

# WWII Primary Source

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Upholsterer, Christchurch, NZ

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Service Number: 24691

6th Field Regiment, Artillery

Served: Greece, North Africa

Returned to NZ

Died Christchurch 2003



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1941

APRIL 4 Fri.

Digging dugout for R.H.Q. today. Good digging. Steve Weir was in a hell of a temper today. Told me off for not having a shave. We have not seen the water cart for a couple of days. We are not settled down yet. We are still sleeping in the open. We are getting shifted around all the time.

APRIL 5 Sat.

Still on the dugout. It is a slow job. The fleas went me last night. Smothered myself with Keatingo in the middle of the night. Have shifted our sleeping position again. The cookhouse is beside a house in the village and there is a lavatory and fowlhouse right next to it. That is to suit the officers whose mess is in the house. This is a great village. The stock is all brought in at night and kept in the backyard and is allowed to wander inside the house.

APRIL 6 Sun.

Still on the dugout. The R.S.M. has been working with us every day. We are still sleeping outside. There is just Ron, Doug and I on the job. Doug and I go for a walk every night. The Germans are at war with Greece now. Things ought to liven up. Doug and I go for a walk every night. There is supposed to be a lot of fifth colonist work going on round here.

APRIL 7 Mon.

We were caught in the rain last night. Piled into the batmans tent about 3 a.m. Frank Jenyns has been sick ever since we left Athens. He got a letter today to say his wife was dead. I got five letters and two remittances today. Wish we could get on to our gun. Getting sick of digging for other people.

APRIL 8 Tues.

Just got one room finished in the dugout when we were ordered to prepare to move. We were rushing around pulling down tents. Tea was at 4.30 and we had lamb. The first we have had since we left N.Z. Went over the pass at night and bedded down for the night about 10.30 p.m. The pass was being mined as we cam through. Jerry must be pushing on.

APRIL 9 Wed.

I was mistakén in thinking that we were retreating. We are going to guard another pass. Camped in the pass tonight. We are supposed to contact the enemy tomorrow. May be rumour. There is just one continual stream of trucks going over the pass. British troops and supplies going up and Greek soldiers, refugees and wounded going back. Got a fly rigged up as tent for digs tonight. It is raining and cold as hell. Saw Dick Dunbier go past.

APRIL 10 Thurs.

Where we are now is to be our wagon lines. We had a smack at three planes this morning. Did not know what they were. Found out later that they were Yugoslavs. The guns have moved into position. Planes have been going over all day today. Our bombers must be giving the huns something to think about. Lot of rumours going round today. Here they are. Russia and Turkey have declared war on Germany. Bengazhie has been recaptured and 25,000 prisoners were taken. The Aussies had a go at Jerry with bayonets and the N.Z. machine gunners are in action and doing good work. Have rigged our tent up a bit better tonight. Wog Fill is bedding down with us.

APRIL 11 Fri.

We are seeing some heartbreaking sights these days. Women and children refugees tramping back over the pass carrying bundles of food and clothing. It rained most of the day and the poor devils are wet to the skin. We gave some of them some biscuits and bully. There was some fifth colonist work going on round here today. Someone was putting up smoke flares on the top of a hill. We let him have four mags and chaps were opening up all round. Hesmon put them out. According to rumour we have lost and won the war today. The latest is that we have the huns surrounded. Bengazhie has not been retaken and the British have retreated to Sidi Berani. We got our pit half dug today but we spent most of the time in the tent out of the rain. Squeek Murry came off his motor bike and broke his leg today. The pommies are bringing up a lot of big guns now.

APRIL 12 Sat. 1941

There has been frost here the last two mornings and it snowed yesterday. Saw Dick go past again this morning. We are shifting back to the other side of the pass this afternoon. I will be sorry to leave this place. Some Italian prisoners marched past us today. They rested just across the road from us and we gave them some biscuits. They fought over them like dogs. Poor devils must be starving. They had marched from Albania and their clothing was in terrible condition. Some had cut and blistered feet while others were walking in their socks. They seemed quite a decent lot. Some were just boys. None of them seemed to like Musso. They accused him of having a good time in Italy while they were fighting. Arrived at our new position about 8 p.m. It was snowing a little and bitterly cold. We sure were hungry when we got tea. Pitched our tent roughly for the night. Bob Johnston is with us.

