40 miles from Messina on the north coast of Sicily & decided to pull in & stop for the night. The following morning we were on the road again by 0800hrs & we had not been travelling for more than half an hour when my driver tried to change gear & the gear lever came out in his hand! We soon got this fixed & were

on our way again. We made Messina comfortably by lunch time & had a 'brew up' in the car park. As we drove right through Messina, we could see what real...

Page 149

...hammering it must have had from the sea. From what I could see as we drove through, there were very few buildings that were not battle scarred. After tiffin we lined up on the dock side & waited for a barge to take us over to the mainland. We had to wait about an hour & then got all the garis & trailers on. By the time we did this it was about 3.30 & the worst of it was that it absolutely poured with rain the whole time. We reached the mainland & assembled in Reggio at 4.30. And so for the second time I landed in Italy. We carried on for an hour or so & got to a place called Gioia Tauro by nightfall & made our camp here. Owing to the delay in crossing, we only did 75 miles that day.

Page 150

Saturday 20th Nov. We started out about 0800hrs & knew that the main part of the convoy would lose the 2 garis towing the trailers. So from now on, the 4 of us with the two garis & trailers formed our own little party & brought up the rear. We did not see the rest of them until we arrived at our destination. Our route was to follow the coast road for the best part of the way & it was not long before we came to famous mountain passes with the most picturesque scenery anyone could wish to see. It was heavy going for the garis up & down these steep hills & although we drove until 4.30 only managed to knock...

Page 151

...87 miles that day. We found a suitable spot on a river bed near the Paola pass to stop for the night. Having separated from the rest of the convoy, we could more or less please ourselves now & took everything in our stride.

Sunday 21st Nov. We started out at 8.30 & made good headway until after tiffin when we ran into very bad wind & rain & had to take things easily as it was very dangerous round the steep hills & corners. We passed one place here, where incidentally the Italians at one time were in full retreat, & the sides of the roads were still littered with burnt out guns, tanks & garis of all kinds.

Page 152

We reached a place called Paia or more by 4.30 and decided to pack up for the night as a good storm was just beginning. We found a big car park on the beach & drew the garis on there.

Monday 22nd Nov. We started out again at 8.30 & made Sapri by lunch time. Here we had to leave the coast road & go inland & in so doing, had to cross right over the mountains. The scenery seemed to get even more beautiful here & as we made a very long zig-zagging climb from Sapri we were able to see the whole of the bay better at every bend. Unlike the day previous, it was beautiful & the sun shining down on the water gave us...

Page 153

...perhaps, one of the most picturesque views anyone is ever likely to see. To describe all the towns we passed would be almost impossible, but to say the least for the majority — they are dirty, filthy & smelly & almost certain to be lice ridden. Having seen the places as we did, it is quite understandable why there is so much Typhus in Italy. Having climbed some exceptionally long hills we eventually arrived at a plateau on the top & made good headway through Rivello, Lauria, Lagonegro, & Sala Consilina where we stopped for the night once more.

Tuesday 23rd Nov. We started at 8.0c & made Salerno easily by...

Page 154

...tiffin time. We stopped in a car park in the town & had our tiffin & found out we were only about 35 miles from our destination. We set out along the coast road after tiffin, passing through Pompeii, and reaching Torre del Greco by 4.0c. It did not take us long to find the large Convalescent Depot we were to take over & soon made contact with the other party who had only arrived the previous day. Our total mileage was 516 miles & the longest run & I might say the most enjoyable we had done.

The Convalescent Depot was a large modern place with every convenience & was still occupied by...

Page 155

...the Italians. It took them 3 days to move out & during that time we were able to look round & take note of our surroundings. We were 6 miles from Naples & from the upstairs windows one could look out right over the bay of Naples. From the north windows you looked straight on to Mt. Vesuvius which was a wonderful sight at night time, throwing out lava & flames. The local inhabitants say that all the time it erupts they know they are safe but when it stops there is a great panic as it is liable to erupt in other places other than the normal crater. We had a look round the village of Torre del Greco but there...

Page 156

...was very little to buy & what there was, the prices were very high. Unfortunately we had left our old desert rats who were still with the 8th Army on the other side of Italy & had come over to the 1st & 5th Army's side with the Yanks. Hence the price of everything being so high.

As soon as the Italians moved out of the hospital we were able to move in & get things straight. I had a room for my laboratory on the top floor looking out to Vesuvius, & on looking round one could see quite plainly that the Italians had certainly picked a beautiful spot for a convalescent depot as there was picturesque scenery from...

