

Report by Major R.T. Binns SX9123, Medical Officer H.Q. 2/8 Field Ambulance.

Kindly provided by his son Adrew Binns

I was captured at El Feltui near Derna April 7th 1941. Capt. G Gilbert, quartermaster 2/8 Field Ambulance and 40 O.Rs were captured at the same place. Immediately after capture it was necessary to establish a dressing station in the field. Wounded were collected and treated, 3 dead were buried by Padre Arkell A.I.F. And Pte. E Broomhead.

On April 8th unit moved with motor transport under German guard with wounded to Derna Hospital which had been evacuated 2 days previously by 15 C.C.S., wards were re-opened and the treatment of wounded continued.

Capt. E.W. Levings R.M.O 2/3 A.T. was sent to the hospital on April 11th and continued working with the unit, doing most of the major surgery for 5 months until August 23rd 1941, all captured British sick and wounded who were evacuated through Derna were treated by the unit. Padre Arkell remained for the five months at the hospital doing Chaplain's duties. It was necessary to have a hospital sergeant – I therefore ordered Corporal G. Rowell to wear sergeant's stripes and he performed the duties of hospital sergeant for five months with efficiency. I recommend that his promotion to sergeant be confirmed.

Sgt. J Amos was sergeant cook and cooked for medical personnel and patients, a difficult task successfully performed under difficult conditions. It has recently been reported to me that Sgt. Amos died suddenly on March 7th 1943 at Parma Hospital Italy, actually whilst awaiting repatriation.

Sgt. K. Day, a professional male nurse, was in charge of operating theatre and Pte. A Whelan, also a professional nurse was in charge of sterilisation and handling surgical instruments. Anaesthetics were given under medical supervision by Pte. Brian Carter.

Medical supplies and equipment of the 2/8 Field Ambulance and supplies left by 15 C.C.S. were used and extra dressings, plaster and other materials were obtained from the Italians. About 480 cases of British sick and wounded were treated by the unit between April 7th and August 23rd 1941. Records kept (A & D book and clinical notes) were recently sent by me to the International Red Cross to be forwarded from Italy via Geneva to Australia. Records of deaths and funerals were kept by Padre Arkell.

Specially good work of nursing the sick and wounded was done by Pte. J. Macrae, L/Cpl. Taeuber, Pte. Mountstephen and Pte. Hawke.

British battledress, underclothing, boots, socks, pull-overs, greatcoats, caps were provided by British Red Cross.

A chapel for Roman Catholic services was provided. Protestant services were held by Padre R. Macdonall (N.Z.) in the barracks.

About October 1942 200 Indians arrived in the camp from a camp in the South Italy. They were dressed in Italian uniforms with parachute badges, had been receiving training by the Italians as parachutists and it was intended to use them to fight against the British, which they had agreed to do. But they would not go to Libia. These Indians gave all words of command in Italian, gave the Fascist salute and were kept in a separate compound from other Indians and other British in the camp. Full records of names, numbers and conditions are being collected and kept by the Australian camp leader Sgt. Major A. Beacroft A.I.F. and by N.C.Os and by loyal Indians in the camp. A report on these conditions has been given by me to British officers of the Indian Army.

On my leaving Gruppignano camp on April 7th 1943 Capt. E.W. Levings remained as M.O. I would recommend that a request be made to the Italian Government for his repatriation on account of his age, his state of health, the length of time (over 2 years) of his imprisonment and considering that there are many other British Medical Officers in Italy who could relieve him of his duties.

I am pleased to state that now at the time of my leaving, the general state of health and morale of New Zealand and Australian prisoners in Gruppignano is excellent. There are a number of men in the camp who have been seriously wounded and are permanently incapacitated and others who are suffering from incurable diseases, who should be repatriated. Corporal J. Marsh has a very extensive chest wound, Pte. Gram a head wound, Pte. B Ward, A.I.F., Pte. Grant N.Z., Pte. Young N.Z., are 3 cases who have been certified as insane and are in the mental hospital, Udine. A request for the repatriation of these wounded and sick men is strongly recommended.

A party of Australian sick and wounded are awaiting repatriation at Attamura hospital, Bari and a party of Australian medical personnel are awaiting repatriation at Bari camp.

Raymond T Binns

Major A.A.M.C.