APRIL 13 Sun.

Found out late this morning it is Easter Sunday. Just about finished our Ac.Ac. pit today and we pitched our tent again in a better possie. Our bombers have been going up the front all day. The Ac.Ac. guns in the pass opened up on some Jerry planes. They must have been bombing our gun positions. Hope nothing happened to the boys. More of our bombers have gone over this evening. Wog Fill has got his car back.

APRIL 14 Mon.

Plenty of fun today. We were bombed and machine gunned. Lockey was just missed. None of our planes were over today. Our guns were bombed and machine gunned. One bomb landed in our supply dump and killed an Aussie. Shrapnel went through Jack Ryder's car. We sure got a thrill out of it today. I am on picket tonight. One of our troop sergeants is hit in the arm with a machine gun bullet. We sent away our last mag of tracer this morning. It will be a long time before we get more. We are as good as useless without it.

APRIL 15 Tues.

Not very many good shots today. Most of them were out of range. Our gun positions had hell bombed out of them. They were machine gunned nearly all day. The Bren up at R.H.Q. is not dug in. They thought the planes had got Mo. Four dived at him and machine gunned him and he was tearing the fabric off them. Luckily they did no damage. Seven N.Z.ers were blown to bits on the pass road. It has been murder for our boys today. About three hundred huns were over and not one R.A.F. plane and no Ac.Ac. guns either. All the boys in the line are asking where the R.A.F. is. It's enough to break your heart. The 19th Batt went into the huns with bayonets and slaughtered 904 and captured 120. They say the huns are not taking prisoners but are shooting them in cold blood. The planes were over in waves of as many as thirty. We were watching them dive bombing and we could see the bombs leaving the planes. They seem almost as big as the plane itself. One plane dropped five bombs at once. The explosion was terrific. They should send Ron and I up to R.H.Q. We are not much use down here. I have had a long day of it today. I was up at 3 a.m. to do picket and have been kept busy running to the gun pit all day.

APRIL 16 Wed.

Ring today and our tent is leaking. We had a crack at one bomber flying low beneath the clouds. Things are not looking too good. There is a rumour which seems pretty right that the Germans have broken through the pass on our left and the troops which were holding it are retreating hell for leather. If that is the case we will have to retreat as we may get cut off. It will be hell if we are. The Greeks were in the front line. We don't seem to have any troops or material at all over here. Port Pyrus is supposed to have been bombed to pieces and they are landing in lighters. 90,000 Canadians are supposed to have landed in Greece. They may be too late. The hun sure knows his job. Hitler has threatened to use gas if the R.A.F. does not cease bombing Berlin which has been raided continuously for 52 hours. Anthony Eden has replied with a threat to put Europe to sleep within 48 hours if he does so. We have been issued with field service post cards.

APRIL 17 Thurs.

Breakfast at 5.30 a.m. Out on the road and ready to move about 7 a.m. Then about 4 hours wait before we moved off. Moved on a few miles and waited for dark. The 25th Batt. were preparing a position to cover our retreat. Moved on again. Went through Larissa. It was in shambles. It rained nearly all day and we were wet through. We are going to retreat hundreds of miles. I would not be surprised if we leave Greece. The Aussies cleared out and left all their supplies. Thousands of pounds worth of food and clothing. It was an open slather. We got cases of M. & V., jam, fruit, shirts, socks, cigs, matches, singlets and various other articles.

APRIL 18 Fri.

