

DIARY OF LIEUT L.G. KRACKE VX44548 HEADQUARTERS POSTAL UNIT A.I.F. ABROAD  
1940 - 1946

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Promoted Captain 1941

Major 1943

O/C Base P.O.

Later appointed Deputy Director Army Postal Services, Land Headquarters,  
Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

WAR COMMENCED 3.9.1939

2.7.40 I was interviewed by Major A.G. Burns re a Com (Lieut) H.Q. Postal Unit.

3.7.40 Enlisted Town Hall Melbourne and after passing med. test proceeded to Caulfield Race Course for further exam and attestation.

18.7.40 Appointment as Lieut with seniority from 17.6.40.

25.7.40 Commenced military duty H.Q. Postal Unit, Craigs Buildings, Eliz. St. Melbourne. O/C Capt. T.J. Woolcock (Lieut C.J. Lancashire was also on duty). The latter subsequently took over command of attached Postal Unit and the vacancy was filled by the appt. of Lieut J.W. Shurmer (Supr Mail Sydney).

21.8.40 Lieut Shurmer took up duty.

20.8.40 Headquarters of the Army Post Office transferred to Tintara House, 73 Rd. Nth. Melbourne.

22.8.40 Final leave.

9.9.40 Entered Broadmeadows Military Camp to prepare for embarkation.

15.9.40 Left Broadmeadows by bus for station. Train to Station Pier Port Melbourne and embarked on M.S. Christaan Huygers a Dutch vessel of approx. 1700 tons which had been chartered by the British Govt. The first morning we anchored off Portsea.

(1st duty as Army Officer in charge of Pickett and knew nothing about it.)

16.9.40 Left anchorage Portsea and took to sea where we joined the other transports with the Cruiser Canberra as escort. The trip to Perth was uneventful.

21.9.40 Arrived Fremantle 9am and met by Capt. Woolcock O/C P.O. Unit. Shore leave was granted from 12 noon to 12 midnight. I had been appointed Postal Officer on the transport and the job of despatching the mails was completed satisfactorily. Our stay in Perth was quite enjoyable and interesting.

22.9.40 Left Fremantle (& Australia). The convoy consisting of 4 vessels was not increased.

1.10.40 Arrived in Columbo, Ceylon after an uninteresting voyage during during which the temperature became exceedingly hot. Port holes and doors were closed and the humidity very unpleasant especially at night when sleep was most difficult. The seas was monotonously calm the whole of the way, altogether different to the high seas encountered in the Bight. The shore leave at Columbo was exceedingly short 12 noon to 4.45pm. Items of interest busy harbour, number of vessels large & small, dispatch of mail to G.P.O. conditions at G.P.O., medieval nature of the populas, number of cadgers and beggars, 6/- for dinner, beer 2/10 bottle, Rupee (money) represented 2/-, number of deformed and apparently deceased natives, density of population, trip to Mt. Lavina driven in cars by Mrs. Lemitra accompanied by Capt. Woolcock, Lieuts Rogers & Shurmer. Miles of modern and semi modern houses

for Govt. Officials divided into classes A, B, & C. Rents range from 25 per month for ordinary 3 room flat. The natives carry on trade with troops on board ship from small boats bag is tied to rope and goods passed up. No horses peculiar carts drawn by cows "Zebu" (Gnu's) small animals. Boots not worn by natives, very few females in streets, natives dive for coins thrown from transport, small no. of whites, hundreds of rickshaws. Galle Face green was the place selected for payment to troops and dismissal troops subsequently lined up and marched to jetty from this point. There are no wharfs. Loading and unloading takes place from punts and it was necessary to transport troops from and to troop ship by Ferry. Beautiful racecourse and Golf courses also gardens. Goods for sale in the poorer shopping centre were generally of poor class. Antiques were however of better class.

2.10.40 1.30pm left Colombo after an interesting stay.

3.10.40 Our course now is due west and the activities on ship indicate entry into more dangerous waters. Life belts are carried continuously. The Cruiser Canberra which had escorted us to Colombo was replaced by the H.M.S. Cruiser Shropshire Canberra going back home.

6.10.40 Arrived off Cape Gaurdafire but land could not be seen. There was however numerous small birds indicating the presence of land. Sea mists were encountered on entering the Gulf of Aden. Convoy stopped 9am boat lowered nothing serious.

8.10.40 Sighted Aden. The Shropshire was replaced by the Cruiser Hobart (and, the escort was increased by the addition of one light cruiser and two destroyers, 4 warships in all). The day is terribly hot. On landing over the convoy the Shropshire fired the round from an 8" gun which was incidentally the first big gun which I heard in the war. A bomber was sighted far off nationality unknown but apparently English. The next 24 hours during which our voyage will take us through the Strait of Bab el Mandeb will be the most difficult and dangerous owing to the comparative narrow passage to be traversed. The heat in the cabin is terrific as all portholes are closed.

9.10.40 Passed thro Str Bab el Mandeb. Land could be plainly seen on both sides. Uninviting cone like peaks apparently with out regulation. Later barren islands were sighted on the starboard side understood to be the Jebel Tur group or the Twelve Disciples. The heat was intense at this stage.

10.10.40 At 7am a convoy of 9 large vessels appeared coming from the north. Our escort there bid us goodbye and to turning round took charge of the vessel going sth. Our convoy then proceeded unescorted after having dispersed. The New Holland Steamer and Indapoorah left us well behind and were soon out of sight.

11.10.40 Proceeding at a moderate pace port holes have been opened again. Land now in sight.

12.10.40 Sand hills rising abruptly close in both sides. No vegetation of any kind. Entered Port Teupic (Suez) Egypt 2pm. Left Port Teupic 4pm and proceed up Suez Canal.

13.10.40 Disembarked Kantara jetty 5am and entrained for Gaza Palestine which was at 12.30pm and entered Dier Sienced. Gaza camp major Fletcher visited H.M. Transport S.z. prior to our disembarkation and advised that we would later be going to Cairo. Postal Units were split up on reaching Gaza. Detached Div. in charge Lt. Rogers proceeded to Barbara and Corps Postal to Camp 89 Gaza. Lieut Shurmer and 3 N.C.O. were retained on the transport for duties and are to proceed to Haifa by boat and join the unit (HQ) later.