Page 157

...all views.

For the first few days we worked hard to get the place straight & it did not take long before things were in running order again. A few days later I had a run into Naples for the first time & was not greatly impressed by it. The talk we had heard about Naples being raised to the ground, as usual were unfounded & the main shopping centre of the town was practically untouched. Of course the area round the docks had been hit very badly & the damage was great, but Naples is a very large city & in comparison with the rest of it, to my mind it did not cover such a big area as people made out.

Page 158

Here again, the Yanks were in occupation & there was quite a number of things to buy in the shops but of course the prices were terrific & black market was at its highest.

There are many beautiful buildings in Naples such as the Cathedral, the museum, opera house, one of the Kings' Palaces & many others. The main street called Via Roma was absolutely packed & was just like going through Oxford St. or another famous street in London during the rush hour.

We were fortunate enough to get a hospital where there was a small theatre already for us & a stage which could be...

Page 159

...have been better for the show we put on at Christmas. It did not take long before we had things arranged to our liking & rehearsals started in earnest. During the next few weeks before Christmas the work rolled in steadily & we had quite a few ENSA shows including Geraldo & of course we rehearsed nearly every

evening for our own show. By the time Christmas arrived we were practically full with patients.

Sunday Dec 11th. I took a half day & visited the ruins of Pompeii which was only about 5 miles away. Comparing these old Roman ruins with those at Sabratha, they were far superior. Here we saw complete streets with the...

Page 160

...shops on either side, the market place, swimming pools, arenas & of course some of the famous houses with the actual paintings on the walls. Some of them were in extremely good preservation & clearly indicated what they were supposed to represent. A guide took us round & explained all the different places of interest as we came to them. I was very glad of the opportunity to go round & it was very educational.

23rd Dec. All of us excited about the dress rehearsal of the show & although a dress rehearsal, we had an audience of about 20 who were unable to come the following night. The concert hall & the best part of the hospital has...

Page 161

...been decorated & it really looked grand. The show went down very well & everyone thought it would be a great success the following evening.

24th Dec. I had to work hard in the morning to get my afternoon off in order to prepare the stage. The show was due to start at 7.30 & we began making up soon after 6.0c. Everybody was ready at the time & our producer opened the show right on time. The whole thing went off without a hitch & everyone thoroughly enjoyed it.

After the show we had a party & started off the Christmas...

Page 162

...celebrations in fine style. At 12.0c we went into the courtyard & sang Christmas carols until someone tried to tip a bucket of water over us & then decided to pack in. The next morning several patients asked why we did not continue & seemed disappointed but enjoyed the 10 minutes we gave them.

Christmas Day. Was a holiday for us all & we did our best to entertain the patients. Their dinner was at midday & we all helped to serve. Those that were able to get up went down to the dining hall while several of us stayed on the wards & looked after those bed patients...

Page 163

...In the afternoon we had a game of football which was very enjoyable & then returned for our own dinner which was at 5.30. I must say our cooks did it very well & the turkey & pork we had was lovely. Of course we had Xmas pudding & 2 bottles of beer per man. The places were all laid out with a little present for each man & 50 cigarettes. After the dinner we sat and ate nuts & raisins until we could not eat any more. After that we had a sing song which lasted until the early hours of the morning.

Boxing Day was a normal...

Page 164

...working day, but our little gang had our own party in the billet with a real good sing song. We kept up parties every night until we saw the N. Year in & by that time there was no more drink left & everyone had had enough for a little while.

On the 28th Dec. No. 1 RAF G.H. arrived & took over our hospital. As we had not had orders to move we were granted 3 days rest & allowed to do what we liked. This gave people a chance to have a look round Naples & enjoy themselves. My pal & I made the most of it & had several lay ins in the mornings & went out in the afternoons.

On 29th & 30th I took advantage of the rest but of course we had a party & sing song in the evening.

31st. My pal & I went to Naples & went to see an opera. The opera house in Naples is really a marvellous place & the biggest theatre I have ever been in. The opera was La Bohème & as I had not seen opera before expected to be bored especially as it was all in Italian. On the contrary I was thrilled with every moment of it. Unfortunately we were a bit late & missed the overture & had to take a seat right up in the gods...

