

The King Island World War 2 War Service Fund

During World War 2, Ruby Milsom received a Comfort Package or a Money Order from the King Island (Tasmania) War Service Fund, and then corresponded with the Fund.

In August 1940, the Island Fund was formally approved to operate independently from the State of Tasmania. It was run by a group of volunteers, led by Mr John (Jack) Marshall. John was an ex WW1 soldier, also the President of the local Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA), founded on King Island in 1919. This is now known as the Returned and Services League (RSL) and the King Island RSL Sub branch is still in operation.

The fund distributed packages to locals who had enlisted and other people who had no connection with King Island. As a mark of respect 139 service personnel wrote letters of thanks, totaling approximately 530 letters – they form the basis of the collection. Further information on the Fund and its operation can be found on the Community Page.

The challenges for a service person during World War 2 to write a letter was to firstly find the inclination (often directly related to their mental condition due to combat), time, paper, a writing implement and a place under cover. Occasionally a letter was typed and the paper ranged from high quality to loose scraps, and as the war progressed supplies dwindled. With letterhead paper, naming a unit or organisation, do not assume that was where the person was when writing. Paper was borrowed and passed on to mates. Occasionally, a Telegram was sent where the emphasis was on brevity as each word added more to the cost.

The standard of writing is directly related to the standard of education and sometimes a friend or a Chaplain would write a letter on a person's behalf. Many of the letters were addressed to Mr Marshall (or just Jack), his wife, a member of the voluntary committee, or the RSSAILA. Some letters are very brief while others are detailed and mention other people, or events they have witnessed. The Marshall's also lost their son John while on Active Service, and some writers asked about John or acknowledged his death to the family.

For most of the war, letters were subject to censorship and this is often observed in a cutout section on a page – if the other side was written on it was also deleted. Many letters have the initials or the signature of the person who checked them prior to posting.

What follows is a scan of the original letter and a typed transcript, based on the original. Grammar or spelling has not been changed or corrected, and if more than one letter was written they follow in date order. Some of the original letters, although stored correctly, are very faint and fragile, but all have been included along with undated letters. They are perhaps the only surviving documents written by this person.

Ruby wrote six letters to the Fund; three in each year from 1941 until 1942. Her letters describe hospital life, how the patients would help each other recover, celebrating special occasions, the luxury of receiving stockings, Islanders she has met and exploring cities in the Middle East. Her final letter referring to the loss of Jack Marshall's son, John, would have been the most difficult one for her, even though she would have seen soldiers die in hospital.

VX 29694.

Staff Nurse R. H. Holloom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.

A. I. F. Abroad.

26th June 1941.

The Members of the K. I. War Service Fund,
Dear Friends,

Very many thanks for that lovely parcel received last week, all intact and in good order. Everything is very useful and will be used almost immediately. The parcel was dated March 14th so took almost 3 months to reach me, but with so much stuff going through their hands our postal staff are hectically busy. We are very thankful that our Air Mail letters are coming through so regularly, some of my home letters have reached me in 14 days which is excellent isn't it? and makes us feel we are not so far away after all.

Five months now since we left home, the first 3 we had a lovely time, it really was just like a conducted Cook's tour & getting paid for it, but now we have had 2 solid months of very hard work and are feeling a bit the worse for wear. Of course we were very soft when we started, having done so little for such a long while. Quite a number of the girls get sick with sand

fly fever or dysentery and that makes it harder on the rest, but of course cannot be helped and is more or less expected in this country.

We are very happy in our work, only the other day several of us were saying we have never been so happy in our lives before. Our boys are marvellous patients they never grumble or complain and are so appreciative of every single thing done for them. Just to have a nice hot sponge or bath, good food, & to lie between SHEETS on a BED just seems like a bit of heaven to them when they arrive down from the lines, and they say just to have a woman around completes the picture. It is wonderful what a few days in hospital does for them, at first all they want is to eat & sleep & more sleep, then they begin to talk & sit up and take some notice & then in a couple more days they are whistling & singing and even joking about the things that seemed so tragic when they first came down. So we feel that we are doing something to help them carry on.

We get some wags amongst them & they are awfully good for their sicker companions who are inclined to brood over the news etc.

Boys that are shellshocked are called "Bombhappie" by their cobbles - last week we had half a dozen who put on an act & kept it up for 2 days, and half the time had the ward roaring with laughter. They made out they were "Bombhappie" - carried on about an imaginary dog around the place, they really were terribly funny - when they left for the time gave me a lovely little wobble dog called "Bismark Bombhappie". I value it more than anything else I have because they were such good scouts.