15.10.40 Visited Jerusalem on way by car to Tiberias. Security officer with diplomatic mails. Arrived Jerusalem 7.15pm. General impressions on the capital see notes on visit to there on 19.10.40.

16.10.40 Left Jerusalem for Tiberias journey most interesting practically whole country mass of rock. Mountains terraced with rock steps to prevent soil erosion passed Nablus Nazareth. In Tiberias many fine buildings outstanding features. Lido, Sea of Galilee, Jordan River transfordon troops. Turkish bath springs visibly fresh water - Car broke down at Nazareth. Hire Arab taxi to Jerusalem (Arab duel outside King David which was reached at 2am 17.10.40.

17.10.40 Hired Taxi to Gaza

19.10.40 Granted leave to visit Jerusalem. Visited several night clubs and on 20.10.40 was shown over many historical biblical places including, market, mosque of Omar where Mohamed ascended into heaven not ascension. Controlled by Arabs Christians and where Jesus ascended into heaven, imprint of foot on stone. Mt. of Olives path over which Jesus last entered Jerusalem. paler noster where Jesus cited Lords Prayer which is written in 37 languages. Garden of Gethsemane beautiful church. Lock of agony nearby is the tomb of the Virgin Mary also Josephs. Down 137 to near a shrine is a slab under which the Virgin is buried. Greek Orthodox in control. Jesus entered old Jerusalem thro Garden Gales. Proceed to church St. Anne Crusaders built 1100AD reputed to be built of birth place of Virgin Mary. French priests in control. Pool of Bethesda where Jesus performed miracle on sick man. From St. Anne to Sacred way via Dolorosa "Way of the Cross". 14 stations 10 on way and 4 in church of Holy Sepulchre built on calvary. No. 1 station is near St. Stehpens Gate Pilates judgement hall where Jesus was condemned to death. (Site held by Moslems) Station 2 Church Ecce Homo "Behold the man" down below is original floor where Jesus was handed to Jews. The way to the above is thro David St. marketing centre 18" wide smell dirty people goats, arabs camels everything. The streets are used as convenience hygiene unknown. Now to Bethlehem and church of nativity erected over manger church built 330Ad oldest in world. Grotto beneight rock. Greek orthodox in control other churches have small strip to proceed to Alter. Anglican use cowil yard Xmas eve 200yds away is milk grotto where Mary suckled Jesus and hid him from Roman Emporor (Heron). Look out to shepherd fields and Dead Sea. Later see the Tomb of Rachel and the well where three wise men saw star and went to grotto and old church of Elijah. Then to cave burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac Rebekah, Leah & Jacob. On the way to Tiverias pass Jacobs well then Nablus where live the Samiritans. Direct line of decent 2500 yds mostly Hebrews, only about 150 left now. Then the Church of Annunication, Site of Virgin home. Josephs workshop has a church also Mary's well at Tiberias can be seen. Roman Ruins. Sea of Galilee where Jesus gathered disicples Peter, Andrew, James and John from fisherman and Matthew were selected to preach. On this sea miracle was performed of draught of fishes and walked water also turning water into wine. Did not go to Dead Seas to such places as Inn of Good Samiritan, Jericho, Mt. Temptation.

25.10.40 AIF Postal Unit transferred from Diersumid Military camp to Camp Kilo 89 closer to Gaza.

28.10.40 Lieut C. Lancashire with 9 other ranks arrived Camp Kilo 89. This unit was destined for Eng. on the Strathallan and left before the main body of Postal troops. On Galy entering war however the transport was diverted to Bombay and Lancashire and his men were held up there for 5 weeks. About this time Lieut Rogers went to Egypt. On 20.10.40 work was commenced on the transfer of Echilon records to our Index Cards. For the purpose 18 men Mr. Shurmer and self worked night work from 10pm to 6am. 1st night



3700 cards were dealt with, 2nd 5500 and 3rd 5800. This estimated that 28000 names (including 8000 on their way from Eng.) require attention. Five Base P.O. men were detailed for duty at Cairo.

3.11.40 The work of transferring information to the P.O. records was completed and following on the inclusion of a notice in routine orders to the effect that certain centres such as Hospitals, Composite training camps etc. should forward nominal rolls to the Base P.O. The record section of the Base P.O. began functioning. The duty of notifying the P.O. of any change of address in individual cases was left to each individual concerned.

5.11.40 In order to provide working space a tent was erected in the P.O. Gaza yard and this was used for future Base P.O. activities. Work was immediately commenced on checking up Part II orders with the records we had now established in order that all changes which had taken place in personnel could be dealt with until such time as the necessary information from Hospitals etc. came to hand. W.O. Hayes had just left for Cairo and was later followed by Corpl Baker and Pte Waterson. Advance copies of Parcels (1750 in all) had arrived from Aust. and from the records the present address of each individual was entered on the lists. Later bills were prepared. Owing to the extremely difficult conditions under which we were required to work, no cabinets were provided for the cards, the job took much longer than anticipated. The full number of parcel bills dealt with to 18.11.40 was comprising despatches from all states. As the parcels were listed in Aust. in alphabetical order it was necessary to insert against each name to correct address as shown on our Index. Later from the parcel bill lists were prepared in unit order.

17.11.40 On the evening of this date signal message was received from Major Fletcher to arrange for immediate transfer of the unit to Cairo and the necessary steps were accordingly taken.

18.11.40 War equipment despatched by train 9.30.

19.11.40 Left Gaza 1.6pm train with Mr. Shurmer and 15 other ranks. Arrived Cairo 11.30pm after uneventful trip. No trouble re customs at Frontier Palestine and Egypt. The crossing of the Suez Canal was made at Kantara. A hot meal had been provided at this point and transport across Canal was made by punt. The train for Cairo was due to leave at 7.30 but was approx. ½ hr late. The Egyptian Rail carriages compare favourably with our own Vict. trains except for punctuality. As it was dark during the whole journey there was little opportunity to view the country or towns passed but it was noticed that Ismalia was a place of considerable size and an important junction. At Cairo on arrival where we were met by W.O. Hayes undue delay was caused thro the Railway authorities not handing over our trunks. Eventually all gear was taken by utility truck to the Victoria Hotel and all of the unit took up temporary residence there. All hands were as could be expected excited at the prospect of commencing their real duties for which they had enlisted i.e. Army Postal Work.