Exciting day today. Travelled all night. We got in a traffic jam which lasted about 2 hrs. During that time we were attacked by bombers. They did not come very low and only dropped a few eggs. We got away four mags. Got caught between limber and truck when it was

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moving. Ron dragged me out. Told Morrison off. Bones is travelling with us. His bike is not going. Mal Pocock has been doing great work up at the command post. Some of the bombs hit a village we were near and started a fire. We are seeing some horrible sights along the road. Refugees and remnants of the Greek army tramping back from the front. There are dozens of trucks tipped over the side of the road and dead horses lying everywhere. We were bombed again in a pass in the hills. One landed a little below us and three dropped up the hill. Larmia was bombed to hell just after we went through it. We got two cases of tracer near Larmia and we went back in the evening and got another case of tracer and five of ball. The pomares at the dump were giving it away. Sure are glad to get it. We are parked in a beautiful spot among olive trees.

APRIL 19 Sat.

We were woken this morning by enemy planes zooming over us. They machine gunned just down the road. Slept like a log last night. Had my first wash for three days this morning. Sure was good. Don't know if we are staying here. Have had several interruptions while writing this up this morning. Several bombers have been over very high up. It is nice and warm and I am sunbathing. It is cruel the way these poor Greeks are being driven from their homes. I only hope we can make the huns pay for it.

APRIL 20 Sun.

Hell of a time today. Bombed and machine gunned all day. You could hear the bullets whizzing through the trees. The planes were dropping bombs ten and twelve at a time. Hear Poles, Czechs and Canadians are in Greece. Hope we don't have many days like today. Some of the boys are getting the jitters. We saw some British planes today. All the boys cheered like hell. It does your heart good to see them. About time they showed up. It took us about two hours to eat our dinner. Have not got a pit dug here. We may be leaving here are grape vines all round us here. Wish they had grapes on. Capt. Chapman has disappeared with the C.C. car and Wog Bill.

APRIL 21 Mon.

Only about five planes over today. It was so quiet it was almost eerie. Ernie, the spot was over first thing this morning. The first round of tracer was right on him and the damn gun jammed. Did I curse. Churchill is supposed to make an announcement that will startle the world today. About a dozen of the boys have taken to the hills. Chopper calls them the hilly willies.

APRIL 22 Tues.

After a quiet morning things livened up and by 4 p.m. everyone was sticking to their trenches again. Several fighters came over and opened fire with their small cannons. They set fire to an ammunition truck. Pieces of shell cases were flying everywhere for about half an hour. Capt Chapman is about the most consistent hill man. No R.A.F. again. Their name sure is dirt among the troops. Jerry has been dropping shells around the guns I think that was all heeey about Churchill making a speech. The bun is in Larmia now. The most disheartening rumour so far is being circulated now. They reckon we are going to quit Greece. The Greeks are supposed to have given in. I hope it is not true. We are shifting back a little into a more protected position tonight.

APRIL 23 Wed.

Yesterday's rumour seems to be right. Other troops have left our new position yesterday leaving nearly all their gear behind. Hundreds of pounds worth of material. Officers gear too. Something must be radically wrong when they leave their personal gear behind. We are not mounting the gun today. Everyone has been ordered to find a good position in the hills and stay there and get as much rest as possible as we may be travelling tonight. We are near the top of a hill now. Not a very good position but we have a wonderful view of the surrounding country. A few planes have been over. "Ernie" among them. One bomb over so far and the Ac.Ac. guns opened up on it. I sure will hate to leave Greece. We have a good view of the battlefield and we can see the shells bursting. We can get anything we like from the store truck now. Different to Helwain. We are moving at 9.45 p.m. Only Bechelon are going tonight. Wish the other boys were coming.

APRIL 24 Thurs.

Travelled all night and only got 62 miles away. The convoy was stopping every half hour. The trucks are parked about a hundred yards from the road. We are up the hill a little in a field of grapes. We got an issue of rum. Ron and Johnnie stayed behind and got stuck into it and then started wandering around the paddocks as planes were going over. They will get someone killed yet. Ron has gone down for some more. Planes are flying across all the time dropping bombs and machine gunning. Hope they do not spot us. Planes left us alone after 5.30 p.m. Unusual for them. Start off again after the sun goes down. We are just like animals now. Always keeping to the shadows and getting what rest we can in the daytime and travelling by night. I am getting as tired as hell. Some of the boys had their packs pinched off the trucks. Still no R.A.F.