Page 165

...on the 6th floor. Nevertheless we could see & hear beautifully. When I first saw the orchestra of 65 players, my eyes nearly popped out of my head. They were absolutely first class & it was a real thrill to hear a good orchestra again. The company were all first class actors & singers & the woman who took the leading part of Mimi had one of the best voices I think I have ever heard. As I say it was all in Italian but the programmes were written in English with a short description of each act. This helped to clarify things a lot & we were able to understand the story quite well.

It was a wonderful feeling to be in a real theatre once again & to see all the plush seats. During the intervals, waiters came round with sweets & cakes, in the same way as they do in any English theatre.

I enjoyed it so much that we decided to go the next afternoon and see the Scottish opera called Lucia di Lammermoor. This time we made sure of getting a good seat & got a box on the second floor (price 30 lire ea).

There was a different company from the day previous but I...

Page 166

...think they were just as good & again I enjoyed it very much. After the N. Years party the previous night which lasted till somewhere around 3 am & then seeing the opera, we all decided it was high time for an early night & not only that, we did not know what was going to happen the next day as our 3 days leave was up.

2nd Jan. There was still no news of us moving & so we were allowed to continue our life of freedom but unfortunately Naples was out of bounds so we could not go to see La Traviata which was very disappointing. Nevertheless, trips were arranged up Vesuvius & to Pompeii again.

For the next 3 days we had a good rest which I am sure did all of us a great deal of good.

We got our orders to move on the 5th & at 9.0c on the 6th we were on our way to Foggia.

We got about 20 miles along the road & were stopped by M.Ps saying that we could get no further than Avelino because the roads were ice bound & the 5th Army divs were on the move & had got stuck.

I was not at all surprised at this because all the...

Page 167

...high hills surrounding us were covered with snow & it was bitterly cold.

We made Avelino by lunch time & drew into a park & had something to eat. The C.O. went out to find out when we might be able to move & came back with the news that we should probably not be able to move until the next day. None of us fancied the prospects of sleeping in the park as it was bitterly cold & we did P.T. to keep ourselves warm.

By some luck some Canadians from a surrounding village found out we were there & offered to put us up for the night in their transit camp. So we piled into the garis & followed them down to their place. We got all the vehicles parked in a small square & then proceeded to the billets. They made us welcome & got a good hot meal for us which was most enjoyable. Then they found us a billet & made us as comfortable as possible. The next morning they gave us such a big breakfast that the majority of us could not finish it. Apparently there was still no news & we were allowed to wander around the village, but to report every 1/2hr.

Page 168

In the afternoon we arranged a football match with the Canadians & had a good game. After the match we were informed that we were to be ready to stand by to move off at 9.0c that night. Once more we had all the garis lined up ready to move off by moonlight, & shortly after 9.0c we were on the move again with a 100 mile journey ahead of us. Although we were all tired, the roads were clear & free from ice & we made good headway, finally reaching Foggia at 2.30 am. I don't remember anything about the last 10 miles of the ride & fell asleep in the car...

Page 169

...at that time 30 M.F.H. had a large hospital & they put us up for what was left of the night. We were all hungry & glad of something hot to drink, finally getting down at about 4.0c. We were up again at 7.30 & at 9.0c moved to another part of Foggia to a large building which we were to take over. At the time the Americans had possession but by mid-day the following day they had all moved out. The same procedure occurred as before of unloading the garis & getting the hospital set up as soon as possible & the next day we were admitting...

Page 170

...patients.

The building we were in was at one time supposed to be an old ladies' rest home & was a very big place with a limited water supply. I had a lab on the first floor but of course no water & after one or two shifts around of rooms, finally got settled down.

The Americans took over the place 30 M.F.H. had, which incidentally was a proper hospital, & 30 moved in with us & more or less amalgamated.

Jack Holland the lab asst. from 30 moved in with me & it did not take us long to have a nice little lab organised for ourselves. We had plenty of work to do but for a change it gave me the chance to have some half days which previously I had little chance of having because I was by myself all the time.

Feb. came along and we were still at Foggia. We were given our Africa Stars which did not mean much out here as most people seemed to be wearing them but probably will mean something when we get home. While we were here, we were able to play quite a lot of...

Page 171

...football & Rugger & on my half days I saw some good ENSA shows & pictures.

Foggia itself was just one mass of ruins & one day I had a walk round & as far as I could see there seemed hardly a building in the place which had not been bombed

or affected by bomb blast. It was said that Naples had been raised to the ground & although Naples was a far bigger place, I considered Foggia had been hit far worse in comparison. Everything was running very smoothly at Foggia & we began to get thoroughly settled down in the same way as we did at Catania. By the end of February...