20.11.40 Future reference in this diary will be restricted generally to private matters as in my official capacity of Officer in Charge of Records a diary will be necessary there. The first impressions of Cairo were - Trams with 3 carriages high buildings - cosmopolitan crowds, terrible poverty and in contrast huge wealth in some places. Apparently no middle class as in Aust. Medieval means of transport donkeys, gharries with beautiful horses thousands of these. Complete pro British feelings of people, Australians getting special attention, beggars and pests, women with peculiar veils and carry children on shoulders. Heavy burdens are carried on head both by men and women, the main coinage is the piastere about 23/4 Aust. 1 Australian is worth 15/- Egyptian liquor is extortionate price - Bottle beer (3/4 size Aust. bottle) is sold cheap 5 ackers (piastre) Whisky in some hotels is 16 piastre a nobler. City is in black out. Cabarets go on most are inhabited by men hardly any women only those entertaining. The women who are dancers appear to be mostly descendant of.



French are particular attractive and most have their fat Gippo bodyguards. Our hotel (Victoria) is in heart of city and about ten mins. walk from Base P.O. which is in 3 story building the French Lyonnaise Building.

1.12.40 We are having our first day off since arriving in Cairo. Having hired a guide with Capt. Woolcock, Lieut Shurmer and 3 others we first went to the museum of Hygiene. The sights there were most interesting but rather harsh for beginners. Effects of every disease imaginable were shown on models. By the way we travelled to this place in a Gharri one of the best means of transport if one is not in to much of a hurry. After our interesting stay there we proceeded by car to the Citadel. This truly remarkable old structure is now strongly fortified and is utilized by the Forces as an Ordinance store. Minarets of truly magnificent design adorn the corners of the parapeted wall. About  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from the fort stands the mosque of Mahommed Ali and over this we were shown. At the door we were met by the High Priest and before entering the mosque slippers were tied over our boots for no one is allowed in without slippers. Entry was made thro a vast arch doorway and right in front mounted on the wall was the plaque of historical fame (representing I forget what). From the porch we entered the huge quadrangle the floors of which were made of alabaster and beautifully designed. The alabaster was presented by the Sultan and was taken from the face of the Pyramids some 600 years ago. At each corner of the triangle was a portch the ceiling of which would be about 100 ft. high and from this hung many chains. During certain times beautiful lamps are suspended here but we were not that at the specific hour. At the far end the East stood the high Alter from which the Sultan spoke when there. At the sides are high wooden walls covered with designed brass. The door was then unlocked and we entered the true mosque. One was immediately struck by the great height of the immense dome rising some 150 ft. with a diameter of about 30ft. This dome is supposed to be about the size of the dome in London. At each corner of the mosque high up to the ceiling is beautiful mosiac work. Hundreds of year old. Looking thro the wide window on one side you see the Citadel and in the side of the wall of the mosque can be seen holes which were made by cannon shots from the Citadel. High up in one spot still rests the actual cannon ball half imbedded in the wall. Napoleon was responsible for this but by a remarkable happening just when the Gunners had found their range something went wrong with the gun with the result that the bombardment had to stop and the mosque remained intact. Sultan King Hussan was responsible for the building of the mosque and so that the builder would not build another of similar design the Sultan ordered his hands to be cut off. In the afternoon we went to the Zoo on our way to the Pyramids. The stay at the Zoo was of very short duration but nevertheless we were able to see the beautiful birds of many bright colored varieties. Elephants, tigers etc. the lay out was particularly good and would I think be considered to be better than the Melb. Zoo. We then passed along the Mena road following the tram line to Mena House a magnificent building and then up to the Pyramids. The Pyramids can best be described as really just what they are. Huge affairs of remarkable dimensions, the largest Kheops covering approx. 12 acres and raising to a height of 450 ft. Originally this one went to 480 but some 600 years ago the Sultan of the time ordered that the surface polished. Alabaster be taken off and now the huge swaure stones of which the pyramid is constructed stand starkly there piled on top of the other no symetry of order appears to have been established only to the extent of raising to its four sided shape. Some of the alabaster facing is till left on Memphis which is but little smaller than Kheops. At the top of this one there is a square of about 30 square yards and altho I did not attempt to climb (Cpt. Woolcock and Lt. Shurmer did) I believe the view is marvelous as on the one side can be seen plainly the Red Sea and the Canal and on the other the Lyban desert stretching out far beyond. We then followed



our guide into the pyramid. An awsome business as the passage is only a few feet perhaps 3 ft. and in the dark following the guide who has a small candle we proceeded up the passage of some 300 steps. At the top and in the centre of the pyramid is the tomb of a Queen and just a little higher is the tomb of the King. All this is worth seeing. On the outside again we proceeded towards the Sphinx and on our way just in from of the ops is a well preserved excavation. At first sight looks like a dry dock and really so it is or was. The stone the pyramid was, you see, brought to this spot from some 600 miles away by boat. How they were loaded on or off goodness knows for they had none of our modern machinery for this purpose. The Nile at that time apprantly ran right up against the spot where the pyramids now stand. It is assumed that in order to commemorate the occasion the boat used was placed in a rock bed and there left to rot away. We then made for the Sphinx which stands in a small valley some 3 or 4 hundred yards from the pyramids. The Sphinx is not quite as big as I imagined but is nevertheless an immense figure of cat like appearance with a humane head the feet and body are made of small stone but the head appears to have been carved out of solid rock. The nose has been practically knocked off and there is many opinions who was really responsible for this. This accounts for the pug nose look. One of the ears has recently been mended otherwise the structure is in its original form. The wall surrounding it is of high stone in places and in others a mud wall serves the purpose. Of course up to a few years ago the only part of the sphinx to be seen was the head, recent excavation hve produced the whole form. To the left of the sphinx is one of the most amazing pieces of all time work. It is the tomb from which the ancient mummies were taken. Tremendous columns of stone some measuring 16ft x 4 x 4 and weighing 40 ton stand there one on top of the other. I can't understand how the work was done it is mystifying to me. The floor here too is of beautiful alabaster. We eventually left after a most interesting day with the determination to pay another visit as soon as time will permit.