APRIL 25 Fri. 1941

Arrived at our new hideout about 3 a.m. Managed to get a little sleep. Cold as hell. Up the side of hill covered with pine trees. The air smells great. We are near the road and traffic is still going back. They are taking a hell of a risk. I wonder when we will get on the boat. I am reading a book. Sure glad I brought it with me. Passes the time away. Heard last night that Jack Larcombe is in hospital and did not come over here. All our mail and parcels for the last month were burnt at Katerina. Bet my parcels were there. Lucky to get my remittances. On the road again 12.40 p.m. We nearly got left behind. The rest of the 6th Field have gone through. We are the last of our crowd. Capt Chapman made Athol stay behind to look for R.S.M. Never made any provision for getting him back. Ron stayed with him. Had to take to our scrapers once coming through. The Greeks have not let us down I am pleased to say. We got a far better reception going through Athens than we did when going up. We were kissed, cheered and slapped by everyone. They wished us luck and said we would soon be back. A man kissed me. I felt a fool. Took cover again for a few hours just outside of Athens. Ron placed under close arrest for disobeying Chapman. Thought I was going to be arrested too. It will be a court martial. We will blow Chapman light out. He has displayed cowardice ever since we went into action. Athol placed under arrest later on this evening. We were entertained this afternoon by a greek family and given beer and wine. I got a little merry. The Greek women are very beautiful. It does your eyes good to see them. Moved on at dark. Doug is in our truck now. The fields are red with poppies. This is the most beautiful country I have seen. Hope we come back here. Chapman was opening his mouth to a woman a Greek told us was a German. Told here where we were leaving from and what time we were leaving the position we were in. That's one charge we are going him on. This place isousy with fifth colonists trying to get information. Tired as hell. Pleased to get to bed. In good position. No R.A.F. again today.

APRIL 26 Sat.

Sitting up on a wooded hillside writing this. Everything is quiet and peaceful. Someone down the gully is playing a sax. It sure sounds good. Haven't seen anything of Jerry so far today. Had a wash in a stream this morning. Our washes are getting few and far between. Can hear gunfire not too far away. Got it in the neck for not being on a parade last night. Doug and I were asleep. Chapman told us to go and get some sleep. Went back on his word when I told him this morning that we did as we were ordered. Said he didn't say so. That guy sure is going for a skate. I will be one of the chief witnesses. Wonder where Alex, Lester, Bob and Doug are. Hope they got out alright. Leckie Forbes is one of machine gunners left behind with the rear guard. I am going to sew this diary up in a piece of ground sheet to try and make it waterproof as I believe we are going off a beach. Left port at 8 p.m. Threw nearly all my gear away. Carting 600 rounds of tracer in my pack with what gear I have left. Also carrying Bren. Marched about four miles down to sea. The sweat just poured out of us. The Navy took over at the beach so we got aboard without any hitches. Just as well the army had nothing to do with it or we would never have got away. The ship is named the "Glengyle". It is a special invasion ship. Went from the beach to the ship in lighters. There was cocoa on for us as soon as we were aboard and was it great. The best I have ever tasted. There are thousands on here. The ceiling was covered with hammocks and the floors and decks covered with beds too. If any more had got on we would have had to have slept standing up. Some of the boys have been left behind. Hope they get out alright. There is Bones, Noel, Rod and Paul. George Barnaby is missing. Last time he was seen he was surrounded by tanks. Johnnie threw Chapman's gear away. Went to sleep about 3 a.m.

APRIL 27 Sun.