Page 172

...we were still hard at it & there still seemed no definite news of any move, possibly due to the temporary hold up at the Anzio bridge-head.

March arrived & showed signs of the better weather coming which was a good thing as I have never seen it rain so much as it did here in Feb. for the whole time I have been overseas. My best pal John Walker was taken seriously ill & had to undergo a very difficult abdominal operation which afterwards proved to be very successful, but at one time it was definitely a touch and go as to whether he would live & we...

Page 173

...were all very worried about him. After a few days he showed signs of good improvement & we all had good hopes for him. Then, just to crown everything I was told I was posted No. 2, which quite honestly shook me badly as I never expected it, but on being told by the C.O. it was the only possible way for me to get promotion, I understood the reason why. It did not take many days for the posting to become effective & I had to pack up my lab in a hurry into the trailer having Jack to do all the work until my successor arrived.

Page 174

Having said my farewell to most people on Thursday evening I was ready to move away first thing on Friday 17th March & it was arranged that I should go on the ambulance with the evacuations to Naples to 3 B.P.D. where I had to wait for the boat to Algiers.

My heart was definitely in my mouth that morning, as I had made some grand pals on the unit & I was particularly sorry to leave while John was still very ill, although I was thankful to hear that before I left he was taken off the D.I. list & showed he was making...

Page 175

...very good progress.

Having finally said goodbye to all my friends I set off in the ambulance for Naples, still hardly believing I was leaving 25 M.F.H. after being with them for 1 yr 3 months.

We had a good run to Naples, stopped for tiffin about 1/2 way & while I was getting my teeth into a crust, I split one in half which annoyed me very much. Nevertheless I was fortunate the next day in being near a dental centre & knowing the D.O. He had a look at it for me & said there was nothing he could do about it except to take it out, which he did in very quick time.

Page 176

I arrived at the B.P.D. about 3.30 & was put into a billet & told that a boat to Algiers might be in the next day, which I thought good news & as I expected too good to be true.

It did not take me long to find out that this place was much the same as other transit camps I have known. Bags of parades & all the trimmings which go to make life one continual bind. Anyway I had the good fortune to meet an old pal who was also going to Algiers & had been waiting about 5 days for the boat & was working at the Sick Quarters. Naturally I...

Page 177

...fell in with him & soon got off the parades by offering my services at Sick Quarters.

On Sunday 19th March Mt. Vesuvius started erupting & threw out quite a bit of lava which according to the local inhabitants of Portici was the biggest eruption they had had for 15 years.

By Monday afternoon the volcano was still erupting & getting far worse. Thousands of tons of lava were being thrown down the sides & travelling at the rate of 1 yard per minute in a 36 foot high avalanche of white hot lava. There was a small...

Page 178

...town right in the way of the main stream of lava called San Sebastiano & by nightfall the whole of this town had been destroyed but all the inhabitants were evacuated safely.

It is difficult for me to describe the sight I saw this night with the volcano in full eruption. I was standing on top of the building in which I was billeted, not more than 5 miles away from the mountain itself & it was a sight I, as many millions of people have never seen before. The whole of the mountain was lit up & all the lava by night showed up...

Page 179

...bright red as it trickled down the mountain side. For anyone who has never seen a volcano erupt — the only thing I can say, that it is one of the most spectacular things I have ever seen in my life but at the same time very terrifying when you can see easily the terrific power there must be behind it. For me to write more about it would be senseless because I am not a very apt person at describing things at the best of times & articles written in the papers “Union Jack & Stars & Stripes” describe the whole thing far better than I could ever do.

Volume 3

No. 2 RAF G.H., Maison Carrée, Algiers. Spring 1943 – Boxing Day 1943.

Page 1

My first impression of Algiers was rather a thrilling one, because I saw it all lit up at night & this was the first time I had seen lights in a harbour since being in Cape Town.

After disembarking we were piled into garis & taken to B.P.D. As usual this transit camp was similar to most others & I was thankful I did not have to stay there long.

I was very anxious to get to my destination & see my new lab. I think I can honestly say that this was the first posting for a long time that I really looked forward to. Probably because I knew I was going to...