20.12.40 Just prior th this the Army had decided that the Victoria Hotel was not quite up to standard for the billeting of Officer and had leased a luxury house boat - named the "Victoria" strangely enough - moored to the banks of Gezera Island. On the 20.12.40 we shifted out there leaving the other ranks at the Hotel. We were disappointed at having to leave the Hotel owing to its close proximity to our work but we realized luckily that the conditions at the house boat in the way of food espically would be much better. The opening function on the boat consisted of a dinner to some of the leading lights connected with Aust. J. Payne Austr Trade Comm. Don Delaney, Irish Consul, Matrons Austr and Scotish hospitals, representatives of the boat house, company Brit. Officers and others.

24.12.40 A Ball was held at the Vict. Hotel and was attended by some 20 or so Austr. nurses from Helmeih Hosp.

25.12.40 Was spent quietly owing in my case to perhaps a carry over. Work a pretty heavy in between Xmas and New Years Eve. There was another dance but I think the boys played up that much that not quite so many nurses attended. Some one stole my cap so it was a costly affair for me.

3.1.41 This day was marred by an unfortunate accident to one of our men. A chap named White temporarily attached to our unit was picked up on the foot path the night before just in front of the Hotel. He was put to bed but on going to him this morning it was discovered he was dead. Our first casualty. I was placed in charge of the burial party, men from Corps Sigs formed the firing squad. Cairo old cemetery.



3.1.41 Battle of Bardia. Maj. Gen. Blamey attended house boat.

19.1.41 Mr. Shurmer and I had the day off and we spent the time going thro the bazaars in Rue Muskey. There you see the native markets and manufacturing shops. Children of very tender years engaged on all kinds of work. The patience of these people is amazing.

26.1.41 With Capt. A.S. Fletcher Austr. liaison Engr (R.A.E.). I left at 11am for Alexandria by car. This was my first real sight of desert. First pass the pyramids and the Old Austr. Camp at Mena. For many miles you run thro camps. Indians, Poles, Brit Sand galon on both sides. Miles and miles of straight road. Bare arid land. 1/2 way is the Half way house palatial sort of eating house run by Greeks. Bottle of English beer 15 piastres (3/9). Men on to Austr. Camps first this side of Alexandria, Ikingi, Maryut and Amaria. Sand galore still. Then we ran on to Alexandria and the first signs that the country is at war balloon barages. Country flooded machine gun nests. Harbour full of warships including Illustrious Eagle, two aircraft carriers dozens and dozens of others. Saw the first sight of thousands of Italian prisoners downhearted, down trodden poor beggars. Then thro the mad mile, carts, donkeys etc. to Alex and what a beautiful place. Wonderful buildings, seafront mosques etc. much brighter place than Cairo. People mostly French and Greek. Stopped at the Minerva Hotel overlooking the bay. Hundreds of bathing boxes. Altogether a most agreeable place. Stayed 3 days during which had a good time.

2.2.41 At the usual house boat party Lady Blamey attended on 20.1.41 at the Gezah Club usual weekly dance. I had the opportunity of seeing Gen. Wavell who was commanding the whole of the Mid E. Forces.

2.2.41 Capt. Woolcock, Lt. Shurmer and self set out by car to look over Sakarah City reputed to have existed 4000 BC. The route lay along the Nile Valley about 15 miles on the way you see the wonderful and fertile flats covered by green vegetation cultivated. Canal runs criss cross and by a system of barrages the water flows to every corner. On the banks you see the native Gippo with their strange medieval methods of farming everything done by hand. Women as usual carrying all varieties of thinkgs on their heads. Here and there was in use the old fashioned barrel affair used to draw the water to higher levels. The barrel is about 6 ft. long and as it has a spiral formation the native by turning it quickly forces the water upwards. Pass thro several filthy villages which must be hundreds of years old. Eventually we came to Memphis. First you are greeted by several dirty children with queer squeaky voices. All they could say was Sieda Goode lye buckshee. Then the statue of Rameses. As with all these old fashioned things, impossible to imagine. Here was a statue now lying down enormous affair measuring at least 35 ft. Solid stone originally in one piece brought to Memphis by craft from Assawn some 600 miles away. There are two of these both have been damaged by the Romans. The statues are reputed to be 6000 years old. From there after seeing the small sphinz discovered only about 25 years ago we went to the step pyramid. One of about 9 round this part. Each of us mounted a donkey and rode to the temple of King Koser right under found it is. Here on the wall were carvings symbolizing or depicting everthing imaginable, truly wonderful work and mysterious how it could have been performed. Later we went to the Apis Tombs or Tombs of the Sacred Bull. Down under found the tunnel runs for about 400 yards. it is about 16ft wide by 15 high and at either side at interval in a depression is a tomb of a bull. The tomb consists of a huge polished granite slab 18' x 8' x 6' and is covered over by another great peice of solid granite. There are 24 of these. An attempt was made to remove these things some years ago but the tombs were so big the attempt failed.



5.2.41 A cocktail party was held on the house boat to greet Mr. R.G. Menzies Prime Minister of Aust. The affair was a wonderful show as in addition to Mr. Menzies most of the Notables of Egypt attended including the Prime Minister Gen. Blamey, Wavell, Lord Lamson Brit. Ambassador. Infact Generals galore all of course had their wives too.

7.3.41 Just prior to this date I had the misfortune to develop a nasty boil on my right leg. As it did not respond to treatment I was ordered to the 15th Scottish Hospital just over the Canal from our house boat. I was only in hosp however for a few days. My first trouble since leaving home.

12.3.41 Mr. Anthony Eden British Foreign Secretary together with Lord Lampson Brit Ambassador to Egypt visited the house boat.