We get a day off a week and find it does us a lot of good to get right away from the hospital whenever possible. This afternoon I am being taken into Tel Aviv where we intend swimming, then having dinner and going to "Madame Butterfly" which is on at a big theatre at present. Tel Aviv is really very nice - it means "The Hill of Spring" - is the first all-Jewish city of the world, & is the main Jewish centre of Palestine. Jewish laws & customs are observed as far as possible & this means that the shops are closed on the Jewish Sabbath, from sunset Friday, till sunset Saturday. There are no trams in this, or any other centre in Palestine, but a Jewish bus company keeps the suburbs well catered for with modern vehicles.

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These cease to run on the Jewish Sabbath but a number of taxis are allowed to operate for the convenience of those needing transport, & if there is room in a taxi anyone wanting to go places is permitted to hail that taxi, although it is engaged, & get in too.

Many continental customs are observed in Tel Aviv & it is quite interesting to see the way in which the inhabitants meet in the cafes for their daily gossip. The cafes too also provide a favourite rendez-vous during the evenings as people like to go there, relax, sip their coffee, chat or listen to the music usually provided by a small orchestra.

The people over here are marvellous musicians, especially instrumentalists. I have been to quite a number of orchestral concerts given by the renowned Palestinian Orchestra and have sat spell-bound for the whole evening. The people also are very hospitable and often entertain us in Tel Aviv or Rehovoth at suppers or garden parties. So you see our life is very varied, but with it all we always long to be back home in dear old Ausim.

Once again thanking you for your kind thoughts expressed in such an acceptable way,
Yours sincerely Ruby Weiss.

VX29697.
Staff Nurse R.H. Milsom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A.I.F. Abroad.
26th June 1941

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Five months now since we left home, the first 3 we had a lovely time, it really was just like a conducted Cook's tour & getting paid for it, but now we have had 2 solid months of very hard work and are feeling a bit the worse for wear. Of course we were very soft when we started, having done so little for such a long while. Quite a number of the girls get sick with Sand Fly Fever or dysentery and that makes it harder on the rest, but of course cannot be helped and is more or less expected in this country.

We are very happy in our work, only the other day several of us were saying we have never been so happy in our lives before. Our boys are marvelous patients they never grumble or complain and are so appreciative of every single thing done for them. Just to have a nice hot sponge or bath, good food, & to lie between SHEETS on a BED just seems like a bit of heaven to them when they arrive down from the lines, and they say just to have a woman around completes the picture. It is wonderful what a few days in hospital does for them, at first all they want is to eat & sleep & more sleep then they begin to talk & sit up and take some notice & then in a couple more days they are whistling & singing and even joking about the things that seemed so tragic when they first came down. So we feel that we are doing something to help them carry on.

We get some wags amongst them & they are awfully good for their sicker companions who are inclined to brood over the news etc. Boys that are shellshocked are called "Bombhappie" by their cobbles & last week we had half a dozen who put on an act & kept it up for 2 days, and half the time had the ward roaring with laughter. They made out they were "Bombhappie" & carried on about an imaginary dog around the place, they really were terribly funny & when they left for the lines gave me a lovely little woollie dog called "Bismark Bombhappie". I value it more than anything else I have because they were such good scouts.

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Many continental customs are observed in Tel Aviv & it is quite interesting to see the way in which the inhabitants meet in the cafes for their daily gossip, the cafes too also provide a favourite rendez-vous during the evenings as people like to go there, relax, sip their coffee, chat or listen to the music usually provided by a small orchestra. The people over here are marvelous musicians, especially instrumentalists. I have been to quite a number of orchestral concerts given by the renowned Palestinian Orchestra and have sat spell-bound for the whole evening. The people also are

very hospitable and often entertain us in Tel Aviv or Rehovoth at supper or garden parties. So you see our life is very varied, but with it all we always long to be back home in dear old Aussie.

Once again thanking you for you kind thoughts expressed in such an acceptable way.

Yours sincerely Ruby Milsom

✓ X 29694

S/H. R. H. Neilson
of the Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A. I. F.

Almoad,
18th Sept. 1944.

Dear Mrs. Marshall and Members of
the King Island War Service Fund.

Very many thanks for another
parcel received from you. It was
posted at the end of May and has
arrived in perfect condition & containing
such useful articles. My stockings
are the envy of all the girls, the supply
with which we left home is running
low, and those bought over here are
of very poor quality and ugly color.
Some of the girls are buying service
weight socks for going out; and
the authorities cannot forbid them
wearing them until someone gets
some decent ones in stock, but they are
of very poor quality also and I do wear
very easily.