Page 2

...S/fdr Price whom I knew so well. Anyway my movement order came through by lunch time & I was very glad. Transport took me right to No. 2 RAF G.H. & when I saw it was very thrilled indeed. It stood on the top of a hill just outside a place called Maison Carrée. From the front of the hospital one could see right on to the sea front & to the left look right on to Algiers which was about 4 miles away. After finding the wardmaster's office, I went to the lab & soon found it situated at the end of a long corridor. S/fdr Price was not in at that moment so I waited & had a...

Page 3

...look round the place. It was not as big a lab as I had anticipated, but nevertheless very nice & clean & at a first glance I could see plenty of equipment. After a short while S/fdr Price came in & seemed very pleased indeed to see me. After a short chat, he took me all round the hospital & introduced me to the departmental chiefs. I soon found out that there were quite a few chaps here whom I knew well & were all with me at Halton in '40 & '41.

After going all round the hospital I came back to the lab & met my assistant & had a talk over a few things.

Page 4

I can honestly say that I felt very happy & very pleased with everything. S/fdr Price put me up for promotion the following day & it did not take me very long to settle down.

We were sleeping in tents & had hospital beds and mattresses to sleep on & the food was quite good.

After a few weeks I was thoroughly at home & had made several changes in the lab & started to teach my assistant & help to get him through his lab exam. I soon found out that he was a very able & willing worker & we got on very well indeed together.

Page 5

We also had one Italian P.O.W. who did all the washing up for us. After a while the work got so great that he could not keep up with it & he asked for our assistant which we were able to get him. After a while we were able to teach him one or two little jobs which helped us considerably & he came on very well indeed.

I found out that there was plenty of sport on the unit & it did not take me long to get my place in the football team.

After a month my promotion came through & I went into the Sgts mess which made a lot of difference as most people know.

Page 6

My promotion was not backdated as I had hoped it would be, only to my time of arrival here which was not very much.

A few days after I was promoted the Sgts mess had an outing & we had a very pleasant day at Tipaza, Milena & the Tomb of the Christians. On the way back we ran into a terrific swarm of locusts which hung around this area for a week or more & were a source of nuisance to everyone & of course the crops. Most people have seen locusts on the pictures but this was the first time I had ever seen them in the flesh...

Page 7

...& I hope the last. They are horrible pests & if any windows are left open they will fly in & go straight for any food which may be lying about.

Nevertheless in spite of the locusts we had a very enjoyable day & a pleasant change.

Every fortnight the Sgts mess held a dance to which most of the sisters came & it always made a very pleasant evening.

I paid one or two visits to Algiers but soon found out that there was not a great deal to do there except go to a show & I will say this, that there were always plenty of films to see. There was also a very...

Page 8

...nice opera house where they held some good shows. The season closed down during the summer & I was sorry because I had intended going each week & kept putting it off until finally it was too late & had to wait until the winter season started again.

To buy anything in Algiers was just out of the question, because the prices were too high. Even gifts at the gift shop were a terrible price & in my opinion not worth buying.

As we were about 4 miles out of Algiers liberty runs were run into Algiers...

Page 9

...twice a week which enabled one to go to a show in comfort knowing you could get back to camp easily without any bother. Trying to hitch like it, was an impossibility.

We had some very good ENSA shows at the hospital & at one time were getting at least one every week, but as the summer went on they got less & less.

Nevertheless we still had 2 cinema shows each week which usually provided reasonable entertainment.

Most of the chaps on this unit had not been overseas very long & they were some of the worst bunch of chaps for...

Page 10

...moaning I have ever met. I think it would have done a lot of them good to spend a few months in the desert without any entertainment at all. Nevertheless, they

did not worry me very much as I was very happy in my job & that was all I worried about.

By the time June came round we had not had any cricket & so I tackled S/ldr Price about it who was acting as sports officer for the unit & he elected me as Secretary of the cricket club. After a week or so I managed to get the club going & we started playing away matches because we had not a ground of...

Page 11

...our own at the time. Later on we managed to get our own ground & matting. We started the cricket far too late in the season & by the time we really got going it was time to pack up being the end of the season & getting too dark to play at nights.

So the end of the summer came & I had not taken any leave. September arrived & my pal said to me that it would be a good idea for us to go away together somewhere, but the question was where? In the end we decided to go to a rest camp about 3 miles away, but not awfully keen on the idea.

About 3 days before going on leave I was going on pay parade & was called to the C.O.'s office...