31.3.41 Arrangements having been made for the billeting of Cairo duty officers in tow sets of flats in "Immo billa" a building of 13 stories (10 and 11 were the ones taken) in the centre of Cairo. All duty officers left the house boat Victoria and took up residence in the new quarters on 31.3.41. The inaugural dinner was attended by some 18 officers, mostly ordinance and postal. Major Woolcock who had just recently been raised to Field rank was elected President of the mess. Jack Shurmer and I were again room mates. The view from our room was one of considerable interest as from here could be seen the Pyramids, Citadel and practically the whole of the city. Up on the high buildings a continuous breeze seemed to be in evidence and this was particularly welcome in view of the early approach of hot weather.

15.4.41 My birthday spent quietly.

20.4.41 Conditions at the office were now fairly stable altho the need for long hours was still apparent not withstanding the increase in staff. Almost 50 men were now employed in Records but there was still an accumulation of 30,000 letters. The war at this time had taken a new turn not altogether favourable for most of the ground gained in Libya was retaken by the Germans and condition in Greece had deteriorated owing to the collapse of Yougoslava and the pressure of Germans. We are confident however and looking forward to better times. Following on the evacuation of Greece and the capture of Crete by the German, mail difficulties became fairly acute owing to the absence of news of whereabouts. Syria was invaded by British Force early on June causing further trouble in the delivery of Corres.

22.6.41 Germany declared war on Russia. What effect this will have. All were of opinion that what ever the result it must at least considerably shorten the war and result in the overthrow of Hitler. The heat was fairly stiff at this time 115 to 118 being a regular thing as a result I lost a few pounds my weight going down to 11.4 in shorts.

29.6.41 Trip to Port Said. Leaving about 9am by utility car. Maj. Woolcock, Lt. Hayes, Fairweather and self journeyed along sweet water canal. Pleasant trip. Narrow stream/draind from Nile/ fairly deep carrying huge barges laden with all kinds of quer goods from stone to watermelons. Passed thro many small villages, dirty filthy places with there usual crowd of loafing type of Gippo sitting around. Everything was nice and green along the Canal, water is raised to the higher flat by many means. Mostly old fashioned water wheel propelled by hood wikked Gamosh or Camel or donkey. Entered the Canal (Suez) area proper at Ismalia. This town quite modern mostly some Arab quarters of course but generally French. Acres of green lawns and gardens. A real treat in a desert country. Stayed a while at French Club very up to date but drinks were dear. Quickly drove us out and on to Port Said along the Canal. All the way wonderful to see big water way thro the desert and more interesting to see great steamers steaming thro the desert. Near the Port many baloon barrages tied down. Few signs here and there of the results of bombings on Port itself. Hundreds of ships seemed a good target for bombs. The city is a dirty looking place but in the European quarter there are some find buildings. Stayed for dinner at the Simine's Hotel and had best meal since arrival in Egypt. Consisted mainly of Gumburry (prawns) put up in some



special way. On the way home called in again at French Club Ismailia and later had tea at Telet Khir Aust. Main Ordinance Depot. Arrived home about 10pm Port Said was raided that night and we apparently just missed it.

25.7.41 Completed 12 months as soldier. Col Sladdin Director Posts arrived in Cairo and as we had to go to Sgt. Jim O'Toole's wedding that night Col. Sladdin was included in party.

14.9.41 Went for a trip by car to the Barrage on weir, one of the biggest harnessing the Nile about 20 miles from Cairo. Supplies the main water system for irrigating the Delta areas and also means of supply. Water for Cairo district. The route by road passes thro dirty "wog" village. Thousands of natives lounging in the streets, dirty and ill fed women selling dates round which fly numerous swarms of insects. Carcases of beasts hang out of butcher shop in the road. Butcher with a big knife carves off hunks to customers, who carry it away unwrapped. Millions of flies add to the terrible scene which of course is prevalent in all Arab native towns. The Barrage is a wonderful piece of Engineering works. Driving along the top of the wall we were met by hirers of trollys. These things if you care to take are propelled by hand just like Railway trolleys on the banks beautiful lawns have been built and as it is only 25 mins by train from Cairo it is one of the most popular resorts for day trippers from the city. On the way home by another route we passed thro acres and acres of fertile country all irrigated and at the time was covered in maize, cotton and other vegetation. In the afternoon of the same day we took the road south th Helwan about 20 miles from Cairo passing thro the fashionable subs of Zamalek Gizerali and Maadi. At Helwan we looked over the ancient Japanese Gardens constructed on real oriental lines. Nice lawns and shady trees rather welcome sights in the desert.

15.9.41 12 months away from home.

16.9.41 3.15 am first real raid on Cairo city. Brilliant but hideous spectacle, flares lighting up city like day, tracer bullets of all colours pierce the sky trying in particular to bring down the flares. In the raid 40 people were killed and 100 injured.

29.9.41 Gen. Blamey inspects the AIF details, quarters and activities. Being Orderly Officer of the Mens Billets escorted him thro the quarters and also met him later at the P. Office when he went thro the Redirection Section of which I was O/C.

3.10.41 Lt. Col. W.G. Wright ex Asst Supt mail Melb arrived by air to assume command of the Postal Corps. There was simmering of much discontent of our activities brought about mainly by the introduction of Slimmed Cables whereby number and name of soldier only was included in the address. One of the biggest traps ever laid. As it was quite apparent to any one that it would be impossible to ensure a 100% quick delivery thro our records as at the inception 6th Div, 9th Div and Corps were in action. Interruptions to submissions of returns were frequent.

11.10.41 Dinner to Lt. Col A. Sladdin prior to his departure by air to Aust. on 12.10.41. Just prior to this date Lt. H.G. Rogers was evacuated from Tobruk and was relieved by Roy Lovell. Maj. Burns returned home by air 27.10.41 for duty in Aust.

30.10.41 Base P.O. moves to TEI. EL. Khibar 50 miles from Cairo. Things were a little bit hickle de pickle de at first at our new location but were righted quickly. The Base consisted of two large brick iron roofed (saw both) buildings each covering 20,000 floor space. All ranks were quartered in tents. Quite a different atmosphere to what we were used to in Cairo. The site was on the far end of base Ordinance Depot and was arid flat sandy desert country, no trees only salt bush here and there. Dust flies and mosquitos were plentiful and alltho it was winter time it was fairly warm in the day time but at night quite cold.