Up at about 5.30 a.m. and mounted Bren. Tired as hell. Saw some of the R.A.F. What a laugh. They show up now we have been kicked out of Greece. If we had had their support before we might still have been there. Three guns had a lash at us just after we saw the R.A.F. A bomb just missed our ship and sprung some of the plates. You would have thought it was a direct hit. It bowled us all off our feet. They machine gunned us too. Ron and I had a close shave. We were standing about a yard apart having a lash at them and a group of about fifteen bullets went between us and killed one chap and wounded Athol who was getting down the ladder on to the deck below. It was a hell of a shock to see Athol lying on the deck. He got it in the back, leg and hand. The other chap got it through the lungs. He was a terrible colour. Another joker got it in the arm. It was just as though hell had broken loose on the ship. There were about four Ac.Ac. guns several pom poms, vickers and dozens of Brens and Lewis guns. The oil was pouring out of one of the bunkers and we shipped a fair bit of water. This reduced the speed of the ship a lot. A bomb just missed one of the destroyers and sent up a great spout of water. They buried the chap who was killed this afternoon. Our advance base hit has gone up in smoke. I am sorry to lose my photos and camera. Still it can't be helped. Joined up with another convoy. One of the ships was sinking. We thought we were going to stop at Crete but we are going to Alex's. Athol will get over his lot alright. Tired as hell now, must get to bed.

APRIL 28 Mon. 1941

Quiet day. I don't think there is much danger now. Athol is doing alright. He just go splinters. Opened tins for the cooks today. Did alright out of it. Got good meals without queuing up. These sailors are great jokers. They are always putting on tea for the boys. It takes the Navy to run things. Wonder if the boys got away. We get into port in the morning. Had a shave this morning. Sure needed it.

APRIL 29 Tues.

Docked about 9 a.m. in Alex's. Got tea and a feed on the wharf. There was a mix up. The army was running it. Some R.A.F. bombers went over. Some of the boys cheered others but the wogs are still the same dirty cadging devils. Went by train to Amria camp and expect to stay there a few days. Got settled in but had to pack up again and march to station where we entrained for Helwain about 7 p.m. Played cards till it got dark. The Y.M. turned it on in Amria and we also received biscuits, oranges and chocolate on the train. Sleeping on the wooden seats. Will be glad to get a decent night's sleep.

APRIL 30 Wed.

Arrived at Helwain at daybreak. Felt as though I had slept on stones. Breakfast was waiting for us. We are not in our old lines but we have a good hut handy to everything. Went to pictures tonight. Got paid this afternoon. We are going to get a complete reissue of clothing. We sure need it. Ron got a telegram. He is a daddy now. It was a girl. There were dozens of sacks of mail waiting for us. It could not have come at a better time. I got a big parcel and thirteen letters as well as six lots of papers. I sure was great to get the letters. I must write down some of the humorous sarcastic remarks made by the boys at the expense of the R.A.F. They all came to the conclusion that the R.A.F. consisted of one plane and a pilot. Some said the plane had a crook sprung while others reckoned the pilot was crook. One day a chap said "There's three of our planes" and everyone piped up "It can't be. We've only got one." Someone else said they were training another pilot in Canada and another asked where they were going to get a plane for him. Still it is not their fault they could not help us.

MAY 1 Thurs.

I am assistant to Chopper in the Sgts mess. Ron is helping Bill in the Officers. Must write letters today. Just Chopper and I in the mess today. We were kept going.

MAY 2 Fri.

Only two mess orderlies with us today and they came late. No news of Alex, Bones, Noel and the other boys.

MAY 3 Sat.

Baths are open now. Went for a dip. Hope to get in every day now. Wrote to Ma today. Not much news nowadays.

MAY 4 Sun.

All our leave is stopped because some of the boys turned a couple of wog buses over and burnt them. I don't want to go on leave until Bones or Alex come back. Go to pictures every night now. Also have a swim every day.

MAY 5 Mon.

Got eight orderlies today although they did not turn up till about 3 p.m. so they were not much use. Hope to get them regularly from now on.

MAY 6 Tues.