We have been away from home
seven months now and some talk
hopefully of being home by Xmas, but
I am afraid they are being very
optimistic. At present our hope
is having a little quieter time,
for which we are very thankful.

although quite a lot of cases of sickness are coming down from Syria, and some of the wounded cases are taking a long while, however they are doing well which is the main thing.

Alan Thompson was an inmate here for some weeks & I saw him on several occasions, but he has now left us & returned to his work. Lew Hoodie is a member of this kind & I often see him.

Since last morning I have had a very enjoyable week's leave in Jerusalem, we stayed at a hostel in the lovely old Cathedral Building on the edge of the City. It was most refreshing, as Jerusalem is so much cooler than where we are situated being situated so much higher above sea level. Next month we are looking forward to cooler weather and perhaps will have more energy then.

Once again thanking you for your kindly thoughts and remembrance.
Yours sincerely, Percy Wilson.

BY AIR MAIL

AIR MAIL
LETTER CARD

IF ANYTHING IS ENCLOSED THIS CARD
WILL BE SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL



Mrs. Marshall

K. I. War Service Fund,

Cornie
King Island
Tasmania

WHEN FOLDED THE LETTER CARD MUST CONFORM IN SIZE AND SHAPE WITH
THE BLUE BORDER WITHIN WHICH THE ADDRESS ONLY MAY BE WRITTEN.

P. H. Wilson



VX29697
S/N. R.H Milsom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A.I.F.
Abroad.
18th Sept. 1941.

Dear Mrs Marshall and Members of
the King Island War Service Fund.

Very many thanks for another parcel received from you. It was posted at the end of May and has arrived in perfect condition & containing such useful articles. My stockings are the envy of all the girls, the supply with which we left home is running low, and hose bought over here are of very poor quality and ugly color. Some of the girls are buying service weight silk for going out, and the authorities cannot forbid them wearing them until ordinance get some decent ones in stock, but they are of very poor quality also and ladder very easily.

We have been away from home seven months now and some talk hopefully of being home by Xmas, but I am afraid they are being very optimistic. At present our hosp. is having a little quieter time, for which we are very thankful although quite a lot of cases of sickness are coming down from Syria, and some of the wounded cases are taking a long while, however they are doing well which is the main thing.

Allen Thompson was an inmate here for some weeks & I saw him on several occasions, but he has now left us and returned to his work. Len Moody is a member of this Unit and I often see him.

Since last writing I have had a very enjoyable weeks leave in Jerusalem, we stayed at a hostel in the lovely old Cathedral Building on the edge of the City. It was most refreshing, as Jerusalem is so much cooler than where we are situated, being so much higher above sea level. Next month we are looking forward to cooler weather and perhaps will have more energy then.

Once again thanking you for your kindly thoughts and remembrance.

Yours sincerely Ruby Milsom

VX 29694.

S/M. R. H. McIlwain

7th Aust. Div. Hosp.

P.O. F. BROOKLYN

19th Oct. 1941.

Dear Mr. Marshall,

Thanks for your letter of the 24th July with Canteen Order enclosed, both were very much appreciated, also a parcel of comforts previously acknowledged.

You ask if I have any opportunity of seeing your son in the 2/3rd Aust. Div. up to the present I haven't but if any members of that Unit come into hospital I will make enquiries concerning him. When writing to him would you tell him that I would be very pleased to see him anytime he is near the 7th A.G.H. and can spare the time to drop in. It is very much easier for the boys to find us, than for us to get in touch with them, and I am always very pleased to see anyone from home. Yes I have seen several W.D. boys lately, in fact Charlie Shaw is in the ward. I am working in tonight, he has just this week had

an operation on his knee, and getting on satisfactorily. Mick Thompson & Vic Brooks have been inmates here, & Charlie tells me 2 other boys from home - Whitley & there are more in this unit, so I must look them up. I have also seen Frank Bishop, & had a letter from him last week. He took ill with pneumonia whilst on leave in Cairo, but is now doing well.

Yes we are very busy just now, we had a rush period of battle casualties whilst the Syrian campaign was on, and since then quite a lot of sickness - malaria, diphtheria, typhoid, & now mumps - Measles also quite a lot of surgery from down the lines. Fortunately we have very few losses.

Although busy whilst on duty we have a very enjoyable time during days of leave, & we enjoy the likable parts of this country to the full.

Once again thanking you for your kindness. Yours sincerely, Percy Wilson.

BY AIR MAIL

AIR MAIL
LETTER CARD

IF ANYTHING IS ENCLOSED THIS CARD
WILL BE SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL.