Jack Shurman and I were in one tent and made ourselves comfortable. batman, Frank Shearer a Scotman talented singer and a rather well read man. We were lucky in this respect. Ed Robins a newly apptd. Com. Of. joined us soon after arrival and he took over the job of permanent Orderly Officer. Work in the redirection section were quickly functioning normally and the show was quite presentable when Col. W.G. Wright visited us shortly after commencement of operations. The staff in the Redirection section was now very heavy on account of parcel lists requiring attention. 100 men were required for the work and these were obtained from I.T.Bns. 103 employed in Records as at 12.11.41.

11.12.41 Japan enters war try vicious attack on American navel bases. Heavy damage was done and during the naval battle three days after the initial attack 2 British battle ships were sunk. (Prince of Wales & Repulse)

15.12.41 Promoted as Captain  
VX44548 Capt. L.G. Kracke  
Austr. Base P.O. Egypt.

Xmas 1941 with other Officers was spent with the troops. The records section was cleared and by rearrangement of the tables seating accommodn for the 300 troops was possible. The dinner was attended by:

Col. W.G. Wright  
Capts A.H. Slanton, Shurmer, Rogers, Kracke, Fairweather, Lt. Smith, Robins.  
Maj. Lancashire.

2.1.42 Left with Capt Fairweather, Shurmer & Lt. Smith to attend conference at Haifa Palestine. Passed thro Kantara, Gaza, Jerusalem and Haifa. The latter is a comparatively new Jewish town built on the side of Mt. Carmel. Recognised as one of the most picturesque towns in the Mid. E. The houses are of solid construction, stone and are modern. From the top of Mt. Carmel it seems possible to throw a stone into the Harbour which altho small is deep. Saw submarines going out as well as mine sweepers. To say nothing of a train load of mines going north. There were many German refugees in Haifa. Cafes etc. are bright but drinks and the like were very dear. Palestine currency is a little dearer than Egyptian 1 piastre = 3 Austr. On our way to Haife were snowed in at Jerusalem. First real fall for 25 yrs. We were in a Cafe and when we came out there was several inches of snow necessitating stay in Jerusalem over night as all traffic was bloked. Board was difficult to obtain and we eventaully had to go to a German Colongy to stop at a Persian - quite good. When we awaoke in the morning there was fully 2 feet of snow. It was a beautiful sight People were on the roofs rolling big snow ball and dropping them on people below. We eventually got away in the afternoon and arrived at Haifa after an exciting trip. Stopped at the Windsor Hotel very crook place. £ 1 12/6 per day 3/- for bath etc. food on the nose.

The Conference:

Col. W.G. Wright  
Maj. Woollock, Fletcher  
Capt. Dracke, Rogers, Fairweather, Cohen, Cordell, Lovell  
Lt. Smith, Childs.

Went off O.K. many things straightened out. After conclusion of conference was granted permission to accompany Capt. Fairweather to his new location. O/C 6th Div. Postal Unit located in Syria with Fairweather, Lt. Childs left Haifa 7.1.42 for Baalbeck HQ 6th Div. The track lead along the coast and was very interesting. This was the rank taken by 7th Div. in action against Vichy French few months previous. Some evidence of action here and then passed over bridge just before Beruit when most Austr. casualties were inflicted. Bridge now repaired. People still mostly Arabs not quite so dark as one further south. Hopped in Beruit Austr. Officers club very good show. Very narrow trams cars pass any side. Policeman carry a white stick. At night visited few night clubs. Kit Cat (one of this name in every town) Luids etc. pretty frowsy every thing terribly dear. Oh the currency very strange. For one Palestine £ note you got 80.3 piastres. I had £5 and it was humerous to get £40 for it.



No to funny paying out for a meal. Our dinner cost 2 or 5/8 Aust. Town out of bounds owing to Austns. having shot up a few prominent citizens. At Beirut we found out that most of 6th Div. area centre of Syria was snow bound. Corps ten miles out was affect. To get to Baalbeck in ordinary times drive of 1½ hrs now necessary to go through Tripoli north to Homs and down to Baalbeck. Left early in morning on that route. Tripoli HQ 7th Div. just a wog town. Had dinner and pushed on north east. Soon ran into snow and by the time got to Homs road was passable only two or three feet of frozen snow and thro it we pushed to Baalbeck encountering snow drifts all the way. Syria seems to be all mountain rubble not a blade of grass or a tree. Snow every where bedouin plentiful - Rotten country in my opinion. Baalbeck on the side of a hill Wog town but here I saw the famous ruins of Temples Venius, Jupiter and Bacchus. The most marvellous sight I've seen to date, massive columns granite, beautiful carvings, immense stones. One 20ft long 1000 tons. Temples smashed by earth quakes 1750. Roman, Turks, German commission also took away a lot of parts. Next day went to Zaally. Completely snowed in feet high. Toasted Arabs bread. Stuck in snow several times. Big free French aerodromes showing marks of British Bombardment. Unable to get to Damascus direct on 10th left for the capital via Homs and Baghdad road. 150 miles arrived Damascus safely poor type of city. Very shoddy, too much of hurry to buy anything in market. Next day left Fairweather and Child who went back to Baalbeck. I took a convoy of four trucks from our brigades and made for Haifa to pick up mails. Uneventful trip over high mountains past Lake Tiberius, Sea of Gallalee. Arrived Haifa 4pm Caught airmail car to Gaza. Stayed with Jack Hayes and left next day for T.E.K. arrived 11p, very interesting trip.

15.1.42 Ominous sighns of whole A.I.F. shifting to a new area of operations.

31.0.42 Capt. J.W. Shurmer, Lt. V. Quinn, E.A. Robins and 70 others transferred from Base P.O. to No. 2 Base P.O. for duty eslewhere and left T.E.K. At this time 7th Aust. Div and Corps also left for an Eastern destination. Cpts. Shurmer and Rogers promoted as Maj. Early in Feb it became obvious that following on the persistent Japs attacks Singapore would fall. This eventually did occur and it was then apparent that there may be some change of plans in regard to the destination of A.I.F. troops from Mid East. Further infiltration of Japs southward brought then to Java Sumatra and Rabual. Darwin was also raided 20.2.42 by bombers and there seemed that we would be sent to Aust.