Page 12

...immediately. I had no idea what he wanted to see me for & was trying to turn over in my mind what I had done wrong! Anyway I marched in smartly & saluted & he got up from behind his table, came across & shook hands with me & said "Congratulations — you are a F/Sgt now." Well I could have fallen through the floor & could not believe my ears for a minute. Of course the rank was only acting, but nevertheless paid which I suppose was the main thing.

My friend & I went on leave the first week in September & spent most days swimming at Sidi Ferruch. We were very lucky to have exceptionally good weather or I'm afraid we should not...

Page 13

...have enjoyed ourselves at all.

During that week we saw quite a number of shows & I suppose on the whole, had quite a good time although I felt I wanted to get right away from the place for a little while.

On my return from leave, the work bumped up nearly 100% & it was really hard going for the two of us for the next month or so.

Cricket did a natural death & once more football took its place & I think it is here that the next chapter in the book should begin.

One Sunday afternoon early in Oct. I had been playing football & came back to the laboratory to collect a towel & some soap & passing one of the sisters' office, I saw her in...

Page 14

...sitting at the desk writing. Seizing the opportunity I went in and asked her if she would come to the Sgts mess dance. I must have looked an awful sight in football kit & hair all over the place & as it was all done so quickly, I must have caught her unawares & she accepted my invitation. The following week, I had a return invite to a dance at the Y.W.C.A., which, I must confess, shook me considerably as I never expected it. Unfortunately the dance was cancelled but instead we went to the pictures. It was a very enjoyable evening & I realised then that I had formed a great liking for this girl. And so I made up my mind not to let...

Page 15

...the opportunity slip by without finding out if she would care to come to the pictures again with me sometime. Knowing that I was keen on dancing, she asked me if I would like to go to the Y.W. dance the following Wednesday. I was very delighted & thrilled & accepted her kind invitation. That Wednesday would not come round fast enough but eventually did & I had a half day & met her for tea & then the dance in the evening. By now we realised that we both had a number of things in common & both liked one another's company.

I had known her 3 weeks now & it was my birthday week, which...

Page 16

...of course caused for celebration. We had a very nice little party & I was convinced even more then, that I had a very lovely girl.

As time went on, we arranged our 1/2 days & days off together & then I had to go & get Infective Hepatitis. I don't think in my whole life have I been so annoyed with myself as I was then, because I did not feel ill & did not want to go into hospital — nevertheless I had to & that was that. Of course I asked to go on her ward & I think that I made one of the quickest recoveries from Jaundice that anyone has ever done. I was in and out of hospital in 9 days, which to anyone knowing how resistant...

Page 17

...Jaundice can be sometimes, was exceptionally quick work. Mind you had I not wanted to have got out so quickly, I am sure I could have had another week at least! So once again I was free to go out with her but she was going on leave the next day so I did not see her for 5 days.

On her return we really began to enjoy ourselves & went to concerts, cinemas, theatre, dances, in fact everywhere together. Even though it was the beginning of December, the weather was still very warm & on fine days we went out on picnics which were a great success.

The time was passing very quickly now & after what one might...

Page 18

...call 3 years of solitary confinement, I was enjoying life to the fullest. It was not until I started going out with Margaret that Algiers held any interest at all. But with her, it was a different place & I might add a place I shall never forget as long as I live.

December rapidly melted away & Christmas was drawing near. Once again I was in a show on Christmas day which, when the time came proved to be most successful.

As is customary in the Air Force, the S.N.C.O.s relieve the airmen of all work on Christmas day & do what work there is to be done on the wards.

Page 19

After serving out the airmen's dinners I went straight on to Margaret's ward & helped with the washing up & meals. We had some good fun together & everything went very well indeed. At 6.30 I left the ward & went straight away to do the first show for the patients. Almost immediately afterwards we followed up with another show for the staff. By the time I had finished at 11.30, I was just about all in & finished off the day with a cup of tea in the bunk with Margaret. Although I was dog tired & thoroughly worn out, I enjoyed the day immensely & am sure I would not have done so had it not been for Margaret.

Page 20 — Final Entry

Boxing Day. I was so tired that I went to bed in the afternoon & slept 3 hours solidly. In the evening we had our Christmas dinner followed by a dance in the evening. Naturally I was with Margaret all the time & realised now that I was more than fond of her.

The Christmas celebrations finished up with a dance on New Year's Eve which was more of a success than the one on Boxing Day.

[This is the final diary entry. Walter put down his pen and did not write again.]