Mr. J. E. M. Marshall,

"Eldorado"

Curie

King Island

Tasmania

WHEN FOLDED THE LETTER CARD MUST CONFORM IN SIZE AND SHAPE WITH
THE BLUE BORDER WITHIN WHICH THE ADDRESS ONLY MAY BE WRITTEN.



VX29697,
S/N. R.H. Milsom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A.I.F.

ABROAD.

19th Oct

1941

Dear Mr. Marshall,

Thank you for your letter of the 24th July with Canteen Order enclosed, both were very much appreciated. Also a parcel of comforts previously acknowledged.

You ask if I have any opportunity of seeing your son in the 2/32nd Btn. Up to the present I haven't but if any members of that unit come into hospital I will make enquiries concerning him. When writing to him would you tell him that I would be very pleased to see him any time he is near the 7th A.G.H. and can spare the time to drop in. It is very much easier for the boys to find us, than for us to get in touch with them, and I am always very pleased to see anyone from home. Yes I have seen several K.I. boys lately, in fact Charlie Thow is in the ward I am working in tonight, he has just this week had an operation on his knee and getting on satisfactorily. Mick Thompson & Vic Brooks have been inmates here & Charlie tells me 2 other boys from home – Whitty & Kerr are now in this unit, so I must look them up. I have also seen Frank Bishop, & had a letter from him last week. He took ill with pneumonia whilst on leave in Cairo, but is now doing well.

Yes we are very busy just now, we had a rush period of battle casualties whilst the Syrian campaign was on, and since then quite a lot of sickness – malaria, diphtheria, Typhoid, & now mumps – measles, also quite a lot of surgery from down the lines. Fortunately we have very few losses.

Although busy whilst on duty we have a very enjoyable time during days off & leave, & we enjoying the likeable parts of this country to the full.

Once again thanking you for your kindnesses. Yours sincerely Ruby Milsom

13th Jan. 1917.

vx 29697
S/N R.H. Wilson
4th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A. I. F. AAROSS

Dear Hon. Marshall,

I have to acknowledge receipt of two
baskets from the R.S.S.I.L.A. for which
I want to thank you all very much indeed,
also 2 parcels from the members of
K.I. War Service Fund, one posted in
August and one in September and both
arriving just before two. They were
lovely, and both arrived in excellent
condition. At present we are eating
the two cakes (the homemade one) and
enjoying it very much.

The thoughts of our friends at
home embodied in these many gifts
did much to make our two a
most enjoyable one. We really did
enjoy it very much and were so busy
with the extra preparations & then
on the actual day carrying out
our plans for the lads, that we
did not have time to ever feel
homesick.

The boys had a lovely day.
Decorations in the way of streamers
and balloons were provided by
the Red Cross, these were put up by

the boys, & we got lots of fresh flowers and gum from a Jewish Colony near by & really made the Ward look very merry.

On Thanksgiving Father & Mrs. came around and distributed Red Cross hampers to each patient, & for dinner we set long tables in the middle of the ward & all up-patients sat down to soup, turkey, ham & vegetables & Mrs. pudding & brandy sauce, & a bottle of beer for each.

The night before a party of us went around the wards singing & Mrs. Carols & this delighted the ladies very much.

So altogether we had a great time. On Boxing Day my friend & I started on our week's leave & we did a tour of Central & Northern Palestine. We stayed at Tel Aviv, Nazareth, Tiberias, went over the border into Syria, back thru Nabulus to Jerusalem & back to camp. And then since then I have had a day in the snow up at Jerusalem which was a novel experience for me. We can only send Air Mail cards now so please excuse brevity of this note. All best wishes & many thanks from Ruth.

BY AIR MAIL

AIR MAIL
LETTER CARD

IF ANYTHING IS ENCLOSED THIS CARD
WILL BE SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL



Mr. J. E. W. Marshall,
King Island War Service Fund,
Burnie
King Island
Australia.

R. H. Wilson

WHEN FOLDED THE LETTER CARD MUST CONFORM IN SIZE AND SHAPE WITH
THE BLUE BORDER WITHIN WHICH THE ADDRESS ONLY MAY BE WRITTEN.

1914

13th Jan. 1942.

VX29697
S/N R.H. Milsom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A.I.F. ABROAD

Dear Mr. Marshall,

I have to acknowledge receipt of Xmas Greetings from the R.S.S.I.L.A. for which I want to thank you all very much indeed, also 2 parcels from the members of K.I. War Service Fund, one posted in August and one in September and both arriving just before Xmas. They were lovely, and both arrived in excellent condition. At present we are eating the Xmas cake (the homemade one) and enjoying it very much.