1.3.42 After conference with Col. Wright it was decided that I should proceed with 100 O/Fs of Base P.O. on next flight overseas (probably back to Aust.) Up to this stage in the New Year practically no mail had been rec'd from Aust. the Airmail having been completely stopped/ Two or three dispatches has been lost after planes had been intercepted by Japs. No surface mail had been rec'd up to 8.3.42 and there was a general feeling of quietude. Work in the Base P.O. became less and less heavy and in order to fill in time a series of route marches and military training was undertaken.

20.3.42 200,000 delayed airmail rec'd by surface first for 10 weeks. Nothing of any consequence happended during the following 3 months excepting perhaps mention should be made of the fact that I spent 1 week in the 27th Gen. Brit. Hosp. following an injury to my knee received as a result of an application of a wrestling hold by a foul drunken Sgt. visitor to the Sgts. mess. Weeks after the knee was still weak. On 10.6.42 the list of men for return to Aust. was promulgated. I was to take 44 Base men (mostly N.C.O's.) and 17 No.2 LOFC people back to Aust. I was naturally thrilled specially the prospect of seeing my wife and family. On 20.6.42 I was notifed that I was under 24 hrs notice and it then appeared that I would get away about 25th. Disaster 22.6.42 Tobruk has fallen will it alter things!!!!!!



24.6.42 A car from B.O.D. called at 07.30 to inform me that the train to take me to Staging Camp Tewfick was waiting at T.E.K. station. By some misunderstanding I had not been informed of this. The train was allowed to proceed and steps were taken to arrange motor transport to Suez. Trucks were provided by Maj. Lancashire and after many farewells the party 61 in all left T.E.K. at 11.15am 24.6.42. That night we stayed at ATTAHA camp Suez and at 06.30 25.6.42 we board the Rajula 9000 tons at Port Tewpok.

Mutiny Other ranks of whole ship refused to move into new postings. All units involved but I got my chaps out of it with a bit of cunning.

There were about 1150 aboard and we eventually cast off at 1715hrs 25.6.42. One of the biggest thrills of my life. On my way home certainly disappointed at the state of the war but couldn't conceal happiness. The trip to Aden was uneventful excepting to mention that it was terrifically hot. Almost unbearable. Arrived at Aden 1400hrs 29.6.42. Aden the behind of the world and appropriate enough for I never saw such an uninviting place. Built on huge bay at the foot of high treacherous barren mounts right on sea front. Not a blade of grass. Did not go ashore.

30.6.42 0500hrs left Aden probably for Colombo. The heat was still terrific but on the night of 2.7.42 a big change came. The sea waves became mountains high, choppy and threw our tub about. A great number of the personnel were sea sick but I was not affected. My cabin mate was Capt. E.C. Adams a very likeably Ordinance chap. We were convoyed from Suez for a short distance by a cruiser but most of way to Aden we were alone. From Aden we were escorted by an armed merchantman. Not a very formidable looking craft but still may be useful.

6.7.42 100hrs arrived Colombo where it was noticed that many big troop transports were in the harbour. It soon became known to us that a big convoy was on the way. We soon found out that all A.I.F. in Ceylon were to go home in convoy and we were to join them. Quite pleasant information we had been told before entering Port that some repairs to our ship were necessary and there was some talk of transshipping. However while waiting for the decision I managed to get ashore with the mail. I contacted Capt. Bill Fairweather, Ltd. Bill Smith and others of No. 3 Base. They were all packed up ready to board ship for home. Returned to ship, and at conference of O/C's was told that our ship was to go into dry dock for repairs to propeller. Arrived in dock about an hour later. It was a unique experience to be in a ship high and dry. All personnel were to live on board during our stay there but leave was granted to all ranks for 4 hrs on 7.7.42. Altho in charge of a picket party I roamed round the city and bought a few things. During the next few days life was fairly monotonous but this was broken a little by the fact that we were allowed to get off the ship and wander around the compound. Eventually after some anxious moments when we thought the job would not be finished the locks were opened and in about 1½ hours we were afloat again. 0800hrs.

13.7.42 I went into town in the morning and got rid of a few letters. 1600hrs 13.7.42 Left berth again for the last stage of our voyage. We were the last of the convoy to moor out, 12 transports having preceded us. Out into the open sea and it looked a fine sight as in addition to the transports there were 3 destroyers, a corvette, an Armed Merchantman and last by and not least was the "Gammil" a fast heavy Cruiser. Seas were moderate and our course for 2 days was a little west of South. At the end of the 2nd day the destroyers and the corvette left us.



19.7.42 1200hrs met by an American Cruiser which after a while took over from the "Gammil" This cruiser then made off westward probably to S. Africa. 5 or 6 days and we should see Aussie.

20.7.42 Seas pretty rough

21.7.42 Still rough seas. Armed merchantman left us and another vessel sposed to be the Kanimbla armed to over one side of escort with the American cruiser on the other side. The sea was beginning to calm down a little and on 25.7.42 the cruiser sent off 4 flying boats all making towards Australia which now would be about 600 miles off. Sea was now very calm and it was a wonderful break after so much wind and high waves. The planes returned to the ship after about 4 hours flying. They probably in that time saw the mainland. Word was passed round that we were expected to berth at Fremantle 1000hrs on Monday 27th. It would be a memorable day for all.

One of the troop ships developed engine trouble and our pass slowed down and we were only doing 8 or 10 knots.

26.7.42 The convoy broke up. The cruiser with Athlone, Castle and 4 others went south obviously not calling at Fremantle.

28.7.42 Land in sight. Aust. at last. Rottness Island sighted and we finally berthed at Fremantle 11am. Band welcomed us. Warf lined with Aust. troops and quite different to when we went away 2 years ago. Met capt. Metcalf Postal for Perth. Leave was granted from noon and it was a memorable occasion when I stepped ashore at 1300 hours. Went by train to Perth. Spent 2½ days in Perth and the boat swang off again on the last stage of the trip at 8am and waited for the rest of the convoy out in the harbour. Eventually at 4pm we began to make way. Convoy consisted of cruiser Adelaide, Armed Merchantman Kanimbla and two destroyers. 8 ships making straight for south pole have been advised that the convoy is going to Melb. and should reach there Monday 10.8.42 meaning that the voyage will take us 47 days.