Orderlies turned up on the dot this morning and things went along O.K. My stomach is feeling too good today. Feel as though I want to be sick. Ron went up yesterday and remanded. He told Steve a thing or two and Chapman put across a lot of lies. I am going to be a witness next time. Frank Jenyns is going to be court martialled. He will get a stretch. Georgie Wright lost 2 days pay. R.W. also 7 days pay and 4 days without leave for being A.W.L. Saw Bob Grigor. Alex and Doug Timms are O.K. Pictures again tonight.

MAY 7 Wed.

Still feeling crook. Saw Alex today. He is crook too. The heat is getting terrible. 110° in the shade today. The baths are empty. Flies are eating us alive. The boys are getting picket nearly every day. Wish to hell this war would end. I am getting homes again.

MAY 8 Thurs.

Nothing much to write about these days. Wish Bones would hurry up and get back. The flies are a curse. Went to pictures.

MAY 9 Fri. 1941

Feeling worse every day. Think it must be the cookhouse. Went and saw Alex again today. He is pretty crook. Is E.D. 116° in shade today. The wind is just like the flame from a furnace. Have been to pictures every night so far. Went on sick parade this morning. They didn't have medicine ordered for me so gave me something else.

MAY 10 Sat.

E.D. today. Sold out twice yesterday afternoon and again this morning. Went to pictures with Alex and Doug. Must get on with my mail. It is too damned hot to write.

MAY 11 Sun.

Feeling lot better today. Alex was supposed to come down today but did not turn up. Must be crook. They are starting the five days leave tomorrow. Must send for some cash. Wrote four letters today.

MAY 12 Mon.

Back at work again today. Not feeling so hot.

MAY 13 Tues.

Alex came down for tea and we went to the pictures. Some of the boys are back. All bar Spud and Bonos. They both are in hospital with bad cases of flu. Bones had temperature of 105°. Hope he is back soon.

MAY 14 Wed.

Sold out this morning. Went on leave with Alex and Doug. First time since we got back. The place is just the same. Nickie's birthday today.

MAY 15 Thurs.

Sold out again this morning. It is becoming a habit. Getting stuck into the cooking now.

MAY 17 Sat.

Nothing much to write these days. Won't write every day. Each day is the same. Work day, go to pictures at night. Haven't missed pictures once since I have been back. See Alex a lot.

MAY 18 Sun.

Troops are going away. 29th Battery to Abbaisia for guard duty. 30th to some other place. There will only be R.H.Q. Sgts here.

MAY 21 Wed.

This is a men's mess now for R.H.Q. boys. Chopper went to hospital yesterday with poisoned arm, result of a burn. I am still crook. I think I will have to get out of the cookhouse. McKenzie is in the cookhouse again. Sgts are with officers now. David's birthday today.

MAY 24 Sat.

Chopper is out of hospital. Saw Crozier about getting out of cookhouse. Said it was (will go out when Chopper comes to work again. There were millions of Gamma flies around today. They are about the size of sand flies and they bite like hell. They made a lot buzzing noise like an engine. We wondered what it was at first. We could hear it above our voices. Saw Arthur Haining today.

MAY 27 Tues.

Saw Leckie Forbes today. Also Reg and Bill Dunpleton whom I did not know were in the Army. Said goodbye to Alex again. They are going somewhere on guard duty. Would not be surprised if they go to Crete. Wish he was in the same outfit as me. I am out of the cookhouse now. Had two letters from Roy yesterday.

MAY 29 Thurs.

Pa's birthday. No news of Bones yet. It does not look too good. Eric and I are going on leave together to Alex's.

JUNE 5 Thurs.

I think Bones is just about a goner. I sure will miss him. Helping Bill in officer's mess for week while Ron is on leave.

JUNE 7 Sat.

Eric and I have decided to go to Palestine on leave because Alex's is getting bombed to much. We go on Tuesday. Have not written home for about a month. Just can't settle down to it. Tried to find Lester today but could not locate him at all. Found out that Harold Jarvis is in hospital with a bullet through his hand. Can't find anything out about Dick Durbier. Hope he is O.K. 5th Field were knocked to leg. 28th Battery are all in one hut.