The thoughts of our friends at home embodied in these many gifts did much to make our Xmas a most enjoyable one. We really did enjoy it very much, and were so busy with the extra preparations & then on the actual day carrying out our plans for the lads, that we did not have time to even feel homesick.

The boys had a lovely day, decorations in the way of streamers and balloons were provided by the Red Cross, these were put up by the boys, & we got lots of fresh flowers and gum from a Jewish colony near by & really made the Ward look very "Xmassy".

On Xmas Day Father Xmas came around and distributed Red Cross hampers to each patient, & for dinner we set long tables in the middle of the ward & all up-patients sat down to – soup, turkey, ham & vegetables, Xmas pudding & brandy sauce, & a bottle of beer per head.

The night before a party of us went around the wards singing Xmas Carols & this delighted the lads very much.

So altogether we had a great time. Box Day my friend & I started on our weeks leave & we did a tour of Central and Northern Palestine. We stayed at Tel Aviv, Nazareth, Tiberias went over the border into Syria, back thru Nablus to Jerusalem & back to camp. And then since then I have had a day in the snow up at Jerusalem which was a novel experience for me. We can only send Air Mail cards now so please excuse brevity of this note.

All best wishes & many thanks

From Ruby Milsom



WITH

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

VX 29697

Sister R. H. Wilson
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.

A.I.F.

Abroad.

23rd April 43

Dear Mr. Marshall,

We have had a lovely big mail this week, the first for many weeks, & it is amazing the difference it makes to our outlook on life. Amongst my pile was a letter from you with the Bantam Order enclosed, many many thanks indeed, and also a parcel sent on the 9th Jan, once again many thanks. It is very good of you all to keep remembering us so constantly, and we appreciate it a great deal, still now that things are so difficult at home we will quite understand if your money and energies are devoted to other sources.

I was talking to Royce Percy last week for a few minutes, we met in Haifa, she on her return journey from



WITH

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

leave in Syria, - I on my way up. Royce looks very well and was very thrilled at the prospect of mail awaiting her return in camp.

Syria is a lovely spot, we enjoyed our leave so much; Palestine is getting rather hot just now but up in the Lebanon mountains it was glorious. There is still quite a lot of snow on the higher peaks, & we had one lovely day up at the "Cedars" - the real beauty spot of the Lebanon, amongst the snow.

Previously to that I had had a week in Cairo, and a week at Petra, - "the long lost city of the South" - South of the Dead Sea on the edge of the Arabian Desert. So you see we have been seeing quite a bit of this part of the world, and finding it wonderfully interesting.

Once again thanking you all very much for your kind thoughts,
Yours sincerely
Ruby McClellan :

VX29697
Sister R.H. Milsom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
A.I.F.
Abroad.
25th April '42

Dear Mr. Marshall,

We have had a lovely big mail this week, the first for many weeks, & it is amazing the difference it makes to our outlook on life. Amongst my pile was a letter from you with Canteen Order enclosed, very many thanks indeed, and also a parcel sent on the 9th Jan, once again many thanks. It is very good of you all to keep remembering us so constantly, and we appreciate it a great deal, still now that things are so difficult at home we will quite understand if your money and energies are devoted to other sources.

I was talking to Royce Percy last week for a few minutes, we met in Haifa, she on her return journey from leave in Syria, & I on my way up. Royce looks very well and was very thrilled at the prospect of mail awaiting her return in camp.

Syria is a lovely spot, we enjoyed our leave so much; Palestine is getting rather hot just now, but up in the Lebanon mountains it was glorious. There is still quite a lot of snow on the higher peaks, & we had one lovely day up at the "Cedars" – the real beauty-spot of the Lebanons, amongst the snow.

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Once again thanking you all very much for your kind thoughts,

Yours sincerely,
Ruby Milsom

VX 29697

Sister R. H. Wilson
4th Aust. Cav. Hoof
c/o No. 1. Base P.O.
A.I.F. Abroad.

15th Oct. 1942.

Dear Mr. Marshall,

I am very sorry indeed to hear of your great sorrow in the loss of John. War becomes a very real and terrible thing when our own boys are taken, we miss them so very much, and when they leave home there is always that anxious thought, but that does not make the blow any lighter when it does fall. Please accept my deepest sympathy for you all.

Many thanks to your Committee for your continued remembrance of me, a Carden Order arrived last week and is much appreciated.

Answered
6/2/42

Yours sincerely
Ruby Wilson

VX29697
Sister R.H. Milsom
7th Aust. Gen. Hosp.
C/o No. 1. Base P.O.
A.I.F. Abroad.
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