1.8.42 still going south but should turn east soon.

8.8.42 Arrived in Melbourne after a fast trip across the Bight which was calm. Leave to see Dorrie and kids and what a thrill. Leave disembarkation. We disembarked at Pt. Melbourne and went by train to Seymour. Leave was not granted until 14.8.42 14 days completed on 28.8.42 and all Vic's reported to Royal Park from where we were drafted to 2 Base P.O. St. Kilda. On arrival there the bodies were handed over to Maj. Draper. I was attached for duty at 2 Base until Oct. when I went fwd to Bris. to introduce the Redirection procedure to cover New Guinea Evacuees.

1.12.42 Job in Bris completed and returned to Melbourne to take up at LHQ.

Feb 1943 Proceeded to Bris Base to oversight redirection procedure.

Apr 1943 Returned to LHQ.

May 1943 With the object of taking up later at Adv. L.H.Q. Bris proceeds to Bris but while there was notified of my appt. as O/C No. 1 Section Base P.O. Port Moresby N.G.

June 1943 With Lt. Col. Sladdin returned to Melbourne and prepared to leave for N.G. My appt. coincided with the raising of H.W. and No.3 Section of Base Port M. and I secured all the necessary equipment for despatch with the 40 odd numbers of the draft including Capt. Harrison and Lt. Goldheir

15.8.43 I left Melbourne by train met Harrison and Goldheir in Syd - These ofrs with O/R embarked there and I went on by train alone.

26.8.43 Boarded Katoomba for Port Moresby arrived 28.8.43. Met by Maj. Shurmer Capt. Quinn. Conditions at Base very congested. Letter room in upstairs portion of a mission building. Elect. light on but just a glimmer.



Car batteries with car globes used for the work at night. Poor show.

10.9.43 Into hosp with abysess buttocks.

14.10.43 Resumed duty. A33 presented interviews. These were papers for promotion as Major which subsequently came thro O.K. I really didnt think I would get this far in rank. Brig. Steele Lae Base Sub Area who signed the papers. Engineers commenced building 3 Sydney William huts to house Letter and Reg. & P.P.'s. Conditions on completion of this work reasonably good. Moresby was at that time receiving all mail for the Island troop excepting Milne bay. Bunlampang in progress and difficulty in getting mails across by air. Air mail from mainland regularly shutout on one occasion 14 days without air mail. Relying solely on American air t'port. 7th Div. move into Ramu Valley caused further worries in getting mails fwd. Units however left L.O.B. (left out of battle). Post orderly who had all records. These men checked mails before going fwd and extracted articles for those not with unit forward. Xmas 1943 Particularly heavy - hours for months 0700 - 2200 hrs 7 days per wk.

Oct. 1943 Capt. Hayward with 2/1 L of C Postal Unit arrived took over L of C area. Capt. Quinn to Milne bay short relief of Lt. Beston then on to Buna where 4 L of C. Lt. Baum was functioning. Capt. Quinn later proceed to Lae to set up an advanced Base.

Nov. 1943 Capt. Lupton with reinfts arrived.

Nov. 1943 Capt. Lupton took over 5 L of C Postal Unit from Lt. Bridley to the mainland.

Dec. 1943 Capt. Attwell arrived and was shortly after tld to 11 Div. to relieve Capt. McKinnon evac to mainland. The Redirection Sectionest. at Port Moresby to cope with evacuee mail functioning well. Capably run by WOI Jerry Donnellan. W.O. baker and Ellis obtain Commissions. Baker to Buna to relieve Beston on leave. Lae commenced to operate as an adv. Base about Nov. or Dec. under Capt. Quinn. Lt. Brookman and Murphy from mainland to Lae. Murphy learned to 1 Corps D.A.D.A.P.S. May & Rogers.

1 and 2 Corps changed over former going back to mainland and Capt. Fenton was again D.A.D.A.P.S.

May 1944 Capt. Quinn to mainland on leave also Maj. Shurmer. May 1944 preparation in progress to transfer main Base to Lae and eventually moved there in July. I went on leave June 28th. Had dermititis. Boarded "Canberra" 28 June arrived Melb 7 July. Leave in Australia 7 July to 31 July, 44.

31.7.44 Left by train. Dermititis developed in buttocks and I entered hosp Bris. 10 Aug 44 and was discharged on 14 Aug. Proceeded to T'ville by train and eventually boarded Taroon for Lae on 28 Aug.

1.9.44 Arrived Lae and took over from Capt. Harrison as O/C No. 1 Section. Maj. Shurmer C.O. Lt. Goldheir and Lt. Ellis - Officers and Capt. Harrison.

Oct. Capt Harrison leave relieved by Capt. Lupton from 5 L of C. Inspected Milne Bay terrible going in trip by air in an old Rapide plane. How we got there I don't know. Heavy rain and cloud only two in plane myself and pilot and did it buck around.

Sept. 1944 Madan operating. Lt. Bennett in charge.

Oct. 1944 Aitape operating in charge W.O. Montgomery. Bougainville in charge Lt. Wilton.

Nov. 1944 Jac Bay operating with W.O. Coulhard and later by Lt. Ellis. 1st army took over area Col. Fletcher, Maj. Corden.

Xmas 1944 not particularly difficult. Much asst. obtianed from Details Depot.



Dec 1944 Advice rec'd of Maj. Shurmer tld to Bris. to be replaced by Maj. Lancashire. Maj. Shurmer departed by plane Dec 28. Maj Lancashire arrived 28 Jan 45. I had collected Dermatitis again during the latter part of 1944 and eventually was reboarded as unfit for service in hot and humid climate. Transferred to Reserve List.

3.3.45 Emplaned for mainland. Held up Finchhafen (Capt. Jack Hayes promoted as Major in my place).

6.3.45 Arrived Bris by air.

10.3.45 Arrived Melb by rail.

Leave 10 Feb 45 - 8 Mar. Germany capitulated May 1945  
Japan capitulated Aug 1945

8.3.45 Took up as Postal Directorate L.H.Q. D.A.D.P.S.

Discharged Jan